

**ACCEDE report
on capacitation
and mobilisation
action research**

Lisa Thompson

Research on citizenship, development and democracy at ACCEDE

The process of democratic transition, while it results in political liberties, has not necessarily created an inclusive citizenship for many previously disenfranchised and economically marginalised communities. While government has ensured, through the enactment of statutes and policies, the participation of local communities in decision-making affecting their day-to-day lives, participation through these state structures remains marginal. Previous research revealed the disconnect between the institutional arrangements of the state, on one hand, and the ability of the poor and marginalised to get their voices heard, on the other hand. It is therefore apparent that an enabling legislative and policy framework in and of itself is insufficient in ensuring inclusive participation.

In this context the challenge, for many, is how to find voice in meaningful and effective ways, so as to be able to access resources and opportunities which will enhance their livelihoods and thereby enable them to escape chronic poverty. At the level of policy analysis, there is a need to move beyond formalistic understandings of citizenship to examine the ways in which rights are interpreted and used. Of particular concern in this respect is the challenge to move beyond the notion of representative democracy (which typically invokes the widest national and international scrutiny and which is assessed according to the freeness and fairness of elections), to forms of participatory democracy, which have substantive meaning for the majority of citizens. How citizens' rights are understood, by both public officials and ordinary people themselves, profoundly affects understandings of their legitimate entitlements to social services, as well as their obligations as citizens.

Issues relating to constructions and reinterpretations of citizenship in southern contexts form the central focus of research at ACCEDE. The links between citizenship, democracy and development are explored through the VLIR funded project that focuses on Citizenship and Democracy, the Ford funded project on New Forms of Citizenship, and the international Citizenship Development Research Centre (CDRC) hosted by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

This working paper series aims to stimulate academic and policy debates through research emanating from the research programmes, as well as through publishing the work of visiting scholars, postdoctoral and doctoral research fellows at the Centre.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report reviews and reflects on the research and action-research dynamics emanating from the discussion of community mobilisation as a form of agency that may bring about change in government policy and in governance. It reflects on ACCEDE's research on democratic development and citizen participation, from its establishment in 2007 until the end of 2015.¹

ACCEDE's fieldwork-based approach has highlighted mobilisation and forms of participation as possibly the most important expressions of citizenship. While this report reflects on broader research findings, it focuses specifically on the research undertaken between 2014 and 2015, and links this to the broader vision and objectives of ACCEDE in the research niche on citizenship participation, mobilisation and accountable governance.

ACCEDE's research has had a predominantly action-research orientation. Its researchers engage with communities, their leaders and organisations, to discuss, analyse and assist in developing grassroots knowledge. The aim is to enable them to be both active and effective around issues of specific importance to them. It is thus fieldwork driven, rather than based on secondary sources and government-funded research (although ACCEDE is also involved in such research when it is aligned with our overall ethos and objectives).

The action-research dimension relates particularly to assisting with providing the technical and political knowledge necessary for communities and their leaders to engage 'with teeth' in their dealings with government at different levels, while at the same time tracking the mobilisation trajectories used. It also focuses on how civil society organisations (CSOs) are formed, and how they create collective agency and legitimacy, as well as challenges to maintaining mobilisation strategies and the forms of participation that are seen as influential.

The research approach developed at ACCEDE is focused on integrating two types of research: the first consists of focus groups and individual interviews relating to governance dynamics at the local level, while the second consists of quantitative survey-based research on perceptions of governance, socio-economic problems facing individuals and their communities, and access to services.

Both types of research evaluate the effectiveness of local development and upliftment policies on the part of local and provincial government (as framed by national government's

broad-reaching policy and legislation on poverty alleviation) over a longitudinal time frame. The combination of data collection techniques has been aimed at strengthening the knowledge base of grassroots community organisations about aspects of service delivery and governance that shape their daily socio-economic realities. These include, in particular, their rights to basic services such as sanitation, water and housing.

