Session 1
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On the Organizational Framework for Citizens’ Participation in the People’s Republic of China

Chu Songyan

Introduction

Human beings meet their individual needs by organizing themselves to allocate resources and share risks. In the private sector, resources are deployed and risks avoided through companies, while in the public sector these same purposes are achieved through the government bureaucracy. People also form civil society organizations (CSOs) such as clubs, associations, and unions to meet their needs and enrich their lives. As the 20th century drew to a close, scholars heralded the “global associational revolution” (Salamon 1999), led in different countries by nongovernment organizations (NGOs), nonprofit organizations (NPOs), the “third sector,” the voluntary sector. Therefore, stock companies, government, and civil society organizations make up the social governance structure.

In the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the private sector is relatively mature, after more than 20 years of openness and reform. The bureaucracy is undergoing reform. The CSOs are growing more and more rapidly, and are gradually becoming an important organizational option for people wanting to express and advance their interests. However, many factors still hinder public support for the social governance structure.

Political Participation of Social Organizations

CSOs come in three categories in the PRC: social organizations, privately run non-enterprise units, and foundations. Each category has its own regulations. According to the Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations passed in 1998, social organizations (SOs) are voluntary, non-profit organizations of citizens formed to articulate common choices and decisions.

Growth of Social Organizations

The Regulation sets strict conditions for social organizations to be registered as legal entities. Organizations that do not meet the requirements are not legal organizations, though such organizations far outnumber those
registered. Though it would be much more impressive to cover all social organizations regardless of their registration status, it is rather difficult to make out their exact number. Therefore, the social organizations referred to in this paper are the registered ones.

The growth of SOs in the PRC coincides with the period of openness and reform, marked by government’s withdrawal from both the market and society. “One notable feature of the reform program sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),” Professor Saich (2000) pointed out, “has been the expansion of social organizations.” Before 1978, social organizations were quite limited in variety and numbers: there were fewer than 100 national SOs, and only slightly more than 6,000 local SOs nationwide (Kang Xiaoguang 1999). The adoption of the policy of openness and reform spurred activity among traditional SOs and led to the rapid emergence of new types of SOs. By the end of 2004, around 153,000 SOs were registered nationwide.

SOs have gone through four stages of development since 1978. Stage one (1978–1988) was the period of rapid growth. At this stage, there were no rules or regulations on social organization, as reform had just begun. Social organizations were managed by nearly every public agency. Their exact number was therefore difficult to determine, but the number was generally believed to be huge, compared with the number in later stages. In 1989, there were around 209,400 registered SOs.

Stage two (1989–1992) was the cleaning-up period. As the social organizations rapidly increased, it became necessary and important to manage them through registration. On 25 October 1989, the first Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations was passed. It established the dual management model and introduced the system of registration. On 9 June 1990, the State Council issued a notice requiring local governments to inventory all SOs. From then on, SO statistics were included in national statistics. By 1992, the number of registered SOs had decreased dramatically to 154,500.

Stage three (1993–1998) was the period of steady growth. With the socialist market economy as the established goal of economic reform, professional and economic research organizations thrived. However, as social organizations were under-regulated—there was still only one regulation governing them—some illegal groups acted to the discredit of social organizations and caused harm to social stability. Therefore, the No. 22 File issued by the State Council in 1996 required strict supervision of social organizations by both central government agencies and local governments. SOs decreased in number, but their governance structure improved.
Stage four (since September 1998) is the regulating and nurturing period. On 25 September 1998, the revised Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations was passed, and some measures to encourage registration, such as lowering the requirements for local SOs, were adopted. However, in 1999, the illegal activities of the Falun Gong movement exposed weaknesses in the management of SOs. There followed a second round of housecleaning and a further decline in the number of SOs. As the weaknesses were gradually dealt with, SOs resumed their slow yet steady growth in 2001. Figure 1 shows the fluctuations in the number of SOs from year to year, reflecting the development of SO regulation by government since the passage of the first Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations in 1989.

To understand the development of social organizations in the PRC, we surveyed three provincial areas from 2002 to 2004. We sent out questionnaires to randomly selected social organizations in Beijing, Zhejiang, and Heilongjiang, and achieved an average response rate of 33.2%. We also did

![Figure 1: Growth of SOs since 1989](image-url)

**Note:** Before 1989, when the first Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations was passed, there were no statistics on the number of social organizations.

**Source:** 1989 to 1991 figures were calculated with 1992 as base year; figures since 1993 were taken from the *China Yearbook on Civil Affairs*, published by China Society Publisher.
more than 100 interviews in this period. Zhejiang, where the private sector contributes more than 50% of GDP, represented the highly developed areas. Beijing, the capital, represented areas with moderate development, while Heilongjiang represented the poorer areas, where agriculture and decrepit state-owned enterprises are the engines of development. From the validated responses, it was evident that only 64 SOs, 2.5% of all the SOs surveyed, were established before 1978.

The increase in the number of SOs since 1993 has been steady, and has been spurred on by the lowering of the local registration threshold in 1998. Generally, the variations shown in the figure coincide with the development of SOs nationwide.

**Figure 2: Growth of Social Organizations in Beijing, Zhejiang, and Heilongjiang**

Note: 2,588 validated responses were obtained from the 2,858 SOs surveyed.
Political Participation of Social Organizations

Social organizations have been growing steadily in every social field and gaining increasing recognition as people with similar interests unite for common goals. Although the participation of social organizations has not been an equalizing factor in politics, it has become an inevitable factor in public policy making. Growing under the watchful eye of government and with its encouragement, social organizations are now “playing the role the government wishes [them to play in] ways the government wishes” (Lu Jianhua 2000) in policy making and the management of social affairs. They are becoming an important bridge between government and the citizens. On the one hand, they are helping to democratize policy making by articulating the citizens’ interests. On the other hand, by conveying government’s policy intentions and wishes to their members and the public, social organizations are promoting understanding and communication.

Political participation by social organizations in the PRC is, however, quite limited at present. A survey by the Zhejiang Bureau of Civil Affairs shows that only about 17% of business associations have actually influenced local government to stop or modify policies (Sun Jinxia 2005). Our survey came up with a similar ratio of respondent SOs who believed that their opinions had had a strong effect on certain policies. Another aspect shows the limited influence of SOs. The survey question “Do you think that your organization is considered an important factor by the government and officials?” drew a yes answer from 67.9% of respondent SOs in Beijing, 64.5% of those in Zhejiang, and 64.9% of SOs in Heilongjiang. But only 16.8% (411 of the 2,445) respondent social organizations surveyed said that they had strongly influenced government decision making. This inconsistency reflects the awkward status of SOs: while they aspire to be involved, they feel powerless to influence government.

Government decides how far social organizations can participate in government and what effect their participation will have. At present, reform in the PRC is still government-dominated. This means that government, relying on traditional skills and measures, still controls information and service delivery. SOs are not considered important information channels and service delivery partners. Therefore, they are merely passive and cannot fully express and defend their interests. Meanwhile, conflicting interests and competition are proliferating in the PRC. Government is faced with the major challenge of harmonizing these different interests by promoting the political participation of social organizations. The challenge has two aspects. On the one hand, the role of social organizations as the main avenue of interest expression and social governance should be emphasized and encouraged. On the other hand, social
organizations should be guided toward public interest goals so that they are not exploited by a few. Therefore, government must regulate SOs while nurturing them, that is, it must consider encouraging social organizations to mediate between conflicting interests, and at the same time design mechanisms to keep social organizations from being controlled by a minority.

Table 1: Influence of Social Organizations on Government Decision Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence on Government Decisions</th>
<th>Beijing</th>
<th>Zhejiang</th>
<th>Heilongjiang</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately strong</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not strong</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to say</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>1,532</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>2,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Surveyed</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>2,858</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentage figures represent proportions of valid responses, not of the total surveyed.

The Development of Social Organizations:
Nurturing while Regulating

As is well known, the development of SOs follows the phase of reform. The reform process, because it is so uneven, both favors and restricts the growth of SOs. Traditional state institutions still dominate, squeezing the survival space of SOs. Among the SOs we surveyed, 70.4% complained of being dependent on government initiative. Since funds are in short supply among SOs and government is still the most important source, some researchers have predicted that “the [growth] of SOs’ activities mainly [depends] on the deepening of reform and the growth of the market” (Wang Ying, Zhe Xiaoye, and Sun Bingyao 1993). This is not enough, however. Since the reform is still government-dominated, a new model for the development of SOs—nurturing while regulating—must be adopted.

The Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations, passed in 1998, is now being amended in response to the challenge of social governance. But the present management system is still focused mainly on registering social organizations, and a complete institutional framework for the management of social organizations has yet to be established.
Generally speaking, for social organizations to function properly—for them to represent capably the shared interests of their members, collaborate in social governance, and enhance and preserve social welfare, complementing the state-market-society allocation of social resources and risks—an institutional structure for establishing, registering, governing, regulating and supervising, raising funds, obtaining preferential tax treatment, etc., for social organizations should be built up step by step. Social organizations are freedom of association in practice, and they take various forms. A registered, legal entity is only one such form. A large number of social organizations in all countries do not meet the registration standards. But registered social organizations do have easier access to tax benefits and government contracts, and derive legitimacy from legislation.

To nurture social organizations while regulating them, government must guarantee their independence while making sure that they are not for profit and nonpolitical, and do not harm the public interest. Independence prevents social organizations from being restricted, especially by government, from expressing their opinions freely. The not-for-profit principle sets social organizations apart from profit-oriented companies, while being nonpolitical differentiates them from political parties, and guarantees their reasonable and lawful participation. The principle of not causing harm to the public interest allows social organizations to represent specific interests that do not run counter to the general interest.

At present, the PRC needs to resolve various issues at the institutional level.

**Regulation of Social Organizations Based on Classification**

Social organizations can be divided into mutual benefit organizations (MBOs) and public benefit organizations (PBOs) according to their interests, and further into those with legal status and those without. The Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations applies only to social organizations with legal status. Many social organizations that do not meet the registration criteria are excluded, though they continue to exist by virtue of the freedom of association. However, they are generally underfunded and do not have the legal identity to participate in public affairs, thus increasing the possibility of conflicts between competing interests.

The growth in social organizations enhances social governance and public services. To allow social organizations to carry out their social responsibilities, a distinction must first be made between PBOs and MBOs, and different regulations set for each group. After that, the registration requirements can be retained as the standard for legal entities, while those social organizations that do not meet the requirements are also put on record. Such organizations could
send their organization details to the supervising agency by post, and the agency could publicize the name lists of these social organizations regularly, so that the public knows of their existence and can decide what to do about them. Moreover, such records enable the State to understand better the activities and functions of social organizations and to consider their interests when making public decisions and social development strategies.

Need for Change in the Dual Management System

To guarantee the independence of social organizations, the dual management system must be reformed. The dual management system makes the Department of Civil Affairs the registration agency while entrusting the actual management of the organizations to professional responsible authorities. In this arrangement, the professional responsible authorities must be Party entities, government agencies, or other authorized bodies. The Regulation gives them unlimited power to supervise the social organizations. Under this system, it is difficult for social organizations to be independent from government and to protect their members’ interests.

In reality, however, the Regulation only requires the professional responsible authorities to review the registration files of the social organizations and to guide their activities within the legal framework, and does not specify procedures for the professional responsible authorities to follow. As a result, some professional responsible authorities simply see to it that social organizations are registered. Other professional responsible authorities, however, regard social organizations as their departments or adjuncts. The social organizations lose their independence this way. On the other hand, some professional responsible authorities could also become too immersed in the interests of specific “departments.” Moreover, although the Regulation places social organizations under professional responsible authorities, it absolves the latter of any legal responsibility for violations by social organizations under their charge; the legal burden falls solely on the social organizations. Hence, the legal relationship between the social organization and its professional responsible authority is an amorphous one. The professional responsible authority can neither regulate nor nurture the social organization effectively.

Getting rid of the dual management system and strengthening the institutional arrangement for the supervision of independent social organizations is an operational choice that must accord with the reality.
Need for Written Supervision Procedures

The supervision of social organizations revolves around their governance structure and fund-raising activities. Social organizations derive their income from membership fees, endowments from citizens and companies, and legal charges for services, but, because of a lack of connection between their management and the tax system, these organizations receive very little endowment and not much more in grants from government (see Table 2).

### Table 2: Sources of Income of Social Organizations, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Beijing</th>
<th>Zhejiang</th>
<th>Heilongjiang</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government grants</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership fees</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All endowments</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service incomes</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>1,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Surveyed</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>2,858</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentage figures represent proportions of valid responses, not of the total surveyed.

Individuals and companies are entitled to tax exemption when they donate to PBOs such as charities, but without feasible procedures for realizing the tax exemption, they are not so willing to donate. Likewise, membership fees can hardly keep the organizations afloat with the strict regulation by the Civil Affairs Department, which holds down the fees. Hence, offering services for money becomes an important way for social organizations to stay alive. According to our survey, many social organizations now stay in existence by holding all kinds of exhibitions and fairs. Others have dwindled to little more than an excuse for the members to establish and keep friendships.

Over the near, as well as the longer term, therefore, better tax laws should be passed and other institutional arrangements made to secure the survival of social organizations and facilitate their supervision. The financial affairs of social organizations—statements of income and expenses, balance sheets, etc.—should be reported promptly to their members, and made known regularly to the public, and so should their activities. The reports should be made available in easily accessible public places.

The Regulation stipulates that there should be only one social organization in each social area at each administrative level. Many social
organizations have ways of getting around this prohibition, sometimes using different names and different categories of activity to achieve the purpose. What is important is that social organizations are growing, and it is hard to say which ones are stronger or more representative. So the Regulation must be changed to encourage more social organizations to register by guaranteeing their members the freedom to join and withdraw from the organizations. The goal is to develop moderate competition to strengthen social organizations.

But building a perfect institutional framework in a short time is not so easy. For now, we can make incremental changes in laws and regulations in different areas to nurture social organizations while regulating them.

Institutional Framework and Feasible Mechanisms

Modern organizations seek opportunities for political participation to pursue a wide variety of interests. In the PRC, as reform and transformation proceeds, “group interests’ influence [on] politics will be more and more [significant].... Consequently, to regulate interests of different groups and keep [the] interest balance at [a] certain level will be an important aspect of political practice” (Li Jingpeng 1995, page 10). Political participation by social organizations should therefore follow some principles, and an appropriate institutional framework needs to be established to ensure a more inclusive political process.

Principles of Political Participation by Social Organizations

The participation of social organizations in political life should follow several principles. First, the public interest should dominate. Social organizations express their interests through various participation channels at every phase of public decision making, to influence policy. Many developed countries such as the UK and the USA require social organizations to follow the principle of public interest in participating in public decision making on education, research, etc. As the PRC is still undergoing social transformation, it is especially important that mutual benefit organizations and public benefit organizations participate in political process with a public-interest orientation. This helps the State to judge the demands of different social organizations, balance different interests, and mediate between conflicting interests. The social organizations, for their part, are able to connect the realization of their interests to the realization of the public interest. In the process, public-spirited citizens are formed.

Second, the principle of legitimacy and reasonability prevents public policy issues from being monopolized by a few powerful social organizations. As political participants, social organizations should not be exempted from
laws and legal principles. They must cooperate as well as compromise with other organizations with competing interests.

Finally, the principle of nondiscrimination applies not only to social organizations but also to government. Powerful organizations are usually better able to make adequate use of the various channels for expressing their interests, while ordinary, and especially weaker organizations use expression channels too little, for lack of financial support and skills. Government should treat social organizations equally, making sure that they have equal opportunities to express their demands and that more powerful social organizations do not encroach on the public interest.

Therefore, not only must social organizations be brought into the political participation framework, but participation channels must be widened and feasible institutional mechanisms innovated.

First, social organizations should be able to represent and express their members’ interests more openly in the social and political process. People are the masters of the State. This is the basic principle of the PRC’s political life, embodied in the election of representative organs of the State, as well as in citizens’ participation, whether direct or indirect, in public affairs. Moreover, as the basic social units allocating resources and risks, social organizations contribute to the balance of social governance. In the PRC, there is no lack of channels for expressing various interests in politics and governance. What is lacking is a way of making these various channels of expression more accessible through concrete institutional arrangements and procedures so that social organizations can participate in public decision making.

Second, public decision making should involve social organizations to encourage citizens’ involvement in public concerns. For democratic decision making, social organizations should be involved at each stage of the process. Public hearings, symposiums, and other forums are necessary for decision makers to make sense of different, often conflicting, opinions. The implementation of decisions is also a continuing process that requires constant exchange of information between government and citizens. The participation of social organizations can also help strengthen the relations between government and citizens, and improve citizens’ political awareness. In some localities, deliberations on public issues and the participation of environmental organizations in environmental policy making, among other measures, are contributing to the design of a framework for mediating between conflicting interests and keeping the public trust.

Finally, public affairs, especially at the community level, should be open to participation by social organizations. Such participation conforms to the rule of law and the protection of citizenship rights, and is one aspect of
democratization. At present, social organizations are relatively active in social affairs, especially in urban communities, but participate less, and ineffectively, in state political affairs. The Lawmaking Act requires lawmakers to hear the opinions of a broad spectrum of society when drafting legislation. But concrete procedures are still under consideration.

Conclusion

A harmonious society needs a strong state, a strong private sector, and a strong society, as well as some kind of collaboration among the three. Though the PRC is becoming richer and stronger, there is no equilibrium between the three spheres: the State is too strong, the private sector is just gaining strength, and the society is still weak. Social organizations have been growing rapidly in recent years, and a flourishing and free society is an increasingly likely prospect. Yet the road to social harmony is still a long one.

Widening social organizations’ participation can not only inspire citizens to give greater attention to public concerns and then strengthen their awareness of government and its activities, it can also lead to stronger citizens and a stronger state. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an institutional framework to support such participation. The Regulation and other related institutions either lack feasibility or conflict with one another. Institutions and laws must be developed to promote the growth of social organizations while regulating them.
References


Qualitative Participation and Social Harmony: A Study of the Literacy Movement in West Bengal (India)

Rabindranath Bhattacharyya

Introduction

Qualitative participation is a much-disputed concept. Since democratic ideas gained popularity, theorists have tried to establish congruence between formal democracy, in the form of a constitution for popular government, and real democracy, in the sense of qualitative participation by the people in government. But political theorists and political sociologists differ greatly in their views about the nature and extent of such congruence, especially in India. The democratic process in India since independence has followed a political sequence of its own. But throughout this journey toward democracy, some issues have continued to block the sought-for congruence between formal and real democracy. One such issue is low literacy, which has hampered participation in two ways: (i) it has impeded the development of the rationality that is required for qualitative participation, to better understand the perspectives and needs of others and seek solutions to accommodate as far as possible the needs and interests of all; and (ii) it has helped maintain, if not facilitate, social cohesions along with primordial loyalties to language, religion, caste, and ethnic groups in a way that has blocked social harmony and hampered the extension of political citizenship through active participation in government. In India, participation at the village-level panchayati raj is one means of participation in the larger democratic system that is relatively accessible to the disadvantaged and facilitates the participation of the people in decisions governing their lives, the public accountability of their leaders, and the equitable distribution of power.

