

THE VALUE OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Public participation in the life of a government and parliament is not just a moral obligation on the part of parliament and legislators, but is also a constitutional obligation. Good governance must include initiatives to strengthen the institutions of government and civil society, with a view to making government transparent, democratic and accountable to the public. Participation in the governance and administration of a country by legislators together with civil society are indispensable if the state is to function effectively. This prevents the abuse or misuse of administrative authority and political power. It also serves as a check on the activities of the administrators and rulers, and allows a diversity of viewpoints to be aired. The aim of this article is to get the views of citizens regarding the role they can play in governance. Questionnaires with open and close-ended questions were administered to members of the civil society. The results indicate that civil society, like other stakeholders, want to make a contribution on issues of governance.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in governance by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance (UNESCAP, 2002: Online). Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives.

It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision-making. Participation needs to be informed and organised. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organised civil society on the other hand.

According to Clarke (1996: 60) serious attention needs to be given to ways in which representative democracy can be strengthened by bringing a wider range of views, knowledge and judgement into the process and also to ways in which power can be shared, with particular interests or in the management of services and institutions.

This article discusses the role of citizens in governance; highlights the rules and strategies for citizen participation in governance; and considers the rationale for citizen participation in governance.

CONCEPTUALISING CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is the realm of organised social life that are voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting and autonomous from the state. It is distinct from *society* in general as it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests and ideas, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold public officials accountable (Diamond *in* Giliomee *et al.*, 1994: 55).

According to Cloete (1995: 20) civil society includes non-political parts or aspects of society consisting of numerous private institutions, also referred to as non-governmental organisations, which range from private businesses, religious or church groups, sport and welfare associations, employers and workers' unions.

Civil society organisations are distinct from other groups in society in several respects (Diamond *in* Giliomee *et al.*, 1994: 56-57):

- *Firstly*, civil society is concerned with public rather than private ends. Civil organisations relate to the community, the collectivity, or some portion of the public, rather than being centred around the individual, the family, or the private, inward-looking needs of group members.
- *Secondly*, civil society relates to the state in some way, but does not seek to win formal control over or position within the state. Rather, civil society organisations pursue from the state concessions, benefits, policy changes, relief, redress, or accountability.
- A *thirdly* civil society encompasses pluralism and diversity.
- The *fourth* distinction is partiality in the sense that no group in civil society seeks to represent the whole of a person's or a community's interests.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

Participation is an active process in which participants take the initiative and action stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control. Citizen participation could be described as the involvement of citizens in a wide range of administrative policy-making activities, including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects, in order to orient government programmes towards community needs, build public support, and encourage a sense of cohesiveness within society (Fox & Meyer, 1996: 20).

Article

Participation in governance

Since the inception of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994, the new government has set out in earnest to ensure that South African citizens have the opportunity of contributing input into the policy-making and decision-making processes (Hilliard & Kemp, 1999: 41).

Cloete (*quoted by* Hilliard and Kemp, 1999: 42) state that the citizens have an indispensable role to play in exacting accountability. This implies that public functionaries have to provide explanations to justify positive or negative results obtained in their performance of their daily activities. The citizen thus has a surveillance role to play to ensure that public functionaries comply with the mandate granted to them.

Public access to governing bodies

One of the most significant constitutional provisions in the *national sphere of government* is public access to, and involvement in, the National Assembly. Section 59(1) of the Constitution, 1996 states that the National Assembly must:

- facilitate public involvement in the legislative and other processes of the Assembly; and
- conduct its business in an open manner, and hold its sittings and those of its committees, in public.

With regard to the *provincial sphere of governance*, section 118 of the Constitution, 1996 provides for public access to, and involvement in, the provincial legislatures in South Africa. A provincial legislature must:

- facilitate public involvement in the legislative and other processes of the legislature and its committees; and
- conduct its business in an open manner, and hold its sittings, and those of its committees, in public.