The links between grassroots communities and their representatives has been a focus over the last ten years, especially as these connections relate to broader local economic development and pro-poor policy articulation between local and provincial government (see Nleya and Piper, 2009; Thompson and Nleya, 2010; Thompson, Africa and Tsolekile de Wet, 2013; Thompson, Conradie and Tsolekile de Wet, 2014).

The two types of research have provided a platform for engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders, both within communities and in government at all levels. While the case-study work has given us high levels of validity, the quantitative research, which has been conducted modeling IDASA's survey methodology, has also allowed for a robust engagement with local government on policy impacts of, and gaps in, pro-poor policies that target basic and social services (see ACCEDE scorecards 2009, 2011, 2013).

In the past two years, the engagement emphasis shifted towards reviewing and assisting with the capacitation of the CSOs and community leaders with whom we have been working. This has involved researching their engagement processes with government as well as providing them with the necessary information and materials, including survey data, to lobby government on specific service-delivery issues (especially housing provision). Previous organisational experience in liaising with different levels of government has shown that, in most instances, data and information pertaining to services in poor communities is necessary to highlight gaps and accountability issues in service delivery policy, and to ensure effective engagement where the CSOs in question have sufficient evidential weight to make government take their concerns and requests seriously.

The goal of this phase was to produce research based on CSO campaigns that could be used to strengthen the campaigns and also facilitate dialogue. As pointed out by Braathen et al (2016: 4), 'In South Africa, which has a transformative and economic growth agenda, the national and local state are sites of struggles to balance both pro-growth and pro-poor approaches to development'. In this context, CSOs and social movements are under pressure to be able to interact with the many faces of the state at the local level and in the way policies are packaged and presented to stakeholders living in substandard settlement conditions. Knowledge of policies thus becomes a key component to effective engagement.

ACCEDE's research falls under a broad thematic umbrella entitled 'new forms of citizenship'. The advantage of its longitudinal time span is that we have spent considerable research time, over a number of years, following up on and working alongside community organisations and leaders, as well as working with key political representatives. In this time we have built relationships that have helped us to understand governance dynamics and the power relations within them.

In the last two years we have done less advocacy work directly with local government and focused instead on CSO capacitation through, first, providing relevant information, and

second, running workshops to ensure CSO members are able to pass on the information through internal training and capacitation processes. In this we have followed the Social Justice Coalition model of training trainers, as well as cascade models of knowledge dissemination. While the emphasis has shifted somewhat in terms of how information is packaged, the key goal of our action research agenda remains the same: to capacitate local community organisations and NGOs with the knowledge to effectively engage in governance networks in order to address the socio-economic problems they face.

Our case-study work has consistently shown that the predominant perception in poor areas is that individual and collective economic upliftment is seen as the most accurate reflection of democratic gains both to individuals and to community organisations (Thompson and Nleya, 2010; Thompson and Tapscott, 2010; Thompson, 2014). For this reason, economic development has a far wider democratic resonance in terms of socio-economic rights and upliftment, as well as the just distribution of public goods through public service delivery. Aside from its resonance with the increasing international focus on the indivisibility of rights, for most South Africans – disadvantaged by years of Apartheid governance – economic rights are essential to ensuring that other civil and political rights have any meaning (Newell and Wheeler, 2010).

We have explored the links between civil, political and socio-economic rights through action research with community organisations in urban areas of the City of Cape Town (CoCT) in the Western Cape and in eThekweni in Kwazulu Natal. Our research methodology has incorporated a combination of key informant interviews and capacitation workshops run over a period of years, with specific organisations including the Khayelitsha Development Forum and SANCO. We have explored how grassroots CSOs and social movements interface with other key political and development NGOs and social movements, such as Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU), Abahlali and SAMWU.