This paper explores the link between increased literacy and the increased competence of citizens to participate in the decision-making structures of the rural local government, the gram panchayats.

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2 A unique grassroots rural self-governing institutional set-up for democratic decentralization.
The Notion of Qualitative Participation

Participation is a social process wherein people exercise their collective initiative in an organized framework to promote their self-perceived interests through means over which they can exert effective control. The body politic is only a metaphor, but communal action is a fundamental fact of social life. Hence, the proper approach to participatory democracy is to consider the ways in which social beings do things together.

Not only do the social beings act in common, but individual acts are subject to rules of ownership as complicated as the laws of property. A society will seem to itself to be much more participant if the actions performed by officials are seen as being done at its instigation and for its sake, and are therefore accepted by the people as being, in some extended sense, of their own. This is largely a matter of social psychology, but it is grounded in the peculiar logic of the concept of action.

This action cannot be merely proclaimed, however; it has to be promoted. In ideal harmonious living, collective decisions do not result merely by aggregating the desires of the members of the polity. Rather, the participants attempt to influence each other’s opinion in a rational manner and they strive to understand the perspectives and needs of others and seek solutions that accommodate as far as possible the needs and interests of all. This requires competence on the part of the participants.

Long ago J. S. Mill (1861) attempted to combine these two contradictory values of participation and competence. He opined that the “goodness of a government” depends on (i) the degree to which “it is adapted to take advantage of the amount of good qualities” in the governed that exist at any particular time; and (ii) the degree to which “it tends to increase the sum of good qualities in the governed.” The first criterion refers to what may be called the protective goal, since Mill would consider government satisfactory to the extent that its institutions protect the interests of citizens and the general interest. The second criterion (for Mill the more important one) is what may be termed the educative goal, because it deals with government as “an agency of national education.” Applying these two criteria, Mill in effect invoked two principles. The principle of participation requires the participation of each citizen to be as great as possible to promote both the protective and educative goals of government. Mill’s arguments for extensive participation appeal to the need to protect the interests of each citizen and to improve the political intelligence of all citizens. The principle of competence, on the other hand, stipulates that the influence of the more qualified citizens should be as great as possible to promote both the protective and educative goals. Here Mill appeals to the need for competent...
leadership to protect against the dangers of ignorance and sinister interests in the government and among the public, and to contribute to the process of civic education.

Although the two principles set the same goals, they call for different means to realize these goals and therefore often conflict with each other. The principle of participation constrains the principle of competence, just as the latter principle limits the former. Qualitative participation in effect upholds a judicious admixture of the two principles, emphasizing the participation of the maximum number of competent people in the structures of decision making. Hence, for qualitative participation, education remains an essential criterion.

Experience of West Bengal

“Freedoms are, thus, among the principal means as well as the primary ends of development,” Dreze and Sen (2002) observe. They add:

Similarly, illiteracy and what Nehru called, more generally, “ignorance,” involve not only a negation of the freedom to read and write, but also an impairment of the opportunity to understand and communicate, to take informed personal decisions, and to participate in social choice. Illiteracy is, in fact, a type of “social unfreedom” and supplements and often intensifies the burden of economic unfreedom in the form of income poverty. (pages 4–5)

Like most other Asian countries, India up to the time of independence had been suffering from low literacy, which had kept Indians from being aware of their sociopolitical and economic condition. According to the Press Release (6 September 2003) of the Ministry of Human Resource Development Information Bureau of India.

When India gained independence, four out of five of her citizens could not read…. The fast growth in literacy in the recent decades even in the face of huge additions to the population depicts a remarkable positive trend. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the fact that India still have (sic) a long way to go towards the goal of total literacy. Out of about 87 crore\(^3\) illiterate adults in the world, 30 crore are Indians. (http://pib.nic.in/archive/lreleng/lyr2003/rsep2003/06092003/r0609200331.html)

\(^3\) A unit of measure equal to ten million.
Hence, in the postindependence period, the Government launched different programs to increase literacy and narrow the gap between formal and real democracy. Table 1 gives data on literacy rates from 1951 to 2001, disaggregated according to gender.

India’s perception of literacy varied over time. But with the birth of the National Literacy Mission in 1988, the perception of literacy, its definition and norms, reflected the objectives of functional literacy (National Literacy Mission 1994). The initial phase of the literacy movement was marked by a Total Literacy Campaign (TLC). The TLC model was area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based, cost-effective, and outcome-oriented. Its goal was functional literacy, through prescribed literacy norms. Functional literacy not only refers to reading and writing skills but also touches on all other issues of development such as health, population growth, family welfare, women’s empowerment, and, most important of all, employment.

West Bengal, a constituent state in the east of India, has been ruled by a Left-Front government since 1977. According to the West Bengal Human Development Report 2004 (Government of West Bengal 2004b, pages 4–5):

With a population of about 82 million in 2001 according to the 2001 Census, West Bengal is the fourth most populous state situated in the eastern region of India. Accounting for about 2.7 per cent of India’s area (88,752 square km) but about 7.8 per cent of the country’s population, this state ranks first in terms of density of 904 per sq km as per the 2001 Census.…

About 72 per cent of the people live in rural areas. According to the Planning Commission, the proportion of population below the poverty
line in 1999-2000 in West Bengal was 31.85 per cent. The percentages of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe populations are 28.6 and 5.8 respectively in the rural areas and 19.9 and 1.5 respectively in the urban areas. Among the minorities, the Muslims are the dominant section and they account for about 28.6 per cent of the total population in West Bengal. The corresponding figures for rural and urban areas were 33.3 per cent and 11.8 per cent respectively. Further, it may be noted that these three categories, namely SC, ST and Minorities, together account for more than half the population, and these are also the three poorest groups in rural Bengal.

Since 1977 two major sets of institutional changes have occurred in West Bengal. The first consists of land reform, mainly tenancy reform and the distribution of agricultural and homestead land to landless and poor farmers. The second major institutional change is associated with the establishment of a three-tier system of local government (the panchayat) in accordance with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act a two-tier system of governance—federal and state units—was prevalent. With the passage of the act, the third tier, comprising the district, block, and village levels, came into existence, for area planning and the implementation of development plans and programs. West Bengal was the first state in India to establish a real participatory democracy by transferring the decision-making powers from government bureaucracies to the people through the directly elected panchayati raj institutions.4

Although the Total Literacy Campaign in West Bengal started at the same time as the campaign in other states, literacy in West Bengal is still far short of mass literacy. According to census data, 77.0% of males and 59.6% of females were literate in 2001. In West Bengal the literacy campaign has four categories: (i) formal education, under which children 5–8 years old are sent to the institutional system or the primary school; (ii) informal education (e.g., the child education program Shishu Shiksha Karmasuch) for children who remain outside the formal system of education because of socioeconomic constraints; (iii) adult education, for a target group ranging from younger adults 15–30 years old up to older adults above the age of 50; and (iv) women’s education, to put an end to the traditional belief that women are best suited for domestic work and that there is therefore no need to send girl children to school.

4 According to the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992, of India, [Art. 243 (d)] “ ‘Panchayat’ means an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas.” Panchayati Raj institutions comprise of the elected bodies at the District (Zilla Parishad), Block (Panchayat Samity) and Village (Gram Panchayat) levels.
It is evident from Table 2 that literacy in West Bengal, especially among females, has been higher than the rate for all of India in most postindependence census years. The noticeable jump in the literacy rate between the 1991 and 2001 census years was a direct result of the Total Literacy Campaign.

This growth in literacy is backed by growth in primary education (based on school enrollment and not actual school attendance). But, as viewed by V. K. Ramachandran, Madhura Swaminathan, and Vikas Rawal (2003), official data regarding school enrollment in West Bengal are poorer compared with that in other states.

These data come from school registers, which are created and maintained by school staff whose employment depends on the enrolment that they register. The fact that the proportion of pupils enrolled in an age-cohort is often larger than the size of the age-cohort itself is the clearest evidence of false data (page 10).

Hence, while the State Elementary Education Report Card, 2004 (Mehta 2005, page 25), gave impressive figures for girls’ enrollment in 2004, the data came from school registers, created and maintained by school staff whose employment depends on the enrollment that they register. The fact that the proportion of pupils enrolled in an age-cohort is often larger than the size of the age-cohort itself is the clearest evidence of false data. Nevertheless, referring to the NSSO 52nd Round Report No. 439 (52/25.2/1) West Bengal Human Development Report 2004 (Government of West Bengal 2004b, page 154), says:

Table 2: Literacy Rate in West Bengal and India, 1951–2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Male West Bengal</th>
<th>Male India</th>
<th>Female West Bengal</th>
<th>Female India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, various volumes; Department of Education Web site.

---

49.5% in primary, 51.6% in primary and upper primary, 51.3% in primary and secondary/higher secondary, 57.9% in upper primary, and 46.6% in upper primary and secondary.
attendance rates for boys were generally slightly lower than the all-India average and substantially lower than the best performing state, which is Kerala, in both urban and rural areas. However, attendance rates for girls aged 6-10 years in rural West Bengal were generally better than the all-India average, although in urban areas the rate in West Bengal was slightly lower. For girls aged 11-13, attendance rates were higher or the same as the all-India average.

The 1992 Report of the Education Commission of West Bengal provides a useful account of the progress of school education (and primary education in particular) under the Left-Front government.

According to the report (Government of West Bengal 1992), there are a number of reasons for the steep progress of primary education in West Bengal. First, the number of schools increased, school enrollments increased more than 80% between 1977 and 1992, and the average distance between schools and living settlements was reduced across the state, especially in the area inhabited by the dalits and adivasis. Second, all school education was made free throughout the state. Third, the number of teachers increased. Fourth, the government improved the conditions of employment of teachers: their salaries, allowances, and retirement benefits rose substantially after the Left-Front government came to power. Fifth, textbooks were provided free of charge under certain schemes. Sixth, the government of West Bengal introduced a system of automatic promotion for the first five years of school. However, the report also noted that dropping out is still a major feature of primary education, that the quality of teaching has not improved, that “the system of school inspection has in practice become defunct,” and that “no real accountability exists anywhere.”

To sum up, the literacy and school attendance statistics show that progress has been made in West Bengal through the literacy movement. Going by the West Bengal Human Development Report 2004 (Government of West Bengal 2004b, pages 144–163), this progress has been made especially among the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes. However, the objective of the literacy movement is not simply to enable the person to read, write, or do simple calculations. The movement was conceived as a dynamic

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The term Dalits refers to the marginalized sections of the Indian society. The year, in which the term was initiated, in 1939 or in 1956, is a matter of conjecture. As have been observed by the analysts, the term evolved due to the need felt by the untouchables of Maharashtra (a state in India), especially the Mahars (a low caste) to go beyond the Hindu caste structure with its sheltering concept of Harijan (the out-caste people) as used by Gandhi, and also to go beyond the class system defining them as proletariat obliterating their ethno-cultural distinctiveness. Adivasi means the aboriginal people, the tribal people.
program of social reconstruction intended to develop untapped human resources. The population covered by the program and the villagers at large are expected to be elevated to a new level of consciousness about environmental issues, relations in society, the role of women in rural society, communal harmony or national integration, etc. Such target population of the literacy movement must have the functionality and awareness that are fundamental in bringing about a radical change in the society through prior changes in the perceptual and motivational world of the individuals concerned.

Literacy and Participation

This paper works on the hypothesis that the increase in the rate of literacy affects participation by increasing not only its quantity but also its quality. Functional literacy increases awareness among the citizenry, whose participation was confined almost exclusively to voting and who had only limited participation in decision making after the elections. Once there is increased awareness, the principle of competence operates among the citizens while they participate in the institutional setup. To assess the increase in the quality of participation in West Bengal as a result of the increase in literacy, one may look at the participation in the *gram sansad* (village constituency) grassroots institutional setup of the *panchayat* system in West Bengal, which has remained very poor since its inception. The *gram sansad* and *gram sabha* are treated in this paper not as a delivery system of higher level of government but as an active institution of local self-government.

There are many reasons for the poor participation in *gram sansad* and *gram sabha* meetings:

- Voters lack awareness about their role and rights in the *gram sansad* and *gram sabha*.
- The complex village social structure prohibits the participation of the weaker sectors.

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7 As far as the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973 (as modified up to 31 January 2004, especially by the West Bengal Panchayat [Amendment] Act of 1994) is concerned, “Every constituency of a Gram Panchayat under clause (a) of sub-section (3) of section 4 shall have a Gram Sansad consisting of persons whose names are included in the electoral roll of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly for the time being in force pertaining to the area comprised in such constituency of the Gram Panchayat.” And “Every Gram shall have a Gram Sabha consisting of persons registered in the electoral roll pertaining to the area of the Gram.” See in this context art. 16A and 16B of the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973 as modified up to 31 January 2004, Government of West Bengal, Law Department, Legislative, pages 25–27. Thus the difference between the gram sansad and the gram sabha is subtle.

8 According to Art. 243 (b) of the Indian Constitution, “‘Gram Sabha’ means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level.”
The marginalized sector has been sidelined in decision making.
Meetings are strongly perceived to be of no use, with decisions made in the party offices of the ruling party of the panchayat.
Women hesitate to participate actively because of social taboos.
Decision making is perceived to be the affair of the higher echelons of the village.
The meeting is held in an inconvenient place.

However, most of these reasons are bound to have reduced influence, or to be totally negated, by the increase in functional literacy. In May 1999, Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) assessed the attendance and participation at gram sansad meetings in a sample of 20 panchayat constituencies located in 14 gram panchayats in three districts—24 Parganas (N), 24 Parganas (S), and South Dinajpur. The authors surveyed villagers following recent gram sansad meetings, concerning their participation in these meetings. The overall participation rate in these meetings was found to be 12% of all voters, compared with the 16% reported for West Bengal as a whole. This suggests that one out of every seven or eight voters attended the gram sansad meetings (the minimum attendance required for a quorum is one out of ten). Of those attending, 43% on average were landless, 41% were marginal or small landowners, and the remaining 16% were medium or large landowners. The following table, using data from Ghatak and Ghatak (2002, tables 4, 5, and 6), shows the attendance rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>% Attending</th>
<th>% Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal and Small Landowners</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-Front Political Affiliation</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

—not available, SC = scheduled castes, ST = scheduled tribes.
*% of constituencies secured by Left-Front candidates.
But the most important observation of the authors was the improvement in the quality of the participation.

The participants actively voice demand for new projects, suggest how allocated funds should be spent and debate how projects should be designed. The Pradhan (Chairperson) and the local representatives are questioned on the progress of implementation of projects, and often face allegations about misuse of funds and selection of beneficiaries. The response of elected officials to these criticisms showed that they could not take the voters present at the meeting for granted. In some cases where there was overwhelming evidence in favour of the criticisms raised by the people, the village council officials admitted their error. Sometimes the elected representatives and other village council functionaries gave a detailed account of the financial situation in respect of various schemes and tried to explain their poor performance in terms of delay of arrival of funds from the state government.

This represents a marked improvement over the previous situation where the power of the village council (gram panchayat) was totally concentrated in the hands of the Pradhan. The Pradhan's power could be maintained mainly by the fact that the common villagers were not privy to information about the allocation of resources and there was no forum to voice their opinions and criticisms. The village constituency meetings seem to be an important institutional innovation to contribute to the ideal of participatory governance, although from our study we cannot judge how much of an effect it will have in making the allocation of resources responsive to public demand, or improving the implementation of projects. (Ghatak and Ghatak 2002, page 53)

Discussions in the 14 gram sansad meetings, according to the Ghatak and Ghatak study, revolved around four main issues, showing why competence is required for participation: (i) agenda setting (new programs and priorities for gram panchayat spending); (ii) design of future projects; (iii) selection of beneficiaries (of water or housing benefits); and (iv) review and monitoring of past and current gram panchayat projects (including location of projects, quality complaints, and corruption and mismanagement complaints). The account of Ghatak and Ghatak suggests a forum that enables genuine and competent participation by diverse groups in public discussions, leading to a measure of accountability of elected members to their constituencies.

Although the Ghatak and Ghatak study did take into account the quality of participation along with the quantity of attendance, no direct relation has
been established between attendance at village council sessions and the literacy rate of the members. That relation is established by an empirical study on the gram panchayats of Suri I Block in Birbhum district of West Bengal.\(^9\)

After the Total Literacy Campaign, Birbhum was declared a fully literate district in 1992 with a literate population of 1,642,845, or 80.56% of the population aged 6 years old and above (National Literacy Mission 1993, page 29). Suri I block consists of seven gram panchayats, namely, Karidhya, Nagari, Khatanga, Tilpara, Alunda, Mallickpur, and Bhurkuna. According to the 2001 census, the block has a total population of 96,485—49,942 male and 46,543 female. The number of literate persons is 51,322, or 62.98% of the total population. The male literate persons number 30,805 (72.81%) and the female literate persons, 20,517 (52.37%). Tables 4 and 5 may help establish the connection between the increase in literacy rate and the increase in the number of citizens participating in postelection decisions in gram sabha (bottom level of the gram panchayat) and other meetings.

### Table 4: Voter Turnout in Panchayat Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karidhya</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagari</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatanga</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilpara</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alunda</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallickpur</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhurkuna</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the above tables it may be deduced that increased literacy has increased voter turnout and the average attendance at gram sabha meetings (except in Alunda Gram Panchayat). The obvious relation between the increase in the rate of literacy and the increase in political awareness is established by the data in Table 6, which show that candidacies in the gram panchayats of Suri I Block almost doubled in number between 1988 and 2003, from 118 to 232.

\(^9\) Data were collected for this study by Sudipta Pal in 2003 at Master of Philosophy level under the supervision of R. Bhattacharyya in the University of Burdwan.
Cooperative Attitude

Because of the increase in awareness, the attitudes of people, especially those below the poverty line, are also changing fast. Different types of cooperatives formed by people with different occupations exist in West Bengal. Even as the cooperative movement is generally suffocating under various government regulatory controls, a small-scale cooperative movement, the Self-

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**Table 5: Average Attendance at Gram Sabha Meetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karidhya</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagari</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatanga</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilpara</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alunda</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallickpur</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkuna</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No available data on literacy rates before 2000.
Source: Records of gram panchayats.

**Table 6: Number of Candidacies Filed in All Gram Panchayats of Suri I Block**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP(M)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITC</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind. and Others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= not available; INC = Indian National Congress; B = Bharatiya Janata Party; BP = Biju Janata Dal; NCP = Nationalist Congress Party; CP(M) = Communist Party of India (Marxist); CPI = Communist Party of India; RSP = Revolutionary Socialist Party; FB = Forward Bloc; AITC = All India Trinamool Congress; Ind. = Independent.