Section 118(2) of the constitution, 1996 explicitly states that a provincial legislature may not exclude the public, including the media, from a sitting of a committee.

Even in the *local sphere of government* community involvement is encouraged in South Africa. For example, section 152(e) of the Constitution encourages the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government matters.

From this expose, Hilliard and Kemp (1999: 43) maintain it is clear that the current South African government is serious about involving citizens in all spheres in the governance of the country.

Public accountability

For purposes of government another significant aspect of the Constitution [section 92(2)] is that members of the Cabinet are accountable collectively and individually to

Parliament for the exercise of their powers and the performance of their functions. Public accountability has thus become an integral part of parliamentary processes in South Africa, and according to Coetzee (1991: 23) public accountability (and public scrutiny) is one of the most important characteristics of public administration.

Public accountability is the obligation resting on each public functionary to act in the public interest and in accordance with his/her conscience, with solutions for any matter based on professionalism and participation, and divulgement as a safety measure (Fox & Meyer, 1996: 105).

According to Hilliard and Kemp (1999: 43) some of the ways in which ministerial accountability can be exacted are through debates, questions, and enquiries. Matters can be debated intensively in the national legislature. This assists the public and opposition political parties to hold the ruling party accountable for any action, inaction or wrongdoing.

Rules and strategies for citizen participation in governance

According to Kroukamp (2002: 50) the participation of citizens in government activities and governance structures should always be well organised. Endeavours to establish sound relationships between the various participants should be preceded by negotiations to determine the rules that are to be followed in the process of participation. Mathur (*quoted by* Kroukamp, 2002: 50-51) suggests the following six guiding rules when participation takes place:

- Participation must begin at the lowest level within the community. People at grassroots level must be aware of the opportunities to participate and they must understand what the advantages of such participation are.
- Participation must take place at all stages of a particular project. From the earliest pre-preparing exercises, to the development of plans, the design of mechanisms for implementation and the final stage of implementation, participants from the community must be taken on board.
- Participation is much more than casting a vote or an isolated activity. It requires from the concerned community members to *get right into the middle of the fight*, to care about matters of concern and not to allow others to take all the decisions.
- Participative processes must deal with the allocation and control of goods and services needed to achieve the goals.
- Participation must deal with existing loyalties. It should not focus exclusively on the strengthening of leadership.
- Participants must be cautioned about the possibility of conflict in some form. In communities where citizens participate in activities of government, decisions may favour one group at the cost of another. All the participants involved, and not only the relevant government institution, must deal with the consequences of a situation.

Once the *rules of the game* have been set, a strategy or plan of action should be developed in order to ensure that the process of participation proceeds efficiently. Kisby

and Kisby (*quoted by* Kroukamp, 2002:51-52) are of the opinion that such a process involves the following seven basic steps:

- Form a group of interested people. Identify other people in the community who might be interested in becoming involved in the planning and development processes of the organisation. Individuals and groups who ultimately want to become actively involved in the future activities of such an organisation will be valuable participants. A planning group should then be formed to prepare an action plan.
- Get to know and involve the targeted community or part of a community. It is of importance to learn about the nature of the community with regard to aspects such as size, economics, existing organisations and major current issues. Get an understanding of the needs of the community and have them identify the challenges to be overcome. Identify the existing resources available in the community such as leaders, facilities and financial support that may exist.
- Choose initial activities or programmes that have a large appeal and a reasonable chance of success.
- Develop a plan of action. Establish goals that meet the 'SMART' requirements, that are goals that are specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and trackable.
- Evaluate the proposed components with potential support to make sure they agree with planned actions.
- Implement the plan of action. Identify problems during implementation and adjust or create strategies to correct them. Publicise successes as soon and as much as possible. Acknowledge volunteers frequently.
- Evaluate on an ongoing basis. Regularly monitor what is being achieved. Determine how close the organisation is to accomplishing its original objectives. Note areas with poor successes and determine why operations or actions went wrong. Finally, build on this experience and evaluation, develop new plans of action.