We have linked this research to wider case studies of community activism and mobilisation for housing provision and basic services in Khayelitsha and Langa, applying our findings from survey research on perceptions of governance and service delivery and other housing-related policy information to producing materials and workshop information on housing service delivery for NGOs in Khayelitsha, Langa and in eThekweni.

A sub-theme of our research is on women's 'stories' that explore the intersections between structures of governance and policies, and examining how women make decisions and the range within which they are able to make decisions relating to broader structural and relational power relations, opportunities and constraints. The emergence of women leaders and the roles they play in local governance both challenges and underlines the gendered construction of power in communities but also in government, as relations of power remain clearly defined in gendered terms in South Africa. For example, while women have increasingly emerged as local community leaders, this often remains at the grassroots level. More formal representation and high-level engagement in governance and local government is still largely conducted by men (Thompson and Conradie, 2011; Sinden, 2015).

In terms of first, analysing grassroots participation, and second, understanding Ward Councillors and their relationship with their constituencies and Ward Forums/Committees as an interface between government and communities, it is clear that the basic formal trappings

of democracy at the local level have variable influence on communities' ability to make decisions about their areas' immediate development priorities. A central part of the problem is that participatory spaces at the local government level are less about engagement and more about information sharing and consultation as a form of compliance (Thompson and Nleya, 2010). The scorecard research that ACCEDE used as a methodological tool for highlighting changing perceptions of services also shows that in terms of hierarchies of need, while there have been some gains in basic services, there is still insufficient consultation with community stakeholders. This results in overwhelmingly negative perceptions of political office bearers (especially Councillors) (Thompson, 2014).

As a research institution with an action research agenda, ACCEDE has researched the policy issues that arise from insufficient consultation. We have worked to bridge the gap through information exchange with local NGOs, especially with those NGOs that originate and are driven by leaders and social forces that are indigenous to the locales in which they operate. Examples of these are the Khayelitsha Development Forum (KDF) and South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), both of which are larger grassroots-based organisations. In the last two years, we have worked with two small but vibrant new CSOs: Sivukile Sonele (SS) in Langa and Community Justice Movement (CJM) in Khayelitsha. We also work with local community leaders and organisations, where necessary assisting community leaders in their efforts to ensure more responsive interventions with relevant government departments (for example, social development and housing).

Over the last decade we have continued to track different strategies of engagement and networked with stakeholders about what works and what doesn't in terms of leveraging government to ensure more effective policy implementation, especially around housing. The overarching theme of the New Forms of Citizenship programme to date has been understanding the complex interplay between governance structures, broadly defined, and forms of mobilisation and social action at the grassroots level. We have also examined the role of grassroots institutions and forms of organisation in creating forms of governance structures that achieve effective community participation and relationships with local and provincial government.

Funding constraints have limited our research to the Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal. While this limits the degree to which findings can be generalized, the research does have the benefit of a high degree of factual validity due to in-depth case-study research conducted over a longitudinal timeframe. We have found a tendency for local government to blame provincial and national government (and vice versa) for the failings of policy and poor satisfaction with public service delivery. Policy black holes between national policies and resource allocation and provincial and local policy implementation, often requires an 'hidden,' poorly articulated level of policy making where broader principles have to be actioned and financed. As an indirect way of highlighting these policy black holes we focused on how communities experience various participatory fora. As most government-constructed formal structures of engagement (i.e. public and community meetings) are about ensuring compliance with legislation on public participation, we also focused on what recourse CSOs take to address grievances, including building campaigns and/or seeking alliances with other CSOs or social movements.

Our research shows that in the last two decades, many communities in poor areas of Cape Town and eThekweni have reached a critical level of disillusionment with state structures at all levels and with political leadership at all levels. This has led to much more visible forms of mobilisation and protest in already protest-prone environments (Thompson, 2014; Thompson, Conradie and Tsolekile de Wet, 2014). These findings are echoed at the national level by the documentation of the number of protests as a form of mobilisation to convey policy grievances. Our research has included liaising with local and provincial government about the policies of inclusion through, for example, Sub-Council Committees, Ward Committees, Integrated Development Plan Processes and Community Housing Beneficiary Committee structures.