Source: Office of the District Panchayat and Rural Development Officer, Bibhum, Government of West Bengal.
Help Group (SHG)\textsuperscript{10} movement, has been gathering strength in the post-TLC phase. NGOs, state government departments, and the central Government have been facilitating the development of SHGs to generate self-employment in the rural areas. SHGs are encouraged to form their own fund, and not to go to moneylenders for loans. The groups set up microenterprises and arrange direct contacts between self-employed persons (like weavers or small-scale food processors) and buyers in the market, directly bypassing wholesale businessmen. SHGs also develop the capabilities of their members to participate effectively in decision making. In fact, throughout West Bengal these groups are sincerely attempting to redistribute wealth and power in a novel way among the poor, especially among the women. According to the Panchayat and Rural Development Department (2004a), there were 73,033 such groups throughout West Bengal up to January in 2004. The District Rural Development Cell, Burdwan district, reported in March 2005 that 7,604 such groups had been formed in the 277 \textit{gram panchayat} area of Burdwan since April 1999. More than 2,750 of these groups were exclusively for women. All these indicate that literacy has increased awareness of participation in democratic associations, and this attitudinal change has had a positive effect on the spread of participatory democracy throughout West Bengal.

The development of SHGs has given impetus to the establishment of a self-funded rural social security system, which helps to do away with the massive underemployment in rural West Bengal. It articulates a concept of governance based on citizens’ democratic acceptance of a carefully crafted balance between the freedom of markets and the provision of public goods for the redistribution of wealth in the society involving openness and concern for others. This favors the concept of civil society at all levels, over that of state sovereignty, and is aimed at the long-standing goal of societal harmony among different sectors, namely, different religions and different castes.

\textbf{Social Harmony}

The word “social” in the expression “social harmony” is an important reminder of the need to view people as part of a collective body and not as isolated individuals. It is often said that a family flourishes if there are strong ties among the members. Likewise a state could also achieve social harmony if more of its citizens were to participate with competence in the structure and

\textsuperscript{10} A group of rural poor people who voluntarily organize for poverty eradication. The SHG members save regularly and put their savings into a common fund for lending to the members. This fund and other funds that the SHG may receive as loans from banks or from the government are managed in common by the SHG.
process of government and if the local government were to make decisions in an autonomous manner. Education enables human beings to make rational decisions in every structure of democracy. In India various social cohesions along with primordial loyalties to language, religion, caste, and ethnic groups have traditionally hindered the development of political citizenship as well as social harmony. Kahane (1982, page 9) observed,

> Although in modern western societies primordial associations have recently been utilized by minorities to promote their occupational, political and educational interests, they are nevertheless often considered a socially pathological phenomenon. In India, on the other hand the most common pattern since at least the beginning of the century has been the utilization of primordial associations.

Consciousness of participation in a democratic association cuts into the primordial loyalties of the members to their social cohesions and thereby facilitates the democratic participatory process that ultimately strengthens the bonds within the society.

Different philosophers have accounted in different ways for the development of social harmony at different periods of history. Confucius believed that harmony in society would flourish when social intercourse was determined by the virtue of humanity and benevolence (*ren*), a concept involving openness and concern for others. For that, men of high social rank had the additional responsibility of providing the people with an example of proper ethical conduct. This process of widening social networks and shared norms through social interactions remains relevant today, although the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships, and institutions through which the process can be generated are now different. Literacy is an essential tool in creating the social network and shared norms.

**Conclusion**

Participation has complex demands, which certainly include income distribution, equality of opportunity in the context of development, and basic education of the people. Dreze and Sen (2002, page 144) write, “The empowerment value of basic education is so obvious that there is something puzzling in the fact that the promotion of education has received so little attention from social and political leaders in the post-independence period.” In fact, the comprehensive and holistic perspective of participation is often missing from the concept of social progress in India. Economic growth is an indispensable element, and sometimes a precondition, of social progress. But
a single-minded pursuit of rapid growth cannot be the whole of development. Kothari (1990, page 73) observed, “… the unidimensional and almost exclusively economic basis of the development paradigm has undermined the prospects for not just development, but for survival of large strata of the world’s peoples.” The Total Literacy Campaign, despite its late introduction, warrants optimism about the potential for qualitative participation in the structures of local government in West Bengal. Once that relation becomes established, the development of social harmony will only be a matter of time.
Qualitative Participation and Social Harmony: The Literacy Movement in West Bengal (India)

References


Enlarging Entrepreneurial Networks of Local Citizens in Backward Regions of India

Amita Singh

Introduction

The implementation of programs to reduce poverty has been a constant concern of policy makers in India. Policies have not generated entrepreneurship among the poor and given them a greater share of economic benefits. A serious gap discovered after the failure of the First Five-Year Plan was in people's participation in the policy process. The Balwant Rai Mehta Report and later reports further brought out the need to narrow the gap. With decentralization uncoupled from people's participation, the poor could not participate in a meaningful way in the policy process. The caste and communal agendas of the political parties also further weakened the process. A real effort at a change came with the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts in 1992, when nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups rose up to face the challenge of globalization in poor regions. The task was formidable: a huge mass of people had to be brought out of their social alienation and apathy to rediscover their power and wealth in the deepening democracy. A versatile leadership, motivational advocacy campaigns, self-help groups, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in governance would make this possible. By the start of the new millennium many grassroots societies in India were enjoying a resurgence of entrepreneurship, but only in those regions that brought a healthy coordination and understanding among the people, district administration, NGOs, and technology. These few regions led the way for others exploring policy implementation processes. This paper brings out the experience of three such regions in three states in India: Purba Midinapore in West Bengal in the east, Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh in central India, and Godhara in Gujarat in the west.

Methodology

The assessment and targeting of the poor in backward regions precedes poverty reduction programs. Targeting is done to obviate the costly identification of the poor under different schemes. Long and Shrivastava (2002)
describe targeting as an innovation in program design in response to information asymmetry and the high costs of surmounting the information barrier. This policy area has seen a large amount of public-private partnerships and entrepreneurial networking, which have substantially increased the participation of below poverty line (BPL) families in the countryside. This is a positive development, since the survey to identify BPL families, introduced in 1997, was not carried out in 18 of 31 states, and even where it was carried out most BPL families did not get identification cards. This inefficient targeting was primarily due to the reliance on the identification of poor and vulnerable groups based on the division between BPL and above poverty line (APL) population groups in the process of providing food security. Conceptual and operational problems inherent in this division have manifested themselves in failed poverty reduction programs, where there has been enormous rent seeking in the form of service delivery delays and misappropriation of funds. The Report of the Comptroller and Accountant General (CAG 2003) on the rural self-employment program Swarna Jayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY), for instance, revealed that out of $.22 billion spent up to 2003 ($.68 billion in all was spent on the program) 53.5% was diverted, misused, or misreported. The CAG report also exposed the pathetically weak governance of program implementation, with state governments using the funds to cover their fiscal deficits.

This paper deals with the asymmetric information between the principal (government) and the agent (poor), which impedes the flow of funds to the targeted poor. It explores the need for community networks that could be self-motivated and self-accountable. The primary data for this paper were obtained through site visits, informal communication with local groups and panchayats (rural local governance units), and semi-structured interviews. Many local beneficiaries, service providers, and fund managers responded to questions with great enthusiasm. Questionnaires on financial and service sustainability and replicability were also circulated among those who could read and write.

Secondary data were obtained from project publications of district governments and from the offices of NGOs working with the panchayats and the district offices (collectorates). Data obtained from panchayat records traced the progress of projects undertaken in partnership with civil society.

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2 Some major antipoverty programs in India have had weak results. These include Samporna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (Comprehensive Rural Employment Scheme), Swarna Jayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana (Golden Jubilee Rural Self Employment Scheme), Indira Awas Yojana (Rural Housing Scheme), National Old-Age Pension Scheme, and Drought-Prone Areas Program.
The questions that were generally asked of the local groups were the following:

- When and why did they participate in the NGO program?
- What made them change their minds about participating?
- Were the transactions less costly or more economical as a result?
- Were the transactions done faster, and did faster delivery and the use of technology influence their decision to participate?
- Was political influence exerted in providing the services?
- Did they witness an attitudinal transformation in the local bureaucracy?
- Were rents or bribes involved?
- How were program decisions made?
- Who were involved in this process?
- How many other stakeholders were involved?
- What were their roles?
- What were the horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms in the program?
- Could they suggest improvements?

The three governance experiments were selected for their contribution to widening the entrepreneurial networks. The following eight indicators were used in assessing program contribution:

- Transparency
- Participation
- Accountability
- Ease of service delivery
- Social well-being
- Replicability
- Partnership
- Sustainability

Achieving Governance Objectives in Three Backward Regions

*Haldia Subdivision in Purba Midnapore*

This region had always been prone to epidemics of cholera, diarrhea, and malaria. With the start of rains in May, the health department used to gear up for action but, despite its best efforts, it consistently failed to prevent an increasing number of children and elderly people from succumbing to the
epidemics. In the early 1990s, with the resurgence of civil society activism around the state, this region also generated an increased need for mobilization to solve local problems. The growth of people's networks was a symptomatic outcome of civil society activism on local issues, which transformed an epidemic-prone region into a fully sanitized, disease-free, and an entrepreneurial village cluster in record time.

This region is made up of 38 *gram panchayats*, where BPL families constitute a clear majority. The Health for All Program was implemented to control diarrheal diseases through improvements in water supply and sanitation in 1990 and 1996. This successful experiment reduced child mortality by controlling the spread of waterborne diseases and imparting good sanitation practices. Working clusters of ordinary people, NGOs, and *panchayat* bodies were formed to promote community participation. The NGOs Lokjagaran Ramakrishna Mission, Abhyudaya, and Tamralipta Guchha Samiti brought the people and the *panchayat* bodies together, and the district administration worked behind the scenes. The initial clusters shown in Table 1 increased over time, as the project progressed.

**Table 1: Cluster Organizations in Haldia Subdivision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Clusters or Combinations of Voluntary Groups</th>
<th>Blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lokjagaran Ramkrishna Mission (NGO), Lokasiksha Parishad, Gram Unnayan, Kendra Sibrampur, Purba Medinipur district</td>
<td>Nandigram I and Nandigram II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhyudaya (NGO), Haldia, Chaitanyapur (panchayat office) Purba Medinipur district</td>
<td>Haldia, Sutahata, and Mahisadal (6 gram panchayats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamralipta Guchha Samiti and Lokjagaran Ramkrishna Mission (NGO), Lokasiksha Parishad, Gram Unnayan, Kendra Dakshin Dhalhara, Dakshin Narekeldah (panchayat office) Purba Medinipur district</td>
<td>Mahisadal (6 gram panchayats)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nandigram II was the first block in West Bengal to be declared a fully sanitized block (on 29 December 2001). Haldia block was the second (on 2 April 2003) and Sutahata block was the fifth (on 27 May 2005). The district administration has sent proposals declaring the other two blocks (Nandigram I and Mahisadal) fully sanitized. The block sanitation plan has been an incremental process, which has also improved the operation of schools. Table 2 shows how social clusters can replicate successful governance experiments in other areas of society.
Table 2: School Toilet Blocks in Haldia Subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block/ Panchayat Panchayats of Gram Samiti</th>
<th>No. of Gram Panchayats</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>School Toilet Blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>At the Start of the Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutahata</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haldia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahisadal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandigram I</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandigram II</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data collected from the Office of District Administrator, Poorba Midinapore.

Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh

A purely NGO-driven experiment that started with the creation of a small center for skill and market development for BPL families in the tribal region of Orcha in Tikamgarh district has since evolved into an imposing entrepreneurial base. TARAhaat (“star-market for communities”), a project of the NGO Developmental Alternatives, delivers products and services to the underserved markets of rural India using ICT in the local language. The project was launched in September 2000. It mainly serves the Bundelkhand region in Madhya Pradesh and adjoining border areas of Uttar Pradesh, where the power, road, and transport systems are antiquated and there is no rail service. Local mafias (nati rajahs) and tribal chieftains control administration as they did in medieval times, as a means of controlling cheap labor and the rich forest produce, including timber.

TARAhaat started as an extension of Gyandoot (e-governance project initiated by the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Digvijay Singh to provide information and services to people). A system that combines local energy, skills, and wisdom with the use of modern technology has been developed to generate a market for non-timber forest produce, vegetables, animals, and handicrafts. Villagers have been gradually inspired to benefit from skills development, income generation, and other government policies through small entrepreneurship. Shops, taxi services, and the provision of handicraft training to others are typical village ventures. The TARAhaat Web site now claims to be the first digital portal designed specifically for rural India.
TARAhaat operates through franchised business-cum-community centers called TARAkendras. The TARAkendras are primarily job markets for the rural poor, which provide the following services:

- **Information.** Timely and relevant information on government schemes, health, law, and commodity prices in *mandis* (community market) is available.
- **Communication.** An e-mail service, TARAdaak (*daak* means “postal services”), is available in 10 Indian languages besides English.
- **Education.** This service is in great demand. TARAgyan (*gyan* means “knowledge”) gives job-oriented training in the English language, personality development, and other subjects (in Orcha Kendra and elsewhere), or in computers and information technology (in all other Bundelkhand *kendras* especially Niwari, Teherka, and Tricher).

The first franchised TARAkendra (“star center”), was launched at Orcha and then at Niwari, small towns in Tikamgarh district. There were 30 such *kendras* in 2005, out of which around 20 were in Punjab, the rich northern state (Bhatinda, Ludhiana, and Sangrur), and the rest in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh, the central state of India. This number was expected to rise to 100 by the end of 2005, but as Dr. Ashok Khosla, chairman of the Developmental Alternatives Group, suggests, at least 400 to 500 TARAkendras are needed in rural India to make the venture self-financing.

The Punjab TARAkendras have not been functioning properly since the demand for information and marketing services is quite low and confined to queries related to emigration to Canada and the USA. However, *kendras* in Bundelkhand regions have been providing the following services:

- Issuing driving licenses
- Issuing *sewa* (service) cards to BPL
- Issuing scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) certificates
- Repairing hand pumps
- Providing hospital information
- Delivering government benefits to SC/ST, girls and women, and BPL
- Issuing certificates of domicile
- Issuing ration cards
The TARAkendra charge only 33 cents for each service, whereas the villagers used to spend more than $35 earlier for the same service. Middlemen have been eliminated, so villagers now wait only 6–15 days to avail themselves of a service, versus the previous maximum waiting period of more than 6 months. A new e-health project, launched to link kendra, patient, and specialist in a neighboring big city, has immensely benefited local people, who no longer need to travel long distances to receive health care. TARAkendra services are provided in the following proportion:

- Gyandoot services (ICT programs of government) (50%)
- Job placement (NGO-driven, with government as a partner) (13%)
- Training (self-paced) (33%)
- Others (with partners in business and technology) (4%)

Figure 1 shows the role of ICT in TARAhaat service delivery.

The whole process is available on the Gyandoot network maintained by government in partnership with NGOs, allowing complete transparency and monitoring.

TARAhaat has become an institution that helps the poor, for whom the lack of information, employment, and opportunities for entrepreneurship is a major weakness of governance. Its Web site is more than a Web portal. It is a complete package offering Web-based education, information, and communication services in rural areas through franchisee cyber cafés (also called TARAkendras). It includes an e-mail facility in all Indian languages, and a wide range of offline and online services on different channels of www.tarahaat.com. Samsung has donated computers to TARAhaat cyber cafés in Babina and Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh), and Tikamgarh (Madhya Pradesh). Microsoft has also given many computers under the training program for women in the BPL groups.

To ensure a transparent system, TARAhaat also teaches English to local people and trains them in policy issues and ICT applications for a nominal monthly charge of Rs100. Microsoft and Samsung have joined this transparency campaign, supporting locally produced street plays that expose cases of bad governance.

Caste and religious factors take a backseat, as was evident in the TARAkendras visited, where women from different communities worked and ate together. Local products are used to produce locally required building and other materials. Energy systems use technology that the local people understand more readily and can manage more responsibly.
Figure 1. Loan Application and Approval through ICT in TARAhaat

1. Candidate

   - Downloads an application form and fills it out

   - Submits the application with supporting documents to DIC office

   - Is the form complete in all respects?

   - TFC meeting and rojgar samiti meeting

   - Sanction letter is issued; DIC office is informed by e-mail

   - Downloads application form and sends important information to DIC office in the required format

   - DIC office receives the information and conducts TFC and rojgar samiti meeting online

   - Sanction letter is issued; DIC office is informed by e-mail

   - After approval, the application form is forwarded to the bank by e-mail and the candidate is informed about interview date

   - Bank makes disbursement on the basis of training certificate

TFC = Tara Finance Center; DIC = District Information Center.
As the scale of operations expands, the cost of service delivery is likely to go down, as has already happened in the Orcha section, but this raises the question of the franchises being run well. The most important contribution of these kendras is the time saved by BPL tribal people in Bundelkhand. Now they do not have to make long trips to the district collector’s office to get their driving licenses and SC/ST certificates, the two services in greatest demand. The lack of agricultural or any other means of livelihood had made these people dependent on government aid. Information about the kinds of occupations available in the market has recharged these communities.

Social well-being has increased as a result of the diversification of TARahaat services to other areas and the use of the community knowledge, wisdom, and skills of all the residents. Small enterprises, self-help groups, rural cooperatives, voluntary organizations, schools, retailers, exporting corporations—TARA Nirman Kendra (“star construction centre,” which uses environment-and people friendly technologies and designs), Desi Power Group of Companies, and TARahaat Information and Marketing Services Ltd. among them—have been organized under the program. There is scope for the use of every bit of rural skill and sensitivity.

**Mahiti Shakti of Godhra in Panchmahal District of Gujarat**

This governance experiment rose out of a partnership between government and local agents and the technical supply wing of the National Informatics Centre (NIC). The Mahiti Shakti (“power of information”) project has transformed the lives of tribal people especially those living in Gogumbha, the poorest of the tribal villages, located at least 60 miles (97 kilometers) from Godhra city. Before the project, these people had to walk long distances to Godhra city to obtain medical aid, a ration card, an SC/ST certificate, or a driving license.

Eight NGOs surveyed the information needs of 13 villages in the district. The survey revealed that the villagers mainly needed land records (maps, records of rights), government forms, agriculture, and information related to the administrative system at the village level, called the panchayati raj, which may provide information and support to the poor for legal assistance, health care, and seasonal programs of government.

The project, a brainchild of the district magistrate of Panchmahal, Ms. Jayanthi Ravi, brought this information closer to the people through kiosks installed in places visited most frequently by villagers, like groceries and eateries. In October 2000, the Concept Centre for Electronic Governance of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad developed a “proof of concept” for citizen-to-government and government-to-citizen transactions.
using information technology as a medium. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which is India’s apex bank for rural development, also carried out a feasibility study, which has inspired many other banks to finance the kiosks.