Preconditions for citizen participation and effective governance

In the process of participation in governance, citizens should be sensitised about the factors that may affect the efficiency of government activities. These factors should be understood and serve as guiding principles for citizens in order to ensure that the concept of governance will succeed. These factors, according to Kroukamp (2002: 54-55), are *inter alia* the:

- Determination of goals. The effects of economic, social, constitutional and other factors on the identification and prioritisation of goals for service delivery are well known. Before useful input by citizens can be made, an understanding of the complexities caused by these factors is required. Contributions by the public cannot be made in isolation. Therefore, it is essential for citizens to have access to relevant information to broaden their vision.
- Misconception that the national and provincial spheres of government have unlimited financial resources that have to be reallocated to address the basic needs of the people. Based on this fallacy, uninformed citizens often contend that the so-called

non-delivery of services is attributed to ineffectiveness, when in reality, it is a result of insufficient funds. What citizens should understand, is the fact that government is continuously under pressure to do more with less. If they show an awareness of and sensitivity for this situation, it is more likely that their participation will be focused on the quality of service delivery rather than setting unreasonable demands.

- Human factor. The differences in opinion of individuals could become so serious that it may negatively affect service delivery. It is possible that within the tripartite system, the needs in a specific area that may be in conflict with the general interest could be a cause for the weakening of the relationships. Of importance, is that the participants in governance should promote common goals rather than impose their personal value considerations or minority views on others (Bekker quoted by Kroukamp, 2002: 55).
- Apart from the citizens, public managers should also take cognisance of the following issues (Kroukamp, 2002: 56):
- Cultural diversities should be acknowledged as public administration and management, specifically in South Africa, require knowledge of and sensitivity to intercultural relations pertaining to the diversity of cultures that exist. In adopting this approach, changing attitudes and behaviour of public managers are priorities for success. No one could respect the value systems, cultures and other unique characteristics of others, unless such a person is personally committed to being sensitive to such characteristics. The immediate challenge, therefore, lies in orienting and re-orienting public managers, not only to let them understand their fellow citizens, but primarily to understand themselves.
- The introduction of a participative style of management as a new style may imply deliberate interventions to change the structures and procedures of institutions. It may even lead to the changing of goals of administrative institutions. The accessibility of members of society to management may result in administrative delays. Public managers should be innovative in inventing acceptable and workable ways by which government structures can be made accessible for citizen participation without lowering the quality of service delivery. The question, however, is whether and to what extent, public managers will be able, prepared and willing to bring about these changes.
- To equalise the divergent approaches to citizen participation and disadvantaged groups in South Africa, education can be used as a mechanism to facilitate this process. Public managers can also be expected to play a crucial role in educating the members of a community for their roles in the post election era. This, however, is not the task of public managers alone. In itself such a task needs the participation of leaders in the community as well as community-based and other non-governmental organisations.

Citizen participation and change

According to Vil-Nkomo (*in* Wessels & Pauw, 1999: 96) in the field of governance, one of the areas which is least understood is the impact of citizens on public service and public sector reform.

After the end of the Cold War, most nations purport to be democratic and encourage citizens to operationalise their citizenship in all aspects of society. The traditional democratic approaches to citizen participation continue to dominate. These approaches include the following (Vil-Nkomo *in* Wessels & Pauw, 1999: 97)

- individuals exercising their right to vote;
- establishing pressure and interest groups;
- using mechanisms such as recall and referenda to ensure the accountability of elected officials; and
- the use of exit (i.e. voting with your feet) and voice (i.e. protest and mass action)

Other modes of communication intended to express operational citizenship include uprisings and riots as well as revolutions that could last over a period of time.