THE OUTCOMES OF KNOWLEDGE CAPACITATION AS A FORM OF ACTION RESEARCH

Capacitation and training has led to an increased visibility of CSOs, in terms of their campaigning for transparent and accountable housing policies and more open and transparent processes and dialogue on social housing provision and basic services delivery from provincial and local government. Armed with more detailed knowledge, they have become more confrontational in government-created participatory spaces. They have also forged lobbying linkages with other CSOs, for example the SS and the Social Justice Coalition. The Khayelitsha-based CJM has formed strong links with the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Both the KDF and SANCO have structures and processes that bedevil the setting of attainable development goals and strategies, although they still hold moral and political legitimacy in the larger political participatory arenas in which they function. However, while they still have collective political influence within their larger community contexts, they find it difficult to prioritise and structure clear goals and objectives. This is necessary to bridge the gap between their political legitimacy and their desire to exercise a developmental impact through their own policies and through engagement with government.

All of the CSOs we have worked with are completely grassroots-based and led. They thus have a different structure and function from organisations that have more external guidance and donor financial support. Examples are the Violence through Urban Upgrading project (VUUP), the Equal Education (EE) campaign, and the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), all of which originate from within Khayelitsha. In all these cases, the leaders do not have significant funding or alternative resources to rely on. While leaders are deeply committed to alleviating the plight of the poor and vulnerable, among whom they number, the struggle for legitimacy arises not in moral and political terms but in relation to performance legitimacy (Brown et al, 2001). This is both resource based and also linked to the setting of clear, circumscribed agendas for engaging with government. Our research indicates that smaller, issue-based CSOs linked to larger social movement alliances are more effectively heard than larger CSOs, which find it harder to prioritise across a range of sectors.

Even a small amount of knowledge dissemination and capacity building can go a long way in ensuring that communities that were previously ignored, or that were ‘silenced’ for engaging in ways that local government finds too confrontational, are heard, even if this is only through social media and in relation to networking with other civil society stakeholders rather

than through effective, influential engagement within local government participatory spaces.² Through the formation of narratives on inclusive policy making that counter those of government at different levels, CSOs and the social movements they form part of are able to challenge official discourses on the development of the city.

Braathen et al (2016) use the term ‘subaltern urbanism’ to describe the effect of researching and engaging the voices of people living in spaces that are often very negatively depicted as both substandard and socially degenerate (e.g. poor, crime ridden, dirty). They argue that this type of action research can help build subaltern people’s resistance to their exclusion from the technicist developmentalist construction and production of their living environment, which is so prevalent in the entrepreneurial model of ‘the urban’ as adopted by local governments in the global South.

There is a great deal of scope to do further capacitation work in what we describe as poor urban areas, involving the dissemination and uptake of policy information to enable stakeholder groups to speak for themselves in participatory fora and to openly challenge the official developmental and socio-economic rights based discourses within these fora when they are merely compliance based. This counter-discourse can help to engage and challenge constructions of policy that are externally derived and driven, enabling stakeholder groups to hold government accountable in direct ways.

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Notes

- 1 Funding has included the Ford Foundation (2006-2015), DFID (2001-2011), VLIR (2007-2010), and WRC (2012-2013), as well as the Provincial Department of Housing (2012) and the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (2013-2015). ACCEDE also has its own operational budget through the EMS Faculty.
- 2 For example, the SJC and the EE campaign have both engaged locally in confrontational ways by directly challenging government leadership on expenditure relating to basic services and education. While confrontation has often met with governmental resistance in different forms, the longer-term effect of the confrontation has been to publicise the lack of participatory engagement around the distribution of resources for such services. Tangible results in terms of policy influence can also be seen in EE's engagement on the national upgrading of schools infrastructure.