Mahiti Shakti uses infrastructure already available in the villages. Working computers and a large number of frequented public telephone booths were networked and connected to the Internet. Trained operators from NIC helped villagers get access to information at these Mahiti Shakti kendras. Printouts could also be obtained, for a maximum of Rs10 per form. The kiosks thus provided single-window clearance for forms and other information that people in the villages used to have to spend much time, energy, and money to get.

As many as 200 district services forms have been made available online. Information about ongoing schemes like those of the District Rural Development Agency and the District Planning Board has also been made available. The Web-enabled version of the Gujarat Geographic Information System gives details of the availability of resources such as land, cattle, and milch animals. Weather forecasts are available from a control room at the District Disaster Management Department, which functions 24 hours a day.

The villagers have become so dependent on these information kiosks that services cannot be disconnected even for an hour. Thus, the local government officials have to work at full capacity, with transparency, individual accountability, and increased openness. Accountability and reliability are ensured through an online grievance redressal mechanism called SWAGAT. At a videoconference held once a month, the state chief minister and villagers meet with the district administrators, including the district magistrate, to resolve the villagers’ problems.

The successful formula has been replicated in other programs: the Internet-Dhaba ("kiosks") scheme, e-Dhara ("information flow") center, e-Gram ("villages"), and e-medical help. Between 2001, when e medical help was launched, and July 2005, more than 20,845 used the service for free tuberculosis treatment, medicine supply, and doctor’s appointments for pathological tests. On the average, 300 villagers use this service daily. Similarly, according to the district office records of Godhra, from April to August 2005 more than 382 applications requesting information and citizens services were received at the block level, and more than 11,477 photocopies were requested. On the basis of a minimal fee worked out for these services, earning for the lowest office of district government increased from a deficit position to an earning of $5,738 in a financial year. Besides the economic returns, villagers have come to see the need to democratize the deliberative bodies in villages and blocks, and have also formed entrepreneurial groups. Some of the less-used
laws and regulatory provisions before e-governance, such as the expansion of rural markets under the Agriculture Produce Committee Act of 1961 of the Gujarat government, have also received a push. For instance, with the information available at the kiosks, villagers have opened 25 dairy centers in rural areas populated mainly by poor shepherd tribes. These community-governed markets or village cooperatives form the agriculture produce marketing committee composed of farmers’ and traders’ representatives, an agricultural extension officer, a representative of the municipal corporation, and the registrar of cooperative societies. This committee now has a Web portal, www.agmark.net. The Gujarat State Agricultural Marketing Board manages and coordinates the functioning of this committee.

Besides forming meaningful income-generating clusters, the program has transformed the poor villagers by showing them a government that works or can be made to work. It has also transformed the local bureaucracy, which has gained through reliable service delivery.

Conclusion
Some important lessons can be drawn from this study of the three poverty reduction programs.

First, the targeted approach to poverty reduction generally leads to inefficient policy implementation and misappropriation of funds. Administrative identification is rooted in colonial bureaucratic models that are unscientific and unreliable.

Second, non-targeted schemes that provide information to people motivate them to know more about government programs. Income generation opportunities become more accessible to ordinary citizens and poor families realize better the value of their assets.

Third, partnership with intellectual groups and professional training from universities and management institutions infuses reliability into these programs, and makes funds—loans from banks and project grants from national and international funding agencies—more readily available. The sustainability of the innovative experiment in governance is thus ensured till it becomes self-sufficient.

Fourth, ICT applications in these service delivery programs have changed attitudes to technology. Now technology is more commonly looked upon as a facilitator rather than a tool for power accumulation, as was the case during the green revolution. ICT has been able to cut through the caste and communal mind-set as benefit seekers appear before a neutral service provider, a kiosk.

Last, entrepreneurial networks grow when local bodies deliver transparent, fast, and reliable service.
The Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society

References


Local Governance, Decentralization, and Participatory Planning in Indonesia: Seeking a New Path to a Harmonious Society

Ida Widianingsih

Introduction

Post-Suharto Indonesia is moving toward more participatory development planning, within the framework of new decentralization policies, which allow local flexibility. Former development policies and programs were uniformly implemented throughout the country under a ministerial decree that disallowed any possibility for differentiated models. As a consequence of decentralization, recent local government policies and practices have had social, cultural, economic, and political influences from across the diverse archipelago. Even though the decentralization laws in Indonesia are still looking for their final form, in terms of development planning, the decentralization process has been opening up chances for local government to develop new planning mechanisms, as shown in various localities like Bima and Dompu regencies under the Support for Decentralization Measures (SfDM project) of German technical cooperation (GTZ); 35 municipalities and regencies in various provinces under USAID’s Performance Oriented Regional Management (PERFORM) Project; and budget planning in Bandung regency (Usui and Alisjahbana 2003, Sumarto 2003, GTZ Advisory Team 1997).

Within the framework of the new decentralization policies, participatory planning allows local government to be more responsive to the public and to deliver better service. More importantly, the characteristic of participatory planning of trying to involve all development stakeholders can minimize potential conflicts among those involved in development. This paper focuses on how the practice of participatory planning underlines the need for public administration to change its role and function in development and how it contributes to building a more harmonious society. This paper examines the practice of participatory planning in decentralized Indonesia, with empirical findings from Solo municipality, which adopted participatory planning in 2001. This has been accorded recognition through a “participatory award” from LogoLink, an international network for participatory planning initiatives.

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In Solo, rethinking the development paradigm was crucial because the city's diversity has contributed to a high level of conflict and social disintegration.

**The Changing Nature of Public Administration: The Emergence of the Participatory Approach to Local Governance**

Even though public administration is still a debated concept, it is considered the most important field of political science, both as a practice and as a field of study (Starling 2005, page 1). It is also viewed as a dynamic concept, since it is influenced by the social, political, economic, and cultural environments. Berkley and Rouse (2004, page xi) argue that the dynamics of public administration is closely related to the increasing value of disparities within the community. In the same vein, Peters (2003, page 2) notes that the dynamics of public administration leads to differences in public administration practices across countries. In view of these factors, there is a need to use an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to understanding public administration.

The emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s and 1990s marked the evolution of the nature of public administration. Regardless of the different ways that public administration theorists refer to the NPM model—ranging from “managerialism” (Pollitt 1993) to “market-based public administration” (Lan and Rosenbloom), in fact the New Public Management is basically focused on management and on performance appraisal and efficiency. Therefore, NPM is moving toward private sector characteristics (Starling 2005, Peters 2003, Hughes 1998). Compared with the traditional understanding of public administration, this latest development is influenced by the democratization process within global economical and political systems (Starling 2005, Peters 2003). The new understanding of public administration now makes the concept of “governance” an important element in public administration.

Even though the definition of governance has great variation, the most fundamental notion of governance for our purposes is that government is no longer the autonomous and authoritative actor that it might have been at one time. Rather, the public sector is now conceptualized as depending on the private sector in a number of different ways, and much of public policy is developed and implemented through the interaction of public and private actors. Since governance is understood as the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision making. OECD (2001) notes that good governance has eight major characteristics—it is
participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, and equitable and inclusive, and it follows the rule of law, as shown in the figure below.

The call to establish good governance has given the public the chance to be involved in decision making. The old style of government-dominated development programs is no longer trusted. Instead, there is an urge to ensure the direct participation of the community in conceptualizing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating development programs. Many argue that governance will find its best performance within decentralized systems (Samaratungge 1998, Rondinelli and Cheema 1983). Decentralization focuses on two main aspects: decentralization between levels of government and also from government to other institutions such as the market and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) (Bennet, in Samaratungge 1998, page 7). It is the transfer to lower-level government of legal, administrative, and political authority to decide and manage public functions (Samaratungge 1998, page 8). Conyers (1990) argues that decentralized governance is produced by good governance. Her research found that more than 62 developing countries have been implementing the decentralization process, which basically offers “open space” for the community to be involved in decision making and development planning.

Saito (2000, page 1) argues that decentralization can contribute to good governance because it can change the relationship between central government and local government, besides strengthening the relationship between

![Characteristics of Good Governance](https://example.com/good-gov.png)
government and civil society. Since the 1980s, decentralization has been promoted as a solution to many problems of administration and governance. In the global context, according to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), decentralization has almost become a prescription for a more democratic society. Most governments like the idea of unblocking centralistic government, improving management capacity, and giving more direct access to policy making. In developing countries in particular, decentralization has gained popularity because of problems arising from the impact of centralistic government (IDRC 2002, pages 1–2). As quoted by Gilbert in Helmsing (2001, page 2) estimates that 63 out of 75 developing countries are implementing decentralization policies to share their central government functions with local governments. More specifically, Conyers (1990, page 16) argues that the benefits of decentralization lie in its capacity to increase people’s participation in planning development activities.

However, LogoLink (2002, page 17) has noted that in many cases the decentralization to local governments of powers, authorities, and responsibilities for delivering basic services has not been accompanied by the decentralization of resources needed to carry out these mandates. The case of decentralization policy in some South African countries showed that the incapability of local governments to manage local resources led to the failure of decentralization (Rondinelli 1981). One important aspect of decentralization policy is how it relates to decentralized fiscal resources. How can local governments implement planning and policy if they have no access to financial resources? For example, the decentralization program in Zimbabwe failed because the central Government still held all the financial resources under its authority (Conyers 1990, page 21). In contrast, the Philippine decentralization program is considered successful because it has a legal framework to ensure that the central Government will decentralize financial resources (Conyers 1990, pages 21–24).

Participatory Planning Approach: An Alternative Strategy for Building a Harmonious Society

The new planning paradigm was declared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) 1994 in Nairobi. According to the declaration, new development planning should consider community
participation, the involvement of all interest groups, horizontal and vertical coordination, sustainability, financial feasibility, and interaction of physical and economic planning. The declaration concluded that the community becomes the main agent of development because it is the community that is directly affected by development planning. The new terminology of anti-centralistic planning—including bottom-up planning, participatory planning, democratic planning, grassroots planning, public involvement, collaborative planning, and advocacy planning—shows that new development planning paradigms should open up more space for the public to participate in decision making that affects their own lives and future.

Friedman (1992, page 3) defines planning as a process that connects scientific and technical knowledge with activities in the public domain to enhance social transformation. Furthermore, he argues that planning can be seen as social learning and social transformation. As social learning, planning positions the government as facilitator. The characteristic of this planning is people learning by doing. It is decentralized, bottom-up, and politically open. As social transformation, planning is a political process with a collective ideology (Friedman 1992, page 4). Participation is defined as public involvement in development. The degree of people involvement in development could be varied. Arnstein (1969, pages 216–217) states that, in practice, participation can develop into three main different typologies: nonparticipation, tokenism, and citizen participation. In planning theory, participation is understood as giving the public space to discuss problems and priorities. The degree of community participation in planning will depend on the dynamics of knowledge, actors, and space within the planning process. In understanding participatory planning, these three elements become important. Participatory planning usually involves different stakeholders with different knowledge and interests. The knowledge used in the process also varies with the stakeholders involved. Space refers to all opportunities that influence planning, including formal and informal organizations and policy making (LogoLink 2002, pages 8–9).

Public participation in planning brings closer relations between the local authority and the community. Decentralized planning, it is believed, can overcome all the limitations created by centralized planning (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983, page 14; Samaratungge 1998, page 2). It can cut short a long procedural process and, as a consequence, should increase local officials’ knowledge of administrative capabilities (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983, page 15). The benefits of participatory planning identified by Rondinelli (1981, pages 135–136) are:
The Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society

- Accommodation of local needs
- Less bureaucracy
- More effective and realistic planning
- Greater political and administrative emphasis on remote areas
- Greater representation in policy making
- Greater administrative capability of local government to manage development
- More efficient political dynamics, control of decision making
- Flexible, innovative, and creative administration
- More effective location of services and facilities by local leaders
- Greater national unity, more public goods and services

Participatory planning also involves communities in identifying and planning their needs, as well as in implementing and evaluating them (LogoLink 2002, page 34). Moreover, the advocates of participatory planning believe that this approach can open up opportunities for people excluded from development not only to participate in decision making but also to assess the level of local government transparency and accountability (LogoLink 2002, page 4). The decentralization of management and development planning is important because it can spread growth and integrate different regions and diverse countries. For example, the Tanzanian administrative reform in 1972 abolished traditional government, and gave more authority to local government in development planning (Rondinelli 1981, page 134).

In terms of promoting a harmonious society, local governments can play an important role in facilitating and promoting peace through good governance. The principles of good governance, which ensure the equitable and accessible provision of government services, the protection of security and human rights, and the active promotion of community harmony and a “culture of peace,” can be achieved through appropriate approaches and tools. Therefore, the participatory planning approach can be used as an alternative strategy toward a harmonious society.

Participatory Planning in Decentralized Indonesia: Seeking a New Path to a Harmonious Society

As previously mentioned, Indonesia is now moving toward more participatory planning. However, in practice there are many differences between localities depending on their social, cultural, and political background. A successful example is the municipality of Solo, which adopted participatory planning in 2001 and has been accorded recognition through a “participatory
Local Governance, Decentralization, and Participatory Planning in Indonesia

award” from LogoLink, an international network for participatory planning initiatives (Sugiartoto 2003, page 202). Solo, also known as Sala or Surakarta, has an important place in Indonesia’s history as the capital city of the former Mataram kingdom. It is known as a center of Javanese culture, and is home to two historic palaces—the Surakartan Palace (Keraton Kasunanan) and the Mangkunegaran Palace. Both palaces are now chiefly symbolic, and have no administrative or decision-making power. In modern Indonesia, the city has emerged as a forerunner in the reform movement (Sugiartoto 2003; Qomaruddin 2002a, 2002b).

Solo is located in Central Java province, only 60 kilometers from the city of Yogyakarta, which is well known for its leading role in social and political change. The population of Solo is about 550,000. However, during the working day that can triple to 1.5 million, as people come from the surrounding areas for employment, trade, commerce, and governance activities (Sugiartoto 2003, Pratikno 2002). Solo is a municipality with five subdistricts and 51 smaller divisions known as kelurahan. Under the new decentralization program, the municipality carries the same functions as other Indonesian local government areas, including responsibility for education, health, social services, and public administration.

Previously, development planning in Indonesia was highly centralized and followed complex stages of planning, characterized by elite and bureaucratic domination from sub-village (kelurahan) to national levels. After a long struggle, Indonesia gained independence from the Dutch colonial power in 1945. Five-year development plans were introduced in 1969, and from that time to the third plan, which ended in 1984, Indonesian development prioritized economic growth rather than social issues. During this time, Indonesian development was designed by and for political leaders, economists, and administrators for their own benefit (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983, Marthuur1983, Samaratunga 1998). The main stakeholders of development planning processes at the national level were the National Development Planning Board, known as BAPPENAS (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional), all ministries, regional governments, and other related institutions. Universities were involved as consultants. At province and regency levels, development planning was conducted by government agencies known as Regional Development Planning Boards, or BAPPEDA (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah).

At the village level, planning was conducted under the strong influence of the village head and a government organization known as the Community Resilience Group (Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa [LKMD]). Theoretically, the LKMD represented community needs, although in reality it only strengthened the power of the village head, who appointed the LKMD...
head and the secretary. Members were mainly elite community figures (*tokoh masyarakat*) (Antlov 2002a, Van Den Ham and Hady 1989). As a consequence, poor communities were rarely involved in decision making, and development focused on physical infrastructure (Sugiartoto 2003, Pratikno 2002).

This has been categorized as “development by, for, and from the kelurahan officials” (Sugiartoto 2003, page 140). In fact, case studies show that *kelurahan* officials also had no strong bargaining position in planning. Although local planning may have been conducted by *kelurahan* officials, the programs undertaken were determined at higher government levels, without appropriate representatives from the *kelurahan* (Rahmanto 2003, Pratikno 2002).

Indonesia’s development planning since the early 1980s has been described by officials as participatory, yet the notion of participation was rhetorical rather than real. Participation at that time was limited to the middle class, including academics, local bureaucrats, or well-known businesspeople (Hady 1997, page 151; Sjaifudian 2002, page 3). Development planning in Indonesia evolved from mainly top-down during the 1960s to a combination of bottom-up and top-down planning in 1982, when a ministerial decree for bottom-up planning was enacted. This established Guidelines for Local Development Planning and Monitoring, known as the P5D system (Pedoman Penyusunan Perencanaan dan Pengendalian Pembangunan di Daerah). Under this law, development planning was intended to be conducted from the lowest level of government administrative bodies (villages and *kelurahan*) to district or municipality levels. However, because the P5D system positioned upper-level governments as decision makers for the lower levels, local government had no ability to decide which programs could be funded or implemented. After lengthy and cumbersome decision processes, higher-level planners approved only 5–10% of proposals initiated at the village level (Buentjen, quoted in Sjaifudian 2002, page 4).

Criticism of the old planning mechanism strengthened during the reform era that began in 1998, following the downfall of the Suharto government. An early change under decentralization in Solo occurred in the name of the former Community Resilience Board (LKMD), which became known as the Village Community Development Institution (Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Kelurahan [LPMK]). The institution’s function also changed. It is no longer the only institution with final decision in planning; rather, planning now involves several village institutions, although problems still emerge because of misunderstandings about the new role, and the inconsistency of local regulations. For example, the mayoral decision ratifying the LPMK in 2003 stated that participatory development planning was the responsibility of LPMK. In contrast, an earlier mayoral decision on participatory planning
mechanisms stated that the process would be conducted by an independent committee. Another inconsistency is in the design of block grants. Again, the mayoral decision stated that LPMK had a role in this design, while a different mayoral instruction said that the block grant should be designed by a nominated committee. Moreover, the organizational structure of LPMK is not clear. For example, it includes the Women’s Welfare Organization, when that group existed independently under the existing kelurahan administrative system.2

In Solo, rethinking the development paradigm was crucial because the city’s diversity (as shown in the table) has contributed to a high level of conflict and social disintegration.

### Structure of Solo Community, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdistrict</th>
<th>Jebres 136,866</th>
<th>Pasar Kliwon 85,374</th>
<th>Laweyan 107,200</th>
<th>Banjarsari 162,363</th>
<th>Serengan 61,758</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>103,901</td>
<td>54,130</td>
<td>85,215</td>
<td>114,368</td>
<td>47,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>30,624</td>
<td>30,289</td>
<td>21,133</td>
<td>45,590</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>1,556</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Between 1911 and 1998, Solo experienced at least 11 major riots relating to economic disparities and political and social issues. These began with conflicts between Javanese and Chinese traders in 1911, radical anti–Surakartan Palace movements in 1918–1920, and anti-Chinese movements in 1960 and 1980. The most serious violence surrounding the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998 occurred in Solo. Apart from the social and personal loss and destruction, the region lost around Rp500 billion ($58,823,529, at $1=Rp 8,500), 10,000 people lost their jobs, and around 50,000 to 70,000 people became unemployed (Kartono 2004, Qomaruddin 2002a, Pratikno 2002, Sugiarto 2003).