Rationale for citizen participation in governance

A variety of authors, mainly from development studies, politics and philosophy have motivated a rationale for citizen participation in governance. The following rationale, according to Meyer *et al.*, (*in* Van der Molen *et al.* 2002:62-63), serve as examples:

- participation is a way of receiving information about local issues, needs and attitudes;
- participation provides affected communities an opportunity to express their views before policy decisions are taken;
- participation is a powerful tool to inform and educate citizens;
- participation enhances the democratisation process;
- participation promotes equality, fairness and reasonableness in the allocation and distribution of public resources;
- participation balances the tension between democracy and bureaucracy.

The Ohio State University Fact Sheet (Meyer *et al.*, *in* Van der Molen *et al.*, 2002: 62) cites the following advantage participation in community affairs:

- the citizen can bring about desired changes by expressing individual or collective views on issues of public interest;
- it promotes citizenship and teach citizens to understand the needs and desires of other citizen groups in society;
- it teaches citizens how to resolve conflict and how to promote collective welfare;
- citizens begin to understand group dynamics; and
- it provides checks and balances for the political machinery of the state.

The following are additional reasons for citizen participation in governance (Meyer *et al.*, *in* Van der Molen *et al.* 2002: 63):

- it promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual;
- it taps the energy of individual citizens within the community;
- it provides a source of special insight, information and knowledge that adds to the soundness of government policies;
- it ensures that citizens have access to the tools of democracy; and

- it creates national dialogue on issues, particularly for previously disadvantaged citizens.

Meyer *et al.* (in Van der Molen *et al.* 2002: 63) reason that from the above-mentioned motivations it can be argued that citizen participation:

- is a tool to promote democracy;
- empowers citizens and builds citizenship;
- balances the power of the elite and the poor; and
- facilitates local, regional, national, subnational, continental and global dialogue on issues of concern.

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTES TO DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

According to Diamond (*in* Giliomee *et al.*, 1994: 58-62) it is now virtually beyond dispute that to fully comprehend democratic change in Africa and the developing world, one must study civil society for the following reasons:

Firstly, because independent associations and media are important to democracy because they provide the basis for the limitation of state power, hence for the control of the state by society, and hence for democratic political institutions as the most effective means of exercising that control.

Secondly, a rich associational life supplements the role of political parties in stimulating political participation; increasing the political efficacy and skills of democratic citizens; and promoting an appreciation of the obligations as well as rights of democratic citizenship.

A *third* way in which civil society may serve democracy and promote good governance is by structuring multiple channels, beyond the political party, for the articulation and representation of interests. This is related to the participatory function by civil society. Diamond (*in* Giliomee *et al.* 1994: 60) maintains that civil society provides an especially strong foundation for democracy and good governance as it generates opportunities for participation at all levels of governance, thus deepening democracy and promoting political efficacy and legitimacy.

A *fourth* function of a democratic civil society is recruiting and training new political leaders. Civil society leaders and activists can acquire a range of leadership and advocacy skills for service in government and party politics. They learn how to organise and motivate people, debate issues, raise money, canvass for staff, negotiate compromises and build coalitions.

Fifthly, a strong civil society widely disseminates information and empower citizens in the collective pursuit and defence of their interests in values.

Finally, the function of civil society is derived in part from the success of the above. By enhancing the accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness and hence legitimacy of the political system, a strong civil society gives citizens respect for the state and positive engagement with it.

POSITIVE SPIN-OFFS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Participatory democracy, according to Fox and Meyer (1996: 93), is an ideal of democratic government which emphasises the importance of maximum direct participation in governmental affairs and decision-making by individual citizens. As in any democracy, citizen participation may have some shortcomings. But it is always necessary to consider the positive spin-offs as opposed to shortcomings. Public participation in the governance and administration of a country is indispensable if the state is to function effectively, for the following reasons (Hilliard & Kemp, 1999: 44) it:

- prevents the abuse and/or misuse of administrative authority and political power;
- stops the government from dominating its subjects;
- allows a diversity of viewpoints to be aired;
- permits citizens to challenge, refute and oppose unsubstantiated claims made by particular parties or groups;
- serves as a check on the activities of the administrators and rulers;
- helps ordinary citizens to grasp the nuts and bolts of government and administration;
- generates a sense of civic pride when citizens eventually see that their inputs have been implemented; and
- creates a sense of *ownership* when citizens are afforded the opportunity to have their say.

