

Workshop Report on Strategies for Promoting Participatory Governance

Hosted by CIVICUS in Glasgow, Scotland on the 22nd and 23rd May 2007

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The Economic Governance Programme (Africa Budget Project) of Idasa was invited to participate at the brainstorming workshop on “strategies for promoting participatory governance”. The event represented the first official event of the new phase of the CIVICUS Participatory Governance program – which aims to enhance the capacity of southern civil society and government actors to promote and practice participatory governance at the national and local levels. The workshop was designed both as (i) an opportunity for a group of leading civil society practitioners to learn from one another and reflect on strategies for promoting participatory governance and, (ii) as an opportunity for CIVICUS to draw on the collective wisdom of this group to help guide this new phase of its Participatory Governance program.

The objectives of the workshop was to identify and discuss key current participatory governance challenges and opportunities, take stock of “cutting edge” participatory governance practices, and brainstorm about strategies for promoting and building civil society capacity for participatory governance.

The findings of the workshop will serve to inform the development of CIVICUS Participatory Governance program activities and to identify potential program partners and advisors. The workshop generated information, ideas and networking opportunities that are beneficial to all workshop participants in the context of their respective participatory governance-related activities. Idasa was then invited to contribute in reviewing the *best tools, books or resources regarding participatory governance (or some aspect of participatory governance)*.

In stock-taking on the leading participatory governance tools from budget and economic perspectives, Etienne Yemek of the Idasa’s Economic Governance defined the participatory governance as the regular and guaranteed presence of representatives of the society that will be affected by the policy adopted when making binding political and economic decisions. Participatory approaches are based on key principles such as accountability, rule of law in a context of basic socioeconomic and political rights, and sharing of power which, together, can help to overcome the most leading obstacles to effective and responsive policies focusing in reducing poverty reduction in a sustainable manner.

As part of the social development process, participatory governance should gradually empower the citizens, and particularly the poor and most vulnerable groups of the society, so that they can convert their numerical strength into genuine bargaining power. That is making their voice being heard at all levels of decision-making.

It is only through the use of effective tools that Participatory governance at all levels of decision-making processes can yield benefits in terms of efficiency, equity and responsiveness of policies by giving a sense of ownership to the citizens, by allocating resources according to citizens priorities needs and preferences and by utilising their skills and knowledge.

Even though there is no blueprint in the practical use of tools to empower citizens in the process that leads to joint decision making, it is worth to recognise that continuous engagement of CSOs in challenging policy formulation and ideally proposing alternative solutions can increase the impact and responsiveness of policies on citizens, and the poor and vulnerable in particular.

To enhance civil society participation in the budget process, IDASA and its partner organisations including the International Budget Project (IBP) has developed tools to empower citizens in decision making. This includes for instance:

- Budget research and analysis tools involve identifying what are the main budgeting problems and establishing the cause and effect relationships which result in, and flow from these problems. The key purpose of this analysis is to try and ensure that the 'root causes' are identified and subsequently addressed in the activity design, and not just symptoms of the problem(s). A clear and comprehensive problem analysis provides a sound foundation on which to develop a set of relevant and focused activity objectives.
- Budget monitoring poor incorporation of human rights and multidimensional understanding of poverty within the framework of economic policy making and lack of transparency and accountability in economic policy making. With respect to budget process, public budgets reflect governments' social and economic priorities more than any other instruments – budgets are the place where policies and programs are translated into resource allocations. Yet national budget processes are often at odds with the democratic imperatives of transparency, participation accountability and accessibility. Recently, it has become increasingly acceptable to link access to information and the right to participation more firmly to better service delivery outcomes. Thus, not only should citizens have access to key budget policy documents, but an active effort must be made to ensure that main obstacles to their participation are effectively removed. Citizen pressure, which is exercised via the various budget forums, is rightfully regarded as key to the deepening of democracy in Africa
- Budget advocacy tools entail creating proactive mechanisms to influence policies and building allies with like minded stakeholders to push for pro-poor macroeconomic agendas.
- Budget literacy tools are often used in building and strengthening of the human and institutional capacities within of the civil society groups, legislatures, and public (social) sectors through. Effective learning through cases studies, simulations and information sharing approaches more often used to enhance their technical skills on policy formulation, implementation and monitoring from pro-poor perspectives. These approaches enable them to deal on a more equal footing with decision-makers at levels of budget decision-making processes. Sectoral training are designed to enable CSOs to tracking budget expenditure from social sector perspectives and to

monitor the impact of macroeconomic policies on poverty, health, education, and children

Idasa through its Africa Budget project working with partner organisations in Africa has considerably used these tools to advance socioeconomic rights, to build, deepen, and strengthen democracy, and of course to enhance good governance at large.

For more information, contact the CIVICUS PG Team at governance@civicus.org; the full report is available at http://www.civicus.org/new/media/PG_Workshop_Report.pdf