Kartono (2004, pages 11–12) notes that the high conflict potential of Solo was triggered by power and value struggles within the diverse community, and argues for a new alternative planning process that considers community

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2 Personal communication, IPM Solo staff, Division of Community Empowerment and Advocacy, 2004.
participation to help overcome the socioeconomic disparities, and also for conflict management.

In particular, Solo has introduced a new paradigm in development called humanized development (*pembangunan ngu Wongke uwong*), which positions equality and freedom of expression as important rights of citizens. In general, this covers the issues of partnership and community participation, improved human resources management, economic development, and law enforcement. The new participatory planning was jointly initiated by universities, NGOs, and the new Solo Planning Agency (Bapeda) (IPGI Solo 2002b, BAPPENAS and GTZ 2003, Kustiawan 2003, Sugiartoto 2003).

The Solo city government made a radical change in 2001 by introducing direct community involvement through a mechanism called Participatory Development Planning (*Perencanaan Pembangunan Partisipatif [PPP]*) (IPGI Solo 2004b, LogoLink 2002, Pratikno 2002). The change in Solo began after a government official at the municipality level named Qomaruddin took part in a Ford Foundation–supported study tour on decentralization and participatory governance to the Philippines in 2000. He was able to advise the mayor and other staff about participatory practices. However, as has often occurred in Indonesia’s transition to democracy, he met with resistance from those afraid of losing power and control (LogoLink 2002, Pratikno 2002). At the same time, he continued working with interested NGOs and academics and established a partnership forum called Indonesian Partnership for Good Governance Initiatives (IPGI) Solo (Sugiartoto 2003, page 30). IPGI Solo conducted discussions at the local level to determine an appropriate planning concept. These discussions involved the Solo Planning Agency (Bapeda), the State University of Surakarta, and Gita Pertiwi, a local NGO involved in environmental and governance issues (Sugiartoto 2003).

The discussions began with research on the role of the Community Resilience Board (LKMD) in development. This was conducted in 10 selected *kelurahan* out of the 51 in Solo. The selection of the research sites was based on certain criteria that reflected Solo’s diversity: *kelurahan* with a mainly Muslim population, those occupied by mostly poor communities, *kelurahan* populated mostly by non-Javanese, *kelurahan* with complex informal sector problems, *kelurahan* mostly occupied by wealthy communities, and those far from the city center, which rely on agricultural activities. This research found that the domination of LKMD in development planning at the *kelurahan* level created high community resistance to the role of LKMD (IPGI Solo 2004b, Sugiartoto 2003).

The new wave of decentralization has not significantly changed local development planning, which remains weak and confusing. The initial
enactment of Solo’s new participatory planning method in 2001 was not very effective, possibly because at that time the idea of establishing new planning mechanisms was still new. The wording of the relevant mayoral document suggested that only keurahan-level governments should follow participatory planning. The Solo government was caught between accommodating a new idea and keeping the old system that was still used throughout the country.

The legal framework of participatory planning was also unclear at the provincial and national levels. This lack of clarity contributed to the uncertainty of planning processes at the keurahan level, and to the resistance of keurahan government officials to the new methods. However, IPGI Solo persisted in its efforts to introduce change through participatory pilot projects in the 10 villages covered by the research (Sugiartoto 2003, Pratikno 2002). Regardless of the difficulties, the initiative of IPGO Solo, in partnership with Solo’s local government, is considered good practice because even within the uncertain planning laws and procedures, local government followed a new paradigm of development.

The experience of other countries including Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Viet Nam also shows the importance of legal frameworks (LogoLink 2002). However, the existence of a legal framework itself does not guarantee the success of participatory planning. Other enabling factors, such as a strong community, involvement of NGOs, and other social and political elements, are major contributors to the success. For example, the Philippines could implement participatory local planning because an appropriate sociopolitical environment existed along with the legal framework. However, in Viet Nam, even though the relevant legal framework has been in place since 1945, participatory planning has never been practiced because of the absence of other enabling factors (LogoLink 2002, pages 32–35).

Under Solo’s mayoral circular letter in 2001, the new planning mechanism began with development meetings at the keurahan, sub-municipality, and municipality levels. Decisions then moved to the Regional Planning Board (Bapeda), and on to budget planning through the regional government, before projects were undertaken at the community level. A forum was elected from the community, government, university, and private sectors to conduct the keurahan development meeting. The LKMD and the keurahan head (lurah), who used to be the main decision makers in keurahan planning, were now only facilitators, and the keurahan development meeting was funded from the Solo municipality annual budget (APBD) (Sugiartoto 2003, page 100).

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3 Circular letter from Solo’s mayor (Surat Edaran, SE Walikota, No. 411.2/789).
The change to a new paradigm has been a slow process because the old planning mechanism was in use for more than 20 years. The barriers to new planning methods and ideas include cultural obstacles and the attitudes and orientation of both the bureaucracy and the people (Sugiartoto 2003, Logolink 2002). For example, the Javanese community is very patrimonial and hierarchical, and its culture contrasts with the principle of participatory planning (Logolink 2002, page 25). As Sugiartoto (2003, page 27) points out, this attitude developed in Solo’s royal court (kraton) and disallows the possibility of viewing ordinary citizens as equals. Because of the predominance of the “old order” (represented by the traditional community leaders) in the meetings at kelurahan, subdistrict, district, and city levels, this culture continues. In this culture, the relationships between leader and community, and between government and community, still follow the patron-client system. Most of the bureaucracy in Solo shows resistance to change, especially among those who benefit from the old system. Many bureaucrats are still skeptical and doubtful of participatory planning (Bapeda Kota Surakarta 2004, Logolink 2002). Hence, change is still largely superficial, and the top-down approach still dominates.

In the first year of its implementation, the new planning mechanism showed only a slight difference from the previous method under the P5D system. From IPGI Solo’s experience, the new planning implementation did often increase the number of people involved in the process. For example, in kelurahan Batuanyar, P5D meetings were usually attended by 30 to 40 people, whereas in 2001 from 35 to 105 people were involved in the new mechanism. However, increased community involvement in the process did not guarantee a significant change in the planning process, because the community did not understand the participatory planning method. Perhaps because of adherence to or the influence of the old development planning, the first kelurahan development meeting was also conducted without clear direction. There was no list of program proposals made. The local elite still dominated; hence, development was still the same and was mainly focused on physical infrastructure such as the kelurahan office and renovation of the symbolic village gateway (gapura)4 (IPGI Solo 2004b, IPGI Solo 2002a).

Throughout the Suharto period, the community came to understand development as merely physical. Moreover, people had neither the means nor

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4 During the Suharto New Order regime, the gapura symbolized levels of development achieved in Indonesian villages or kelurahan. A gapura could be erected only after a certain percentage of households in the settlement were classified as having left the poverty level. Often, disproportionately large sums of money were expended on their construction and maintenance.
the confidence to criticize, and tended to accept government decisions. This led to inappropriate programs. Qomaruddin (2002, page 14) noted that this legacy engendered difficulties in gaining community participation in Solo planning processes. Another problem was that the community had no experience in conducting democratic meetings; therefore, their capacity and skills remained very limited. At the next level, that of the sub-municipality, the situation was the same. Although up to 397 people could be involved on the first day of a sub-municipality development meeting in kelurahan Banjarsari, for example, the outputs were still the same as those under the P5D system. In 2001, 70% of programs concentrated on physical development, and only 30% on social, economic, and cultural issues (Sugiartoto 2003, page 171). At the district level, the number of people involved was far greater than expected. At least 800 people from different areas were involved in planning. However, the output again could not satisfy stakeholders involved in this case, because of inappropriate time management. Most of the time was consumed by discussion of a code of conduct rather than the content of development issues (Sugiartoto 2003, pages 174–177).

In 2002, the second year of the new mechanism, planning at kelurahan level showed a difference in prioritizing development activities. A new mayoral decision provided stronger law enforcement, and increasing attention was paid to nonphysical activities, including a credit scheme for pedicab drivers and food sellers, land reclamation programs, and street vendor issues (Pratikno 2002, IPGI Solo 2002a, Sugiartoto 2003, IPGI Solo 2004b). After the learning experience of the first year, the 2002 kelurahan development meeting was conducted with a clearer direction and more support from higher levels of local government. For example, the Regional Planning Board collaborated with IPGI Solo in training 255 facilitators for 51 villages (IPGI Solo 2004b, pages 12–13). The process started from neighborhood meetings, which listed program priorities to be discussed at subdistrict meetings. Not all kelurahan were able to submit a list of priorities because of their limited capability to produce an appropriate plan document; in such cases the subdistrict committee prioritized programs on the basis of data provided at the kelurahan meeting. During this period, community interest and involvement in kelurahan development meetings increased, and although some kelurahan heads had difficulty gaining community participation, others attracted strong interest, with the highest involvement being 400 persons (IPGI Solo 2004b, page 3).

Women's participation in the kelurahan development meetings increased only from 5% in 2001 to 7% in 2002. However, real progress was made, in that people began to address structural issues, which were impossible to discuss openly under the New Order regime. From the second year of implementation
of participatory planning, Sugiartoto (2003, pages 196–197) noted at least three lessons learned: people were more open to change, they were also starting to criticize government policy, and they were becoming more aware of their own problems. A number of significant problems still have to be overcome. There is still a highly structured hierarchical power relationship in the local culture. In negotiations between people and the state, this is overtly expressed through the formal uniforms worn by local government staff. Another difficulty is that the introductory participatory planning generated “wish lists” that frustrated the community and officials because the program proposals made were rarely approved (LogoLink 2002, pages 46–47).

A number of practical problems also occurred. In one case, socioeconomic representation was unequal, and in another ward officials were excluded from the meeting for the sake of efficiency. Some kelurahan facilitators were ineffective, and presented a long list of problems or needs without any clear indication of how problems occurred and how they could be resolved (Rahmanto 2003, page 67). The uncertain role of the still existing Community Resilience Group (LKMD) also created difficulties (IPGI Solo 2004b, page 4). Some inconsistencies remained because of lack of coordination and agreement between local government offices, and the production of different documentation. For example, relevant new local planning documents such as the local annual plan (Repetada) and the local strategic plan (Renstrada) were not available because the main guideline, the local development program (Propeda) was still only in draft form. Planning documents also followed different time frames. One of these was for the period 2002–2005, another for 2002–2006, and yet another for 2003–2007 (Bappenas and GTZ 2003, page 70). The latest Solo participatory planning mechanism under the 2004 mayoral decision addresses these issues by integrating the planning documents.

Despite the practical problems, in 2003 and 2004 community involvement continued to increase. Development prioritized long-term programs such as the poverty alleviation program in kelurahan Pasar Kliwon, which allocated a block grant for the pedicab driver credit scheme (economic aspect). Other kelurahan allocated scholarships for the poor (free education for the poor) (IPGI Solo 2004a and 2004b). Budget transparency began to increase, and the allocation of funds to development programs was clarified.

In 2004, significant changes were made in gender issues, representation, program priorities and indicators, the role of planning committees, opportunities for participation, time frame, design of mayoral decisions, and transparency (IPGI Solo 2004a and 2004b). Every planning stage must now involve at least 30 women, and the List of Development Programs must also consider women’s perspectives. The 2004 initiatives also involve the informal
sector more directly in planning. Another change is that the Priority List is no longer held at the district level, but is decentralized to the subdistrict level. Mayoral decisions are also designed for more public involvement, and must be discussed publicly before they are enacted.

The new participatory planning method has generated significant differences in the stakeholders involved, the mechanisms used, the levels of community participation, and financial sources. The old system involved only the head of the *kelurahan*, subdistrict staff, the LKMD, and informal leaders. The new planning system involves NGOs, civil society organizations, informal sectors, *kelurahan* officials, political parties, university staff, and the *Kelurahan* Community Development Institution (LPMD), previously called the LKMD (IPGI Solo 2004b). The new planning begins with neighborhood discussions, and aims to maximize community participation. Financing now comes from Solo’s local development budget, called the *kelurahan* block grant. The role of government now is mainly that of facilitator rather than decision maker.

**Conclusion**

This paper argues that the implementation of a participatory planning approach in Solo has reduced the high conflict potential in the city because it positions equality and freedom of expression as important rights of citizens. In general, participatory planning covers the issues of partnership and community participation, improved human resources management, economic development, and law enforcement. From analyses of the case of Solo, it is evident that the limitations of the participatory planning practice relate to the loss of community trust in the role and function of government at all levels. For example, it is a tendency of local government to merely change the name of institutions or processes without introducing real change. One demonstration of this is resistance to the former Community Resilience Board (LKMD) as village planner because of its image as an institution of the New Order regime. Although the LKMD was renamed the Village Community Development Institution (LPMK), the basic functions of the institution and the degree of representativeness remain the same.

The dilemma of the LKMD position in development planning indicates the existence of an “anti New Order.” The same indications can be found in many localities, and in my opinion this situation has engendered demands for a “free New Order”—the desire for changes in institutions and systems regardless of their positive or negative aspects. The importance of understanding the philosophy of the new system is sometimes neglected. This is underlined when local government in many localities introduces a “new planning system”
that is in fact the same New Order planning system, in the hope of erasing the negative image of the New Order regime.

This paper also found stronger recognition of the importance of participatory planning in the decentralization era. Particularly in Solo, the local government has been working together with NGOs and civil society organizations to establish a new planning mechanism that generates more participatory development. The experience of Solo shows that the direct involvement of the community in all stages of participatory planning creates a feeling of inclusion and a sense of purpose. The community is enthusiastic for the process (Qomaruddin 2002b, page 15). Moreover, new relations between different ethnic groups begin to develop. People are involved in participatory planning as a community. The community also becomes more responsible for development programs in its area, and is motivated to learn skills related to participatory planning (Qomaruddin 2002b, page 16).

From the Solo case study, it can be seen that the success of participatory planning as an alternative strategy for building a harmonious society can be achieved only by maximizing the roles of all development stakeholders. Awareness of the importance of networking between all development stakeholders should be developed further to keep balanced relationships among development stakeholders. However, change has not been maximized and is slow because there is limited understanding of the process. In Solo, the strong local culture has influenced the practice of participatory planning through kelurahan, sub-municipality, and municipality meetings. There is a tendency toward elite domination and the exclusion of women and the young generation. Another obstacle is the difficulty in convincing some top-level local administrators and local parliament members to support the new planning method. There is also a need to institutionalize access to information in decision making through an appropriate legal framework.

It can be concluded that even though the practice of participatory planning in Solo has opened a new track toward a more harmonious society, shifting to a new development paradigm is not an easy job. Participatory planning requires those who hold power to share it with other development stakeholders, thus reducing their control over the community. The Solo case study shows that it is important to emphasize the need of local government to change the way it behaves and to develop new relationships with the community and other development stakeholders.
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The Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society


Citizens’ Participation in Local Budgeting: 
The Case of Mongolia

Byambayar Yadamsuren

Introduction

Decentralization has been part of Mongolia’s reform agenda since the 1990s. In 1992, the Management Development Program decentralized power and created management capacity at the local level. In 1994, the Public Service Law sought to define the tasks and directions of the public service system. In 1996, a reform policy on the trends and structure of government activities clarified the structure, authority, and functions of the central Government.

But, despite these reforms, decentralization in Mongolia has been centrally driven and implemented slowly, and is so far incomplete. Citizens elect local parliaments, but governors are nominated by these parliaments and appointed by the next higher level of government. Administratively, local governments have some control over local personnel, but sectoral policy decisions (primarily in health and education) remain centralized. Budgeting is still centralized as well, and local governments neither have significant revenue-generation powers nor control over intergovernmental transfers.

Mongolia lacks an integrated decentralization strategy and still has only a vague understanding of the decentralization concept, its virtues and threats. As a result, some recent reforms have reversed the decentralization process. A reform of the General Tax Law (GTL) in 2001 reduced local budgets significantly, and the Consolidated Budget Law (CBL) mandated the inclusion of the personal income tax in the central budget after 2002. Similarly, in 2003, the Public Sector Finance Management Law (PSFML) required all spending on education and health to be part of the line ministers’ portfolio, rather than financed out of local government’s budgets, as was done previously. These centralizing measures aside, the decentralization agenda is still active in Mongolia and continues to move ahead with the support of civil society and international development organizations. The movement has been particularly active in the engagement of citizens in public decision making.

This paper discusses fiscal decentralization and citizens’ participation in local budgeting in Mongolia, the lessons learned, and suggested improvements. Fiscal decentralization is influenced by the interests of the central Government,

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citizens’ participation, and the capacity of the local governments to implement this policy. Citizens’ participation is the hallmark of fiscal decentralization.

Country Profile

Mongolia is a unitary state with a central government and three levels of subnational governments: aimags and the capital city, which have provincial status; soums (rural districts) and duuregs (urban districts); and bags (rural subdistricts) and horoos (urban subdistricts). Aimags and the capital city are intermediate tiers of government, and soums/duuregs and bags/horoos are local governments. Bags and horoos are the lowest formal administrative and territorial units. There are now 21 aimags with 329 soums, and 1,560 bags. The capital city has nine duuregs with 117 horoos. For a country of the size and population of Mongolia, having 2,000 or so subnational units means jurisdictions with very low population densities. To address this issue, the Government of Mongolia is discussing a regionalization plan to reduce the number of subnational units in the country.

According to the Constitution, the administrative and territorial units of Mongolia are organized on the basis of both self-governance and state management. Hence, Mongolia has a dual system in which each administrative and territorial unit has both a governor and a hural (assembly of people’s deputies). While the former represents the central Government throughout the territory, the latter is a truly representative institution.

Aimag and soum hurals serve as representative bodies of the local people, pass regulations for their respective political and administrative jurisdictions, and monitor the local administrative bodies. In addition, hurals approve the budgets of their respective aimags and soums and oversee budget execution. Aimag and soum governors run the local administrative organizations and are the local representatives of the central Government. Governors make, implement, monitor, and evaluate local policies. The governors’ offices also provide administrative services: they serve as civil registries, provide notary services, and expedite licenses and permits. Bag and horoo hurals are self-governing organizations with the direct involvement of residents; their main function is to solve common local issues. Bags and horoos also have governors, who primarily provide liaison between the citizens and soum authorities.

Hurals are elected directly by local residents. Aimag and soum vary greatly in size and population, and the size of each hural varies with its population (see table). In the selection of governors, hurals submit their nominees to the governor at the next level of government, who makes the appointment. Thus, aimag governors are nominated by the aimag hural and appointed by the prime minister. Soum governors are nominated by the soum hural and appointed.
by aimag governors, and bag governors are nominated by the bag hural and appointed by soum governors.