Clearly, citizens develop a sense of patriotism and purpose when they are allowed to make a contribution to civic affairs, no matter how insignificant their inputs may seem. Thus, citizen participation is crucial not only to promote but also to sustain democracy.

Goals of citizen participation

The fundamental question, according to Meyer *et al.*, (in Van der Molen *et al.*, 2002: 63-64), is: "Why do citizens participate?" They maintain that different authors have, over the years, tried to answer this question in the following manner:

- some argue that participation is at the expense of the poor and they will invest their participation as a free good, desirable in unlimited quantities. The citizens will invest in it when they believe it will secure them valuable benefits, not otherwise available at comparable cost, time and risk;
- citizen participation can be used as a strategy to reform governments;
- it is a worldwide movement away from centralised state control to regional and local governance;
- it provides information to citizens;
- it improves the public-policy process;
- it supplements public-sector work;
- it refocuses political power and community dynamics;

- it refines the societal context in which policies are formulated;
- it increases but cannot guarantee, the chances that programmes and projects will receive acceptability;
- it brings about disequilibrium in the way bureaucrats think and act.
- it disturbs bureaucratic incrementalism and linear problem-solving strategies, thus introducing a lateral approach to problem-solving; and
- it interferes with the function of government.

Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness through increased co-operative government

Co-operative government is a unique and bold concept developed by South Africa's constitutional negotiators to establish a new framework for governance in a democratic South Africa. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that few constitutions in the world, if any, explicitly place moral, operational or political obligations to co-operate in different governing organs in their interactions with each other (Gordhan *in* Maharaj, 1999: 199).

Co-operative government assumes the integrity of each sphere of government. But it also recognises the complex nature of government in modern society. No country today, in Gordhan's view (*in* Maharaj, 1999: 204-205), can effectively meet its challenges unless the various parts of the government:

- co-ordinate their activities to avoid wasteful competition and costly duplication;
- develop a multi-sectoral perspective on the interests of the country as a whole, and respect the discipline of national goals, policies and operating principles;
- settle disputes constructively without resorting to costly and time-consuming litigation;
- collectively harness all public resources within a framework of mutual support; and
- rationally and clearly divide among themselves the roles and responsibilities of government, to minimise confusion and maximise effectivity.

According to Doyle *in* Van der Waldt *et al.* (2002:197) *effectiveness* refers to whether a given alternative results in the achievement of a valued outcome; thus an objective is achieved. *Efficiency* refers to the amount of effort required to achieve a specific level of effectiveness. Policies in the public sector are considered efficient if they are, amongst other things, cost-effective (Doyle *in* Van der Waldt *et al.*, 2002: 197).

Vil-Nkomo (*quoted by* Hilliard & Kemp, 1999: 50) envisages the role of the citizen in terms of a system of interlocking co-operative government in the three spheres of government. While the three spheres are interlocked, the role of each must be clearly identifiable in the whole system of government.

The entire process of citizen participation is usually facilitated, strengthened and supported by co-operative government. In terms of Chapter 3 of the Constitution all spheres of government are compelled to co-operate on both vertical and horizontal levels.

Any large organisation must promote co-operative governance if it is to function with limited impediments. Prerequisites for *healthy* co-operative governance include the following (Hilliard & Kemp, 1999: 50-51):

- clear, concise and unambiguous communication channels traversing structures and persons;
- mutual trust, respect and cordial human relations right from the organisational apex down to grassroots level;
- adequate devolution, delegation and decentralisation to public functionaries to submit completed work;
- unity of purpose and command throughout the organisational set-up; and
- a genuine desire to uphold the work ethic and do a fair day's work.

It is the duty of the citizens to report to the authorities any breakdowns in communication in the public service. According to Hilliard and Kemp (1999: 51) covering up problems in the public service will not promote the ideals of co-operative governance. Furthermore, all the organs of state should synchronise their activities for co-operative governance to work properly.

If co-operative governance does not occur, misgovernance could become commonplace. Interaction, networking and exchanging information to maintain public service efficiency should eventually ensure that public functionaries first and foremost serve the general welfare of the population. The governmental machinery must remain well-lubricated and public institutions must act in unison to attain their governmental and administrative goals. Thus, good co-operative governance ensures efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

The value of citizen participation in governance

King (*quoted by* Kroukamp, 2002: 52-54) states that citizen participation is costly, time consuming and frustrating, but it cannot be dispensed of due to the following reasons:

Firstly, participation, in and of itself, constitutes affirmative activity – an exercise of the very initiative, the creativity, the self-reliance, the faith that specific programmes such as education and others seek to instil. Participation is, in fact, the necessary concomitant of faith in the dignity and worth of the individual. It implies that citizens wrestle with the meaning of such normative and practical concerns as social equity, citizenship, social conflict, co-operation, democratic theory and the public interest. The denial of effective participation, including the opportunity to choose, to be heard, to discuss, to criticise, to protest and to challenge decisions regarding the most fundamental conditions of existence is a denial of the worth of the individual.

Secondly, citizen participation, properly utilised, is a means of mobilising the resources and energies of the poor. In the South African situation, those in squatter settlements surrounding many cities and towns are living example of passive consumers of the services to producers of those services. Citizen participation thus exerts pressure to increase mass production for mass consumption.

Thirdly, citizen participation constitutes a source of special insight, of information, of knowledge and experience that cannot be ignored by those concerned, their efforts should fulfill their aims. Comprehensive action programmes, devised by professionals and accepted by the dominant social, political, education, and economic institutions represent consensus of the majority on how to solve social problems.

Fourthly, vigorous, continued participation is indispensable to consolidating democracy. When the future of the very regime espousing democracy is at stake because it is a new and uncertain experience, the basic objective is to ensure that democracy survives. The value of democracy is ensured through experiencing it at first hand. This might be in a procedural, formal sense when participation for many is confined to electing their representatives periodically and regularly.

Finally, citizen participation in governance has an instrumental purpose too. If by participating, citizens are able to satisfy their needs, and even their demands, by observing the rules of the game of democracy, then there is all the more reason to support the game, and indeed nurture it. Lawrence and Stanton (*quoted by* Kroukamp, 2002: 54) argue the emphasis in this instance falls on tangible opportunities and resources – having recourse to the former and acquiring the latter.

Citizen participation is essential to sustaining democracy and promoting good governance. If citizen participation is widespread, it will keep the rulers accountable to the people, and will prevent politicians from making policies which are detrimental to the general welfare of society. Put differently, citizen participation is crucial to ensure that the *voice* of the people is heard and the needs and wishes of the citizens duly acted upon (Hilliard & Kemp, 1999:57).

LIMITATIONS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

The more obvious limitations of citizen participation present themselves in the current dilemmas outlined by Meyer *et al.* (in Van der Molen *et al.* 2002: 64-66):

- Although participatory democracy encourages popular participation, reality shows that not every citizen is interested, or has the capacity, to participate in public affairs.
- A diversity of languages in a community can cause problems if, for example, interpreters communicate a wrong interpretation.
- In the event that the needs and requests of citizens are not being addressed, reluctance to participate may result.
- Bureaucracies in developing countries are not structured to facilitate citizen participation, which hampers constructive citizen-input.
- In conflict-ridden societies, citizen participation may be limited due to fear.
- Some activities of government are technical and may be in conflict with community values and preferences.

Even if there are limitations for participation in governance by civil society, a democratic state must ensure that it consolidates and maintains democracy by encouraging civil society participation.