### Size of Hurals, by Number of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Government</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of Representatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aimag</td>
<td>≤ 50,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50,001–90,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 90,000</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulaanbaatar</td>
<td>≤ 2,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soum</td>
<td>≤ 2,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,001–9,000</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 9,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duureg</td>
<td>15 (5 duuregs)</td>
<td>35 (5 duuregs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under this dual system, state management of government seems to dominate self-governance, as the appointed governors at each level have ultimate control over the functioning of the administrative and territorial units. Currently, there is a substantial amount of delegation of state powers to aimag governors, and of intermediate powers to local governors. Thus, in general the center of power lies in the governors, who implement most of the major sectoral functions and decisions as representatives of the central Government.

### Budgeting

The budget cycle in Mongolia consists of four stages: budget formulation, budget appropriation, budget execution, and budget monitoring and evaluation. Each budget entity goes through these four stages. The PSMFL (article 4.1.4) defines a budget entity as “an organization that carries out the functions and services of the state either with national or local funds.” Thus, for example, at the soum level there are six budget entities: the soum hural, the soum governor’s office, and the soum’s school, kindergarten, cultural center, and hospital.

The process of budget formulation begins with each soum and aimag budget entity preparing its budget proposal. Authorities in charge of budget preparation at this level are:

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2 The governor in Ulaanbaatar has special powers, which include the right to attend Cabinet meetings, to communicate directly with the Prime Minister, and to coordinate policy with the Central Government (Law on the Capital City Legal Status, article 23.2).
- In the hural, the secretary of the hural;
- In the governor’s office, the deputy governor and the accountant; and
- In the school, kindergarten, cultural center, and hospital budget entities, the general managers and accountants of these entities.

The budget estimates prepared by these entities are submitted to the authorities at the next higher level of government, according to the process shown in the figure. The budgets of the soum governor's office and hural, and those of the bag governors, are submitted by the deputy governor of the soum, on behalf of the soum governors, to the aimag governors and the Department of Finance, Economics and Treasury (DFET) in the aimag governor’s office. Soum schools, cultural centers, and kindergartens submit their budget proposals to the aimag education and culture department, and hospitals submit their proposals to the aimag health department. The proposals are submitted by each entity’s general manager and accountants. The deadline for submitting the budget proposals of the soums’ budget entities is not defined, but is usually between June and July of each year.

The DFET in the aimag governor’s office consolidates the budget proposals of the soum hurals and soum governors’ offices and sends the consolidated proposals to the DFET head and to the budget officers of the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MOFE) before 15 August. Similarly, the aimag education, culture, and health departments consolidate the budget proposals of the soum budget entities and submit the consolidated proposals to their respective line ministries at the state level, which review the proposals and submit them to MOFE, also before 15 August. The MOFE reviews and consolidates the budget proposals of all the entities and submits the consolidated proposals to the Government of Mongolia before 15 September. The Cabinet then discusses the state budget and submits it to the Parliament of Mongolia before 1 October. This marks the end of the budget formulation process (adopted from PSMFL).

The budget formulation process has its origin in the strategic business plans (SBPs), on which the budget entities base their budget estimates. SBPs are 3-year plans made according to the general budget framework approved by the Parliament of Mongolia. An SBP must reflect the strategic tasks of a budget entity for the next 3 years, as well as the type, quantity, quality, and cost of the expected budgetary outputs (PSFML, article 26.2). In addition to the SBPs, soums and aimags must base their budget priorities on their midterm (3–5 years) and long-term (more than 5 years) development plans, and on the governor’s 4-year action programs.
The absence of a specific deadline for submitting these proposals is problematic, because it introduces uncertainty to the budgetary process and gives aimag very little time to consolidate the budget and engage in meaningful discussions about budget priorities.

The process of budget appropriation begins with the Parliament’s approval of the state budget. In early December, aimag hurals approve aimag budget proposals within the approved budget framework. After this, the soum hurals also approve soum budget proposals and submit these to the aimags sometime in December. While the soums’ budget proposals are undergoing approval at the aimag hural, the soum governors’ offices have the opportunity, though limited, to exert influence.3 However, once the aimag hural approves the budgets, the soum hural can no longer make changes in the line items. In January, the soum hural releases a budget resolution and submits it to the DFET in the aimag governor’s office, together with the detailed budget allocation.

The process of budget appropriation, stakeholders say, is not properly regulated. Not only do the norms (Administrative and Territorial Units, Their Management Law, CBL, and PSMFL) fail to fully and coherently regulate the process, but the soum and aimag hurals have not yet designed efficient

3 This is done through the elected representatives of the soums to the aimag hural.

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procedures to coordinate the process. As things stand today, only once during their sessions do the local hurals hold an open discussion to comment on the budget proposals submitted by the governors. As a consequence, the local hurals pay very little attention to the process of budget approval. Also, because budget proposals focus on the financing of current expenditures, which are relatively small, these meetings do not stimulate productive and effective discussions. Moreover, the budget proposals of soum hospitals, schools, kindergartens, and cultural centers are not discussed in the hurals as the proposals are directly approved by the Great Hural of the State within the framework of the respective sector budgets. As a result, soum citizen representatives indicate that in practice the budgets do not reflect the real priorities of the soums. For this reason, budget approval often becomes a formality, with limited participation from soums and aimags.

The budget year goes from 1 January to 31 December. During this period, soum and aimag budget entities collect revenues according to their revenue plans, and spend in accordance with two instruments: output purchase agreements (OPAs) and performance agreements (PAs). After the Parliament of Mongolia approves the state budget, line ministers at the state level sign OPAs with aimag governors and PAs with general managers, who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the budget entities. Similarly, after the aimag hural approves the aimag budget, the aimag governors sign OPAs with the soum governors and PAs with the general managers. At the soum level, once the hurals approve the budgets, the soum governors sign PAs with the general managers.

Through OPAs and PAs the different levels of government coordinate their spending, mostly on health and education. This budget execution process has helped local budget entities (schools, kindergartens, etc.) to execute their budgets more effectively, to limit overspending, and, consequently, to improve overall fiscal discipline.

Despite the improvements introduced by the performance agreement system, however, the current system of budget execution still has deficiencies, which include the lack of flexibility of budget entities to meet local needs and a mismatch between national priorities and local revenue generation.

**Budget entities cannot meet local needs.** When higher-level budget entities approve budget proposals, they largely ignore local opinions, as well as the geographical, economic, and social factors of each particular case. Instead, budget approval is based solely on the previous year’s budget, so during budget

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4 Only the CRHs of Tuv and Orkhon aimags, and some districts of Ulaanbaatar, have specific regulations on budget approval.
execution soums have little flexibility to respond to local needs. For example, in Umnudelger soum of Khentii aimag, the budget for meals for schoolchildren in 2004 was the same as in 2003, so it fell short of meeting the necessities for 2004 (Center of Mongol Management 2004).

There is a mismatch between national priorities and local revenues generation. In the current system, budgets do not fully provide for the appropriate revenue sources for the financing of a number of government projects that local governments must implement. Local budgets are overburdened, and the implementation of the projects is often hampered. The situation has been particularly problematic in the local implementation of national programs related to structural changes, like the White Revolution, which is not funded out of local budgets.

The fourth stage of budgeting—after budget formulation, appropriation, and execution—is budget monitoring and evaluation. Mongolia has several mechanisms for budget monitoring and evaluation. These include both internal and external controls. The internal mechanisms are: (i) hierarchical control by the governors, and (ii) financial inspection by the State Professional Inspections Agency. The external mechanisms are: (i) monitoring by local hurals, (ii) auditing by the State Audit Board, and (iii) monitoring by citizens.

Governors are responsible for controlling budget execution by the budget entities. They have authority to evaluate budget performance and, if necessary, to penalize misconduct. According to the Administrative and Territorial Units, Their Management Law (article 33.2), soum governors have the power to penalize directors of soum budget entities (governor’s office, schools, kindergartens, etc.). Penalties for budgetary misconduct range from reductions in the salary of the directors of budget entities for a period of 1 to 3 months, to the termination of employment. In practice, however, soum governors do not seem to use these powers regularly, even when they discover irregularities in budget execution.5

The State Professional Inspection Agency (SPIA) is a central government regulatory agency, with branches in each aimag. The SPIA has the right to inspect all administrative services, including budget execution. Its Department of Financial Inspections reviews the budget every 2 years. If it uncovers financial misconduct, the department may impose financial penalties. According to soum administrators, however, the sanctioning power of the department is ineffective and not sufficiently preventive.

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5 For instance, in Tarialan soum,Uvs aimag, the hospital director was penalized by the soum governor with a 20% reduction in salary for 3 months, because of a procurement problem. Unfortunately, cases that a soum governor exercised this power are few.
The State Audit Board acts on behalf of the Parliament of Mongolia to audit the execution of the budget and the implementation of laws. The State Audit Board has branches in each aimag, the aimag audit boards. These boards perform financial audits of aimag and soum hurals, governors’ offices, and other budget entities. In addition to the State Audit Board, the CBL, PSMFL, and the Administrative and Territorial Units, Their Management Law give hurals extensive monitoring rights. However, for a number of reasons, these rights are seldom fully exercised. For example, central line ministries—and not hurals—approve the expenditures of state budget entities. Thus, since hurals have no authority over these expenditures, they cannot effectively monitor them.  

Citizens’ Participation in Budgeting

Citizens in the local areas virtually do not participate in monitoring and other stages of the budgetary process. Generally, this is so because the budgetary process in Mongolia has traditionally been vertically driven. The new constitution promotes participation, but the development of local self-governance is in its initial phases. Therefore, citizens in bags, soums, and budget entities have very limited participation.

Some participation takes place at the local level, mostly in the form of written and orally transmitted communications between citizens and line department civil servants, soum administrators, and elected officials. In Tarialan soum, for example, citizens are invited to the budget approval meetings. In Undurshil soum, an opinion poll conducted by the hural of Dundgobi aimag resulted in the creation of two bag centers at a cost of MNT800,000 (approx. $658). Also, citizens in this soum requested, and received from the aimag governor, MNT500,000 (approx. $411) for reconstructing the bag office building. These funds came from an emergency fund under the discretionary control of the governor. Citizens also express their opinions concerning school and hospital heating, schoolchildren’s meals, prices of products bought by budget entities, and local investment needs (Center of Mongol Management 2004).

According to this research, there are three main reasons for the low levels of citizen participation. The citizens themselves lack knowledge about the activities of local governments and the ways in which they can participate. Also, the limited size of budgets and their high fixed-expenditure commitments discourage participation, as citizens believe that participating

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6 Only the hural of Baruunturuun soum, Uvs aimag, uses its monitoring rights.
would not be effective. On the other hand, local governments, administrators, and politicians also rarely encourage citizen participation. According to one questionnaire used the research made by CMM, 79.7% of the citizens who were interviewed had not participated at all in local budget making and spending. This is too low a level of participation.

Citizens usually do not know that they can participate in budgeting and how can participate in it. More than half of those asked did not know about existing mechanisms for holding decision makers accountable. Citizens, however, have the right to request the SPIA and the State Audit Board to conduct financial inspections and audits, but they do not exercise this right.

Citizens think that participation would not be effective. Among the interviewees, 29.4% thought that they could take an active part in the local budgetary process but have not participated; 64.5% said that citizens could not expect to have their common issues reflected in the local budget; 34.2% said that they had participated in budgeting, but their suggestions were not reflected in the budget.

Citizens are interested in participating, but local politicians and administrators usually ignore their interest. The questionnaire also revealed that more than half of the interviewees were interested in participating in the monitoring of budget execution. But 40% agreed that there was not enough information on budget execution, and 90% wanted to have such information made more available to the public.

More generally, citizens’ participation is low in the bags, soums, and budget entities. Bags are the primary organizational units in the country. These traditional forms of association have traditionally provided a suitable geographical division for Mongolians living in distant locations. Bags are the first entry point for citizens, so they are the basic units of decentralization and citizens’ participation. Citizens’ participation in bags, however, is very limited. At present, the legal framework is not consistent in addressing the issue of bag participation. On the one hand, the Constitution (article 59) dictates that bags should have meetings of citizens; on the other hand, the Administrative and Territorial Units, Their Management Law does not provide bags with an independent budget. The salary of the bag governor, for example, is part of the soum budget. Budgetary independence is a critical factor in participation. In the case of the Sustainable Livelihoods Program, for example, the selection of projects is discussed openly in the Bag Common Hural, and this has become the engine for promoting citizens’ participation in local decision making. In

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8 The Research on Fiscal Decentralization made by the Center of Mongol Management (CMM) and financed by Household Livelihoods Support Program in 2004.
other words, citizens will decide to participate only if they see a benefit in doing so. *Soums*, being the lowest level of government with budgetary autonomy, are supposed to organize open discussions to decide local budgetary allocations. In practice, however, this process is ineffective for at least two reasons. First, *soums* approve the budget proposals of hurals, governors, and governors’ offices, but not those of schools and hospitals. Leaving out decisions about health and education, which are an important component of citizens’ demands, makes hurals less participatory. Second, even if there is a tendency for more active participation in budget planning, at the time of budget approval, authorities are not bound to incorporate citizens’ proposals, and this further discourages citizen participation.

**Problems and Suggestions**

The research identified a number of problems associated with the current system of local public finances in Mongolia and the level of citizens’ participation in local budgeting. These problems, together with some suggestions, follow.

**Lack of information and transparency.** There is an overall feeling among stakeholders that transparency in the operation of budget entities is still limited. Specific budget information is not available or is inadequately provided to citizens. Similarly, other information on the activities and performance of government activities is not available to the public. None of the local administrations in the *aimags* and *soums* covered by this research provided open information on its budget execution to citizens. The situation calls for broadening citizens’ access to government information. The whole budgetary process must be made more transparent. Budget entities especially must make their expenditures and performance measures more accessible to citizens.

**Low capacity (lack of knowledge and skills).** Although limited, a number of reforms have been introduced to rationalize the budgeting by local governments. The reforms, however, require heavy investments in training and capacity building, which are still missing. Specifically, local officials require training in the preparation of strategic business plans, outcome definition, cost estimation, performance evaluation, and the drafting of effective contracts and performance agreements. In addition, a number of *soums* and *aimags*, especially in the most remote parts of the country, still need basic training in generating medium- and long-term development plans, and in formulating, executing, and monitoring their budgets. For this reason, the effects of the reforms have not yet materialized. For example, even though local budgets should be performance-oriented, budgets are still planned according to the old input-based classifications and provisions. The central Government must
therefore invest heavily in local capacity building. Training to improve the technical skills of public servants in charge of local fiscal functions, including skills in the preparation of strategic business plans, is needed.

**Lack of accountability.** Overall, local accountability in Mongolia is still weak. Most accountability mechanisms are vertical, so horizontal and social accountability is undermined. Line ministries, especially in the health and education sectors, have strong vertical control over their local representatives. This weakens the accountability of these central representatives to both the local hural and the citizens. Not only do elected local bodies have ineffective mechanisms to hold local administrations accountable, but citizens also lack ways to effectively control their local governments. Citizens do not have effective mechanisms to voice their demands and complain about the inefficient work of public servants. There must be additional mechanisms for social accountability to allow citizens to voice their concerns and local governments to respond to those concerns.

**Lack of local participation.** Citizens’ participation in both the executive and legislative branches in bags, soums, and aimags is marginal. Citizens have limited knowledge and information about the public policies of local governments. One questionnaire used in this research found that only 9.5% of those interviewed had participated actively in local budget making and spending.

The existing legislation fails to provide options for citizens to participate in the planning and monitoring of budget entities, and citizens also lack knowledge and information about administrative and budget reforms. The traditional thinking that it is up to the administrators to solve local problems is still dominant among local residents. Mongolia has had no experience in the decentralization of its public administrative institutions. Therefore, decentralization and local self-government skills are not yet developed. Even among civil servants there is no agreement on the concepts, requirements, and mechanisms of decentralization. In various cases, local problems continue to be solved in a centralized way, with very little participation from citizens. New mechanisms for citizen participation must be devised to allow efficient state-society interaction, especially in the areas of local planning and budgeting.

**Interference from higher tiers of government.** In many ways, Mongolia remains a centralized country with a strong central presence—administrative and political—at the local level. Central line ministries still exercise power at the local level, and this limits local self-governance. Fiscally, most locally generated revenue ends up in the central budget, creating a disincentive to increased local tax collection. Local governments are still far from having the political, administrative, and fiscal autonomy to govern their own affairs, with
little intervention from the central Government. In sum, the limited possibilities for increasing local revenues and the few initiatives in support of local interests have become obstacles to the development of local self-governance and decentralization. The central Government must clarify the current assignment of expenditures and ensure that the country’s development plans incorporate both national and local priorities.

Conclusion

The low levels of citizens’ participation are caused by citizens’ insufficient knowledge of how they can participate in budgeting, the limited size of local budgets and their high-fixed expenditure commitments, and the lack of initiative among local governments, administrators, and politicians. Mongolia needs to communicate more information about local budgeting, encourage citizens’ participation in budget making, and improve the accountability of decision makers. What is missing is citizens’ participation that serves as a basis for fiscal decentralization.
The Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society

References


Relationship between the Size of Local Government and Citizen Participation in Sri Lanka

M. H. Ajantha Sisira Kumara
Wasana S. Handapangoda

Introduction

Public participation in democratic society is both vital and problematic. Citizen engagement in the development and implementation of policy can help to generate a heightened sense of public value for what government does. Listening to citizen preferences, providing citizens with an opportunity to analyze available options and determine a preferred option, and providing feedback through performance measurement and monitoring and evaluation are all likely to help ensure that the public will value more highly the publicly funded services they receive. According to Berner (2001, page 23), citizen participation in governance is widely encouraged by academics and professional organizations and is a popular conference topic. What do governments try to accomplish when they involve citizens? There are two expectations (Berner 2001):

• To inform the public of government decisions, and
• To involve the public in decision making.

This paper discusses the level of citizen participation in local government authorities in Sri Lanka and its relationship to the size of local authorities.

The local government of Sri Lanka has a long history extending to the period of Sinhalese kings in the 4th century. The oldest chronicle of Sri Lanka, Mahawansa (6th century), mentions local administration by the nagara guttika (city mayor). Village organizations called gam sabhas functioned under village leaders, who enjoyed the power to administer local affairs and also performed judicial functions such as dealing with petty offenses and resolving disputes.

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3 Village councils prevailed in ancient Sri Lanka.
Local government today is an expanded version of such responsibilities, operating under the democratic system of governance. There are three types of local authorities—municipal councils, urban councils, and *pradeshiya sabhas*—under the administrative supervision of the provincial councils. The various aspects of their establishment and operation are covered by the Municipal Council Ordinance, the Urban Council Ordinance, and the Pradeshiya Sabhas Act.

**Review of the Literature**

What is *citizen participation*? According to Parry (1992, page 16; cited in Lowndes and Pratchett, 2002, page 2), it is taking part in the formulation, passage, and implementation of public policies. Parry’s definition of citizen participation as political participation emphasizes the actions taken by citizens seeking to influence the decisions ultimately taken by local public officials and elected representatives. Defined this way, citizen participation includes not only participating in electoral activities but also contacting public officials, joining protest actions, and getting involved, either formally or informally, in local issues (Brady et al. 1995, pages 272–273; cited in Lowndes and Pratchett 2002, page 2).

According to Leatherman and Howell (2000, page 1), local officials rely on citizen input to stay informed about public concerns and to gain insight into citizen preferences. They add that citizen participation is at work if information flows from the electorate to the decision maker. Moreover, there is a direct relationship between the freedom of information and citizen participation in a country (Participation and Civic Engagement Group-World Bank 2000, page 1). Freedom of information, including access to information, is essential for transparent and accountable government. Access to information enables the citizens (the clientele) to be involved in formulating social policies and making governance decisions, and ultimately restores societal harmony. Only with adequate information can people discuss and debate the activities of their governments. Therefore, the right to information is increasingly recognized as a fundamental human right, protected under international and constitutional law. The local people should have equal opportunity to communicate their views and suggestions regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status, gender and other characteristics. The World Bank (2000, page 2) advocates the same equity principle.

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4 A local government authority in Sri Lanka.

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The system of local government is itself a way of encouraging citizen participation in public decision making. As Franklin and Ebdon (2002, page 1) put it, local government has the best opportunity to promote face-to-face interaction between the elected officials and the public. Hence, there is a strong tradition of fostering citizens’ involvement in local political decision making. Allowing citizens’ groups to decide how resources should be allocated is thought to foster high levels of social capital (Putnam 1993; cited in Franklin and Ebdon 2002, page 1). In social capital theory, the clients are the key stakeholders of government programs and their input is solicited since they are most likely to be affected by the decisions made.

Several expectations and prescriptions guide citizens’ participation in resource allocation. Franklin and Ebdon (2002, page 2) suggest four groups of factors that determine the level of citizen participation in decision making by a particular local government:

- Structure of the local government unit;
- Participants;
- Mechanisms of participation; and
- Process of public participation.

The size of the local authority is part of the structure. The other components are the form of government and the legal requirements for input into government.

With respect to the participants, the local government officials have to consider who will participate and who will identify and invite them.

Franklin and Ebdon (2002, page 4) mention public hearings, public meetings, citizen surveys, citizen juries, and Web surveys among the mechanisms that countries generally use to get people’s views. In the choice of mechanism, Franklin notes, timing is important. People must be given enough time to express their views before the local administration decides. Another consideration is the scope of the material to be presented. Citizens will be active when the discussion concerns neighborhood issues, Gurwitt (1992, pages 48–54; cited in Franklin and Ebdon 2002, page 4) points out. He adds that participation tends to improve when there are several mechanisms for it.

The last group of factors considers the logistics of the process itself. A common barrier to meaningful participation, say Frisby and Bowman (1996, page 78), is lack of knowledge. Therefore, designing a participation process that provides the information necessary to educate and inform the participants, in a language they understand, is an important first step in finding out their preferences.
Concept of the Study
The study tested the assumption that the size of the local authority and the population covered (independent variables) influence the level of public participation (dependent variable), which in turn leads to societal harmony. The determinants of size that were considered were average total expenditure per year (both recurrent and capital expenditure) and number of staff (executive, nonexecutive, and temporary), contractors, and suppliers. Figure 1 shows the framework of the study.

Figure 1: Framework of the Study

![Figure 1: Framework of the Study](Source: Authors' research.)

Significance of the Study
Sri Lanka has a well-organized system of local government administration with powers, functions, and duties vested by ordinances and a host of other subsidiary legislation. During the pre-independence period and more specifically during the second half of British colonial rule, local government institutions in Sri Lanka were greatly influenced by local government developments and practices in the United Kingdom (Abeywardana 1992, pages 116–126). Thus, the local government authorities in Sri Lanka including municipal councils, urban councils, and pradeshiya sabhas have become more expansive and bureaucratic.

According to Nanayakkara (1992, page 3), two main principles of local government should be taken into account. One is access by the community, which means the institutional capacity to utilize the views of the community through the direct involvement of the citizens in local planning, project
implementation, and other areas of decision making. The capacity of government to promote access, Nanayakkara (1992, page 3) says, is inversely related to the size of the governing bodies. The second principle of local government is service, and it is related to the principle of access. The service principle suggests that local government has to achieve technical adequacy aligned with community needs and interests. In the Sri Lankan context, the question to be asked in this regard is how far devolution and decentralization have taken place.

Therefore, to ensure effective citizen participation in local government decision making and provide better services, the governing bodies and their clientele must be of a “proper size.” This empirical study set out to see whether there is indeed a negative relationship between the level of citizen participation and the size of the governing bodies, and to gain an understanding of other factors that can affect the capacity of the authorities to promote effective community participation.

Methodology

This research combined qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The population of the study consisted of all three types of local government authorities in Sri Lanka—municipal councils, urban councils, and pradeshiya sabhas—and their clientele. As of 2003, Sri Lanka had 14 municipal councils, 37 urban councils, and 258 pradeshiya sabhas (Department of Public Administration 2003, page 124). One local government institution of each type in the capital, Colombo, was selected. The three institutions were: Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte Municipal Council, Maharagama Urban Council, and Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha. A representative sample of the clientele (general public, government organizations, community-based organizations, private sector, and nongovernment organizations) was also drawn through stratified random sampling.

Officials of institutions were interviewed with the aid of a structured questionnaire and an interview guide (Appendix 1). Beneficiaries were also interviewed and observed. Secondary sources of information supplemented the primary sources.

Indices of the size of the governing body, service area, and public participation were used. Scatter diagrams and a simple linear regression model were constructed, with the size of the governing body and the size of service area as independent variables and the level of citizen participation as the dependent variable. The results obtained through the regression model were compared with the results of the interviews conducted with officials and beneficiaries.
The index of the size of governing body was based on recurrent expenditure and workforce. Recurrent expenditure—expenses incurred to maintain current activities—“plays a more important role in determining the size of the institution than the level of capital expenditure” (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2002, pages 50–56) and was therefore used to determine the size of the governing body. Generally, the recurrent expenditures of local government institutions in Sri Lanka cover salaries and wages of employees, transportation, supplies and instruments, maintenance of capital assets, interest, dividends and bonuses, subsidies and donations, and pensions and gratuities. These items are divided among five major programs as follows:

- Common administration and staffing;
- Health services;
- Land and buildings;
- Common utility services; and
- Welfare facilities.

The size of the labor force of the local authority was also taken into account. The labor force was divided into three categories, namely, executive staff, nonexecutive staff, and contractual employees. These categories of the labor force comprised the subcategories listed in Table 1.

The index of the size of the service area of local authorities was based on the population, grama niladhari divisions,5 and the area covered (in square kilometers).

**Getting Citizens to Participate**

Local authorities in Sri Lanka use three methods—formal meetings, discussions, and questionnaires—to get the views of their clientele. The Commissioner of the Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council had this to say:

The views of the public are considered when designing projects to address crucial issues such as garbage clearing. We discuss such matters informally, particularly with the business community, and occasionally with the general public. (29 September 2005 survey)

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5 Grassroot-level administrative unit in Sri Lanka.
Relationship between the Size of Local Government and Citizen Participation in Sri Lanka

The Secretary of the Maharagama Urban Council noted:

Not only informal discussions but also formal meetings are held with the community if we need to get the views of the general public with regard to various decisions taken with the ultimate intention of uplifting the standard of living of the community. (29 September 2005 survey)

According to the Secretary of Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha:

Generally, informal discussions are held to get the views of the clientele on the projects, which are expected to be implemented through the Pradeshiya Sabha. Apart from that, questionnaires are distributed among the clientele to get their views when and where necessary. (3 October 2005 survey)

In comparison, following a survey of local authorities in England between March and July 2002 (with a 55% response rate), Curtain (2003, page 2) identified a wider variety of tools and processes for enlisting citizen participation, as follows:

### Table 1: Labor Force of Local Authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Staff</th>
<th>Nonexecutive Staff</th>
<th>Contractual Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Clerical Staff</td>
<td>Breman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Officer</td>
<td>Storekeeper</td>
<td>Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Consultant</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Assistant, Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Bokkeeper</td>
<td>Caretaker, Cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Librarian</td>
<td>Assistant, Library</td>
<td>Bokbinder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayurvedic Medical Officer</td>
<td>Telephone Operator</td>
<td>Computer Operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer-in-Charge of Day-Care Center</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>Security Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer-in-Charge of Preschool</td>
<td>Motor Grader Operator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WK Authority</td>
<td>Boko-loader Operator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Assistant, Cemetery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Planner</td>
<td>Labor, Street Lighting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka Technical Service</td>
<td>Typist (English and Sinhalese)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Officer</td>
<td>Clerk, Cemetery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Officer</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Examiner</td>
<td>Caretaker, Playground</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 29 September 2005 survey.
More traditional forms of consultation such as public meetings, consultation documents, co-option into committees, and question-and-answer sessions;

Customer feedback through service satisfaction surveys and complaint and suggestion schemes;

Innovative methods of participation such as interactive Web sites, citizens’ panels, focus group discussions, and referendums; and

Approaches that encourage citizens to deliberate issues through citizens’ juries, community plans and needs analysis, visioning exercises, and issue forums.

The choice of method is dictated by the goals of citizen participation and the desired citizen input. According to Leatherman and Howell (2000, pages 1–2), the following are common purposes for which citizen input is sought and the methods that are generally effective in achieving the task:

**Community meetings and public hearings.** Open gatherings of people from the community who wish to be heard about a topic or issue. A public hearing is often formal, with statements going into an official record of the meeting. A community meeting will often be an informal gathering where people come to share ideas with local officials.

**Focus groups.** Small gatherings of stakeholders who meet in a confidential setting to discuss an issue or react to a proposal. These meetings are often facilitated by a trained individual. Participants are typically asked to respond to open-ended questions intended to initiate a discussion among the group.

**Workshops.** Meetings focused on the accomplishment of a predetermined task. Primary stakeholders are often involved because of a high level of interest in the issue, but the full range of interests should be represented. Rather than soliciting general opinion, workshops are intended to focus on specific concerns and produce a predetermined product. The benefit of such meetings is that those most directly affected by an issue are directly involved in addressing it.

**Task forces.** Small (usually 8 to 20 people) ad hoc citizen committees formed to complete a clearly defined task in the planning process. A task force is often appointed to study a particular issue and offer a report of findings and recommendations to the policy-making body. They often function under deadlines.

**Priority-setting committees.** Citizens’ groups appointed to advise local officials regarding citizens’ ideas and concerns in planning community projects. Participants are trusted to represent the concerns of citizens and sometimes act as a “go between” with the local government.
Policy Delphi. A technique for developing and expressing the views of a panel of citizens chosen for their knowledge about an issue. The objective is to work toward a consensus of opinion that can be used by policy makers in decision making. Successive rounds of presented arguments and counterpoints move the group toward consensus, or at least to clearly established positions and supporting arguments.

Interviews, polls, and surveys. Potentially less threatening means by which citizens can speak directly with someone about their views. Detailed information can be gathered. It can be informative in both content and overall reaction to an issue. To be valid and representative, this method requires a trained survey taker to maintain confidentiality and statistical reliability.

Media-based issue balloting. Coupled with a media-based effort to discuss alternatives and consequences of potential solutions. Citizens are asked to respond through the local media. Letters to editors or radio call-in shows are monitored to gain a sense of the public reaction. It can be a good way to gain a quick reaction to proposals from those most likely to be active on an issue.

Citizen advisory boards. Appointed groups of representatives of one or more community interests. An advisory board studies an issue and makes recommendations to policy makers. The range of decision-making authority can vary and, in some cases, may be binding.

Referendums. Direct and binding decision-making authority by the electorate. For highly controversial issues or where uncertainty exists about the overall sentiment of the community, decision makers sometimes allow the issues to be decided in referendums.

The very limited and rudimentary methods of public participation in Sri Lanka drew this comment from the Secretary of the Maharagama Urban Council:

Even though we have highlighted the term “public participation” in our mission statement, corporate plan, and other documents, that is, in fact, the most neglected by us in our duties. (29 September 2005)

The citizens have no access to an elected representative at the local government office. Instead, they meet a bureaucrat, a career official who may be unresponsive to their grievances (Nanayakkara 1989, page 276). One reason for this neglect could be that local government officials have not been trained for citizen participation. Such training should be part of a properly organized mechanism of citizen participation. Only then can the institutions move toward
novel and effective methods of citizen participation, which will ultimately lead to societal harmony.

**Public Participation Index**

An index of citizen participation was developed on the basis of the following factors:

- Number of formal meetings held each year ($X_1$);
- Number of discussions held each year ($X_2$);
- Number of times questionnaires are distributed each year ($X_3$);
- Number of projects adjusted each year to suit the clientele ($X_4$); and
- Number of projects implemented each year irrespective of the views of the clientele ($X_5$).

The first four factors were assumed to have a positive impact on the level of citizen participation, and the last factor, to have a negative impact.

The citizen participation index (CPI) was computed as follows:

$$
CPI = (X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + X_4) - X_5
$$

Local authorities with a higher CPI have greater citizen participation in decision making, and ultimately greater societal harmony, and vice versa. Table 2 shows the CPI for the last 3 years for the Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council, the Maharagama Urban Council, and Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha.

Table 3 gives the index of the size of the three local authorities selected (see Appendix 2), together with their CPI. As mentioned earlier, recurrent expenditure and workforce were considered in determining the size of the authority.

To understand the relationship between the two indices, a scatter diagram was created out of the computed values (Figure 2).

The diagram shows a nonlinear relationship between the size and the level of citizen participation in the three types of local governmental authorities in the country: municipal councils, urban councils, and *pradeshiya sabhas*. The regression line was constructed by converting the values into logarithms as follows:

$$
Y = -14.712 \ln (X) + 68.636
$$

where $Y$ is the level of citizen participation and $X$ is the size of the local authority.
Table 2: Citizen Participation Index (CPI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Authority/ Year</th>
<th>No. of Formal Meetings (X₁)</th>
<th>No. of Discussions (X₂)</th>
<th>No. of Times Questionnaires Are Distributed (X₃)</th>
<th>No. of Projects Implemented Irrespective of Views of Clientele (X₄)</th>
<th>No. of Projects Adjusted (X₅)</th>
<th>CPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council</td>
<td>2002 10 21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003 12 18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2004 9 17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharagama Urban Council</td>
<td>2002 11 11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003 11 18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2004 9 17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha</td>
<td>2002 16 20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003 22 20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2004 18 18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews on 29 September and 3 October 2005 with the Secretaries of the Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council, the Maharagama Urban Council, and Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha with additions by authors.

The value of $R^2$ stands for the extent to which the size of the local authority affects the level of citizen participation in local authorities. The $R^2$ value of 0.625 indicates that 62.5% of the variation of the level of citizen participation is due to the variation in the size of the local authorities. Hence, in Sri Lanka, the size of the authorities can be used to explain the level of public participation in local government institutions.

The slope of the regression line shows the degree of relationship between the size of the local authorities and the level of public participation. The slope of -14.712 indicates an inverse relationship between the two variables. In other words, the smaller the size of the local authority, the greater the level of citizen participation in its decision making, and vice versa. Thus, pradeshiya sabhas, the smallest local government institutions in the country, have greater citizen participation in decision making, whereas the municipal councils, the largest local government institutions, have marginal citizen participation.

The pradeshiya sabhas have proper mechanisms for getting the views of the beneficiaries about decisions made. They have appointed beneficiary groups...
Table 3: Index of the Size of Local Authority and Calculated CPI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority/Year</th>
<th>Index of Size of Authority</th>
<th>CPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte Municipal Council</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maharagama Urban Council</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews on 29 September and 3 October 2005 with the Secretaries of the Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council, the Maharagama Urban Council, and Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha with additions by authors.

Figure 2: Relationship between the Index of the Size of the Authority and CPI

Source: Survey data, 2005.
with the assistance of community-based organizations. Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha, for instance, has appointed the following beneficiary groups or committees:

- Library committee;
- Health and education committee;
- Public utility service committee; and
- Sports and recreation committee.

The Secretary of Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha remarked on the level of public participation in the pradeshiya sabha thus:

We have sufficient time to conduct participatory meetings and discussions because we maintain a small budget and workforce for that. If we were to have a large budget, that would lead to a larger staff, and maintaining the Pradeshiya Sabha itself would become an issue. So, we don’t utilize a larger staff to maintain registers, accounts, ledgers, and other documents. Rather, more officials are utilized to work with the community. (3 October 2005 survey)

On the other hand, a client of Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha had these comments about the quality of the services rendered by the pradeshiya sabha:

Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha is a very familiar public office to us. Its officials are always with the general public when solving the issues in the area. They provide us with very good service no matter what their political background might be. (3 October 2005 survey)

A large budget and a large workforce evidently hinder public participation and thereby dilute societal harmony. The internal processes of such institutions use up a large amount of resources, and not enough is left for participatory meetings and discussions. According to Peiris (1992, page 6), local government is participatory democracy, and that should be the main objective of local government institutions. Hence, local authorities should focus more on stakeholder management. But local authorities in Sri Lanka are more concerned with maintaining their internal business processes. The Secretary of Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte Municipal Council said this about municipal councils:
The council has to maintain a huge budget. Furthermore, because we are a larger organization, beneficiaries are reluctant to come to the council to discuss their issues. They have very limited opportunities to meet the Mayor and other elected officials, and this is very unfortunate. (29 September 2005 survey)

As organizations become larger, there is progressively less opportunity to promote citizen participation in decision making.

The relationship between the size of the service area and the level of citizen participation was also determined. The service area was calculated by considering the size of the population served, the number of grama niladhari divisions under each local authority, and the size of the local authority in square kilometers (km²). Table 4 gives the index of the size of the service area (Appendix 2) and the CPI.

Again, a simple regression model was constructed to analyze the relationship between the two variables. The size of the service area was considered the independent variable, and the citizen participation index, the dependent variable. Figure 3 shows the scatter diagram and the regression line plotted.

A linear relationship between the two variables is observed. The regression equation can therefore be established as follows:

\[ Y = 2.3931X + 21.229 \]

where \( X \) is the index of size of service area and \( Y \) is the citizen participation index.

Since \( R^2 \) is equal to 0.7162, around 72% of the variation in the level of citizen participation in local authorities in Sri Lanka can be attributed to a variation in the size of the service area. The slope of +2.391 indicates a positive relationship between the size of the service area and the level of citizen participation in the local authorities in Sri Lanka. As the size of the service area increases, so does the level of citizen participation, and vice versa. This characteristic of local authorities in Sri Lanka is shown in Figure 4.

Thus, a small governing body with a large service area will have a high level of citizen participation. The pradeshiya sabha, the smallest local government organization, serves a very large area. Its level of citizen participation and societal harmony is very high. A municipal council, on the other hand, is very large but serves a very small area. Its level of citizen participation is very low, and societal harmony is neglected.

NAPSIPAG
Table 4: Index of the Size of Service Area and Calculated CPI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority/Year</th>
<th>Index of Size of Authority</th>
<th>CPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte Municipal Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharagama Urban Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Interviews on 29 September and 3 October 2005 with the Secretaries of the Sri Jayewardenepura Municipal Council, the Maharagama Urban Council, and Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha with additions by authors.

Figure 3: Relationship between Index of the Size of Service Area and CPI

Source: Survey data, 2005.
Conclusion

The level of citizen participation of local authorities in Sri Lanka is based mainly on the size of the governing bodies and the size of the service area covered. There is an inverse relationship between the size of the governing bodies and the level of citizen participation, but it is a negligible one. In other words, in a participatory democracy, local government institutions, whatever their size, should be able to accommodate the views of their clientele when and where necessary. However, there is a positive correlation between the size of the service area of local authorities and the level of citizen participation.

Small local government institutions with a large service area are better participatory institutions. On the other hand, large local government institutions with a small service area are poor in citizen participation in decision making.

Most often, Sri Lankan local government institutions pay more attention to managing their internal business processes. Thus, they have largely neglected to consider the views of their clientele. When they do get the opinions of the people, the local authorities in Sri Lanka use traditional methods such as discussions, interviews, and questionnaires, and not the more comprehensive and sophisticated methods of citizen participation that are commonplace in the developed world.
References


Appendix 1: Interview Guide (Beneficiaries)

1. Individual/Business/Community-based organization(s):
2. If individual, level of education: Occupation:
3. Local authority to which beneficiary belongs:
4. Services received from the local authority:
5. Level of satisfaction:
   - ☐ Strong  ☐ Moderate  ☐ Indifferent  ☐ Low
6. Mode, amount, and frequency of payments made for the services rendered by the authority:
   - Mode:  Amount:  Frequency:
7. Do you participate in the process of decision making by the local authority?
8. If yes, nature of decision making: Mode:
9. If no, why not? (You are given no opportunity/not interested in the process, etc.)
10. Level of accessibility of elected members of the authority:
    - ☐ Adequate  ☐ Moderate  ☐ Indifferent  ☐ Inadequate
## Appendix 2: Indices of Size of Governing Body and Service Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte Municipal Council</th>
<th>Maharagama Urban Council</th>
<th>Homagama Pradeshiya Sabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of Governing Body</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent Expenditure ($SLRs’ 000)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Executive Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Non-executive Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Contractual Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Size of Governing Body</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Service Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grama Niladhari Divisions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area ($km^2$)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Size of Service Area</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recurrent Expenditure ($SLRs’ 000)**

1. $30,000$–$70,000$
2. $70,000$–$110,000$
3. $110,000$–$150,000$
4. $150,001$ and more

**No. of Executive Staff**

1. Less than 100
2. 100–300
3. 301–500
4. 501 and more

**No. of Contractual Staff**

1. Less than 150
2. 151–250
3. 251–300
4. 301 and more

**Index of Size of Governing Body**

Column subtotal

**Population**

1. $120,000$–$140,000$
2. $140,001$–$160,000$
3. $160,001$–$180,000$
4. $180,001$ and more

**Grama Niladhari Divisions**

1. $125$–$150$
2. $151$–$200$
3. $201$–$310$
4. $311$ and more

**Area ($km^2$)**

1. $1$–$2$
2. $2.25$–$2.5$
3. $2.51$–$3$,
4. $3.1$ and more

**Index of Size of Service Area**

Column subtotal

Mujwahuzi Njunwa1

Introduction and Purpose of the Paper

Harmony has been elusive in many countries of Africa, Middle East, Asia, and Eastern Europe. The lack of harmony in these continents has often manifested itself in conflicts such as wars between countries or between ethnic groups fighting for control over resources (arable land, water, minerals, etc.), religious dominance, or monopoly of state power (Maganga 2002). As harmony declines in these societies, social tensions emerge and the potential for conflict increases. Finally wars break out, people get killed, and citizens flee their homes and countries for safer havens. They ultimately become refugees.

For more than 40 years societal harmony in Africa has been in serious crisis. Since the 1970s more than 30 wars have been fought on the continent, most of them between states. Fourteen of Africa’s 53 countries were afflicted by armed conflicts in 1966 alone. These accounted for more than half of all war-related deaths worldwide, and more than 8 million refugees, returnees, and displaced persons (Guest 2004). In the last four decades, Africa has produced 9.5 million refugees and, worse, hundreds and thousands of people have been slaughtered as a result of these conflicts. For instance, until July 2004, in Darfur, Sudan, the Arab militia—the janjaweed—killed as many as 30,000 people and left more than a million others displaced (see Dousing the Flames of Darfur, in The Economist, 3–9 July 2004, page 13).

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo 3.3 million people have been killed in various wars. In 1994 close to a million people (Tutsi and moderate Hutus) were killed in what is now known as the “Rwanda Genocide.” This is without mentioning what has taken place in Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda. Wars have also been recorded in the former Yugoslavia, between the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. In Sri Lanka, two ethnic groups—the Sinhalese and the Tamils—have waged wars against each other that have left so many people dead (Bowen 1996).

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1 Senior Lecturer and Director, Institute of Public Administration, Mzumbe University, Tanzania.
This paper looks at how public administration can create conditions for preventing the emergence of the conflicts briefly outlined above and can therefore promote harmony in society. It reviews the major initiatives that Tanzania’s public administration has taken to create relative harmony and stability over the years, and presents some lessons for reflection. More specifically, it describes the major local government structures that Tanzania’s Government has put in place to ensure that societal harmony is maintained as a key condition for socioeconomic development. The paper has seven main sections: (i) the introduction, where the purpose of the paper is outlined; (ii) a discussion of key conceptual/theoretical issues related to societal harmony and public administration; (iii) a discussion of some theoretical requirements for societal harmony to exist; (iv) a look at how colonial administrations created the potential for disharmony in Tanzania; (v) a focus on Tanzania’s local government system structures that have been put in place to promote societal harmony; (vi) some lessons for reflection; and (vii) conclusions.

Conceptual Issues

Societal harmony has been defined as a state of peaceful existence and agreement (Hornby 2000). The concepts “peaceful existence” and “agreement” imply the presence or existence of diversity in society, as well as the mechanisms to harmonize diversities for better and productive uses. Diversity, broadly viewed, may mean citizens who differ in social status, personal perspectives, level of education, socioeconomic needs, and access to power as well as public goods and services. Diversity may also mean differences in natural endowments: some parts of the country may be better endowed with resources such as minerals, rivers, forests, pastureland, and socioeconomic infrastructure than other parts of the same country. With such diversity in society, there is always a struggle for access and therefore a potential for conflicts to arise and thus for harmony to fade. This means that certain mechanisms must be put in place to contain or resolve such conflicts for societal harmony to exist.

Crum (1987, page 29), for instance, writes:

Conflict appears everywhere. We find it in our personal lives at home, between parent and child and between spouses. We find it at work between employer and employee. It is there between man and woman. We see religion against religion, nation against nation. It is the underlying theme throughout all human history. With the increasing complexity of life on this planet, the exploding human population, and our possession of awesome weapons, which could trigger our total annihilation, conflict has become the critical issue of our time.
Crum contends that it is not whether one has conflict in one’s life, it is what one does with that conflict that makes a difference. Shonholtz (1998) sees conflict and democracy as inseparable. He argues that democracy legitimates conflicts that are peacefully expressed and resolved. In a democratic society, according to Shonholtz, conflict can make the entire society aware that new normative rules must be set to effect orderly change.

Slaikeu and Hasson (1998) argue that conflict itself is not the problem, but unresolved conflict is. The two scholars see conflict as an integral dynamic in the growth and development of living organisms and groups. Conflict occurs when the ideas, interests, or behavior of two or more individuals or groups clash.

Bowen (1996) addresses the causes of societal disharmony, while focusing more on ethnic conflicts. He dismisses the view that the world’s present conflicts are fueled by age-old ethnic loyalties and cultural differences. This view, he says, is based on three mistaken assumptions: first, that ethnic identities are primordial and unchanging; second, that these identities motivate people to persecute and kill; and finally, that ethnic diversity itself inevitably leads to violence. Bowen argues that this view misrepresents the genesis of conflict and ignores the ability of diverse people to coexist. Diverse identities coexisted throughout history without necessarily leading to conflicts, he adds. Moreover, society has always designed mechanisms to contain and resolve differences.

To Bowen, conflicts in Burundi, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and the former Yugoslavia resulted from the creation by political leaders of elite and nonelite classes with varying access to public services and benefits, including state power. The creation, for example, of the Tutsi elites by the Belgian colonial administration in Rwanda led to the emergence of antagonistic relationships between the Tutsi elites and the nonelites (the Bahutu and Batwa). The same happened in Sri Lanka, where the British colonial administration created Sinhalese elites against the Tamils. Therefore, what Bowen is saying is that social differentiation is inherent in human society, but it can be used by ruling elites either for positive ends such as forging a strong social consensus for the development of society or for negative ends such as spawning interethnic or interstate conflicts for their own political gain or other reasons. This means that politics and public administration can either create and sustain societal harmony or destroy it.

Public administration is therefore another key concept where societal harmony is concerned. McSwite (1997) looks at public administration as the study and work of management in public organizations, and the study and work of leadership in those organizations. Bennis (1993) says that managers and administrators focus on doing their work right, while leadership is
The Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society

combined with selecting the right programs, policies, values, and goals. Bennis contends that in today’s environment, it makes more sense to describe public administration as the practice and theory of doing the right things the right way in the service of society. In short, the task of public administration is both to manage and to lead.

Behn (1998), Terry (1995), Selznick (1983), and Denhardt (1981) discuss in detail the role of leadership and public administration in society. They all agree that leaders motivate, mobilize, and inspire the citizens to support programs for implementation. Public administration redefines the policies and programs and crafts strategies for putting these into practice, for the public benefit. According to Perry and Keller (1991), public administration has three components: administrators, the human side of the government bureaucracy and a source of action; structures, or the framework within which decisions are processed and implemented, views are exchanged, and information is shared; and procedures for carrying out mandated activities.

So far, our review of the literature has served to remind us of a number of issues. First, the concept of “societal harmony” assumes diversity in society and, therefore, the possibility of conflict. Second, where social diversity is concerned, the key issue is not to stop conflicts from happening but rather to harmonize the various divergences toward a common agreement for the betterment of society. Third, public administration is a critical institution in the promotion and sustainability of society harmony. Finally, societal harmony is a value that public administration must purposively create and sustain.

Requirements for Societal Harmony: Some Theoretical Considerations

Societal harmony is a result of many factors. First, it assumes a commitment by the society to guarantee the safety and security of its members including their property. Secure people will have peace of mind, settle down, and live without worries or fear. They can concentrate on productive work for their own betterment as well as for the development of society as a whole. The people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan can hardly be expected to settle down and live harmoniously. Societal harmony does not exist where members of society constantly live under the threat of war, torture, displacement, or dispossession.

The second factor is political will. People in leadership positions must willingly and consciously show that they are committed to creating peace and harmony in society. Unless the leaders do this, the followers are not likely to have peace and harmony. What is happening in Burundi, Somalia, the Sudan,
and Uganda is a leadership crisis in which the leaders, mainly for self-serving reasons, refuse to show the political will to end the armed conflicts in their countries. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni has persistently turned down meetings with the Lord Resistance Army fighters, who virtually control the northern part of Uganda and have engaged the regime in armed conflict for more than 10 years. If the belligerent sides can meet and discuss their differences honestly, peace and harmony will be possible.

The third factor is equity. Hobbes (1651) wrote on this subject:

The safety of the people, requireth, further, from him, or them that have the sovereign power, that justice be equally administered to all degrees of people; that is, that as well the rich and mighty, as poor and obscure persons, may be righted of the injuries done to them; so as the great, may have no greater hope of impunity, when they do violence, dishonor, on any injury to the meaner sort, than when one of these, does the like to one of them: for in this, consisteth equity, to which as being a precept of the law of nature, a sovereign is as much subject, as any of the meanest of his people.

Therefore, the role of the political leadership in society is to formulate policies that ensure that all members of society have equal access to public services and goods. Distributive and redistributive policies are one way of attaining social equity. On the other hand, preferential treatment of one part of the population by politicians or administrators to the neglect of other parts is unfair and is likely to create discord.

The fourth factor is citizens’ participation in political and governmental decision making. Arguments for enhanced citizen participation often rest on the merits of the process and the belief that an engaged citizenry is better than a passive citizenry (Putman 1995, Arinstein 1969). It is also believed that if the citizens participate, policies might be more realistically grounded in citizens’ preferences, the public might be more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, and the improved support from the public might smooth divisions, and make it easier to govern and regulate (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). Participation dispels inertia. The political leadership, for its part, must create an informed and active citizenry by sensitizing society to its political and social rights and obligations, and mobilizing its members (Baregu 2001). But for all this to happen, there must be relevant structures within which the members of society can elect their leaders, participate in resource allocation decisions, and air their views about the conduct of their leaders and the government in general.
The fifth factor is political identity. The people, individually or collectively, must be able to identify themselves with the state authorities and be able to support their political or economic philosophies and strategies (Heater 1990). Political identity presupposes that the government is people-centered and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

The sixth factor is education and training. The citizens must have the skills needed to carry out their responsibilities. Leading a nation whose citizens are illiterate and ignorant is difficult—and expensive. Training can be in the areas of leadership, citizen mobilization and motivation, management of meetings, conflict resolution, records management, or other fields that the government may regard as critical.

The seventh is sustained growth of the economy and trade. The ability of a nation to produce enough commodities for internal consumption and for export plays a very critical role in promoting societal harmony. Hungry citizens cannot be productive and are hard to lead. Moreover, the production of commodities for export enables the country to earn foreign exchange that it may use to import capital goods and other raw materials for further investment and production. A weak economy cannot meet or sustain the needs of the citizens, and is thus a fertile ground for popular dissatisfaction as citizens chase fewer commodities and services while their needs overwhelmingly surpass the commodities and services available. The government must therefore manage the economy properly so that enough resources are generated to sustain the needs of the citizens and the society as a whole.

Colonial Seeds of Disharmony

Before we look at the structures that Tanzania has put in place to strengthen harmony, we need to review a few historical issues about Tanzania. Tanzania gained its independence on 9 December 1961, after more than 75 years of German (1885–1918) and British (1919–1961) rule. Like most other colonial regimes, the German and British colonial administrations created social and economic imbalances to suit their colonial interests. This was the policy of divide and rule. First, they created elitist classes based on race (Europeans, Asians, and Africans), which had unequal access to public goods and services. Europeans enjoyed the best access and Asians (mainly Indians) were dominant in the financial and commercial sectors. The vast majority of Africans, however, occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder. A few Africans, mainly from chiefly lineage, were allowed limited access to public goods and services. So at independence, tensions related to race and inequity were brewing. This was a challenge that the nationalist government had to face and resolve.
Second, the colonizers created imbalances in the ethnic structures of the country. Tanzania had and still has more than 125 ethnic groups, each one with its own language. Development plans and strategies favored those ethnic groups that resided in high places, such as those around Kilimanjaro Mountain, the west lake region (i.e., Lake Victoria), the Southern Highlands region, and the Indian Ocean coastal areas (from Tanga to a few kilometers south of Dar es Salaam). These areas had fertile land, sufficient rainfall, and cool weather. Incidentally, in these same places the European settlers established private businesses (mainly coffee and sisal plantations), and allowed the establishment of missionary centers, which provided limited social services such as education and health care, besides religious ministry (Christianity). Road and rail networks were fairly developed in these regions. At independence, these areas were far ahead of the rest of the regions in education, health care, and wealth. They had also developed passionate tribal feelings that made them regard other tribes (especially those not “favored” by the colonizers) as unwanted and inferior.

Third, and related to the second factor, was the absence of a policy for investing in socioeconomic infrastructure to develop the entire territory. Places where there were settler plantations or mining facilities were well served by roads and railways. Hospitals, schools, and churches followed the European missionaries. But the central, western, and southern regions of the territory were completely ignored.

Fourth, the colonial administration did not allow the residents to participate in central or local government processes. Policy and administration were the exclusive monopoly of the colonial administration (European) officials. A small number of Asians (mainly Indians) had limited participation in colonial administration. The development of political identity and national pride was thwarted.

Fifth, and related to the second and third factors above, the colonial administration made no attempt to unite the people by introducing a common national language. The Germans and the British promoted and used their own languages in official business. Very few local residents spoke these foreign languages. Every ethnic group spoke its own language. Linguistic parochialism reinforced the other imbalances and severely hampered the efforts of the nationalist government to build a nation.

Finally, and directly related to colonial practices in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda, was and still is the factor of refugees. Tanzania has taken in close to a million refugees. The presence of these refugees makes it even less likely that the Government, with its already overstretched capacity, can provide public goods and services to its own citizens.
The refugees also cause environmental degradation by indiscriminately cutting down trees and grass to build their dwellings, and pose a threat to security, with the guns they illegally carry. Relations between local residents and the refugees are uneasy and tense at best. Armed conflicts have broken out, and people on both sides have been killed. Yet the refugees are unwilling to go back to the turmoil in their home countries.

Local Government Structures for Strengthening Societal Harmony in Tanzania

This paper deals mainly with local government in Tanzania. The local government system is patterned after the British model. It is a centralized system with limited decision making and financial autonomy. There are at present 122 local authorities throughout the country. Acts of Parliament 7 and 8 of 1982, which define the responsibilities of local authorities, provide the legal framework of local government. In addition, sections 145(1)–145(2) and 146(1)–146(2) of the 1977 Constitution ordain the existence of local government to promote development and democracy in the districts and subdistricts. Local authorities are either rural (district councils) or urban (city, municipal, and town councils). Directly under the district council is a ward, under which there are the village governments and, under each village government, a 10-house cell. Under the municipal or town council is a ward, and under that the mtaa (street government) and finally a 10-house cell. A city council follows the same structure as these other two urban councils except that it runs through a municipality.

More than 85% of Tanzania’s population of 35 million (according to the 2002 Census) is under local government. Because the vast majority of the people live at this level, this is where most of the potential tensions discussed above are most strongly felt. Structures must therefore be put in place to ensure that tensions and disagreements are resolved and divergent views are harmonized. These structures are discussed below.

The Council

The urban or district council is the supreme elective structure that formulates and approves bylaws