Consolidation and maintenance of democracy and good governance

According to Diamond (*in* Giliomee *et al.*, 1994: 63) several internal characteristics of civil society, in addition to the autonomy of the state, mediate and enhance the contribution it can make to the consolidation and maintenance of democracy and good governance. These factors are particularly important in determining the degree to which civil society will contribute to the development of a democratic culture.

Firstly, the goals and methods of groups in civil society must be compatible with the practice of democratic politics. The chances for stable democracy significantly improve if civil society does not contain uncompromising interest groups, or groups with antidemocratic goals and methods.

A *second* important feature of civil society is its level of organisational institutionalisation. Institutionalised interest groups, like institutionalised political parties, contribute to the stability, predictability and governability of a democratic regime.

Thirdly, the degree of democracy of civil society itself affects the degree to which it can socialise participants into democratic forms of behaviour. If civil society organisations are to promote democracy, they must function democratically in their internal processes of decision-making and leadership selection.

Fourth, the more pluralistic civil society is, the more it benefits democracy. Pluralism helps groups in civil society to survive and encourages them to learn to co-operate and negotiate with one another.

Finally, civil society serves democracy best when affording individuals opportunities to participate in multiple associations and informal networks at multiple levels of society. If there are more associations in civil society, they will develop specialised agendas and purposes of consolidating democracy and good governance.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has recognised the importance of strong and assertive civil society to sustain democracy and good governance. Thus the ECA, in collaboration with the African civil society community, has established the African Centre for Civil Society. The Centre provides support services and capacity building assistance for indigenous civil society organisations (ECA Report, 1999: 6).

A civil society centre in any country, including South Africa, should perform activities to:

- provide training for civil society organisations in managing development projects;
- facilitate dialogue between states, and civil society organisations with a view to creating an enabling environment for the work of civil society organisations; and
- strengthen and broaden civil society organisations' understanding of the policy environment and process, including analytic and social skills to add value and influence national priorities.

Conditions for democracy and economic and social development to flourish have been created in South Africa. In KwaZulu-Natal a new government was installed – after the

April 14, 2004 elections – and a new legislature, formed on the basis of the proportional representation electoral system. They are now grappling with how to make itself more responsive and relevant to the needs of its citizens.

The roles of the organs of civil society, non-governmental organisations and civic movements are crucial to achieve much-needed interaction among the governing structures. The Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, Willis Mchunu, and Premier Sbusiso Ndebele have, on the side of provincial legislature and government, publicly declared that the doors of the institutions they head are open to receive opinions from leaders of all sectors of civil society on how to best deal with the issues facing the people of KwaZulu-Natal (The Mercury, Thursday, 10 June 2004).

Parliamentary institutions, such as portfolio committees, must be open to members of the public. The same applies to constituency offices, which are also supposed to be open on a non-party political basis. Ordinary citizens must be empowered with the ability to lobby effectively and productively. Various groups in civil society need to work with each other. Together with other civil society formations, communities can use their comparative advantage to influence policies across all spheres of government.

In Africa a Pan African Parliament has been formed. The concept behind this Parliament was to get citizens to participate in their governance and to interact with the state. It also strives to empower the people to interact with or lobby those who take the decisions. The challenge, in short, is how to make the government and, indeed, Parliament accountable to the people, given our current electoral system, which creates only a flimsy link between members of Parliament (legislators) and the electorate.

SUMMARY

This article has highlighted the need for participation by citizens in governance. Results of the survey indicate that civil society prefers to make a contribution on governance issues. Participation is a way of receiving information about local issues, needs and attitudes. This provides affected communities with an opportunity to express their views before policy decisions are taken. When promoting good governance, participation by all is a powerful tool to inform and educate citizens. Also, participation promotes equality, fairness and reasonableness in the allocation and distribution of public resources. Civil society participation in governance can make a contribution in promoting good governance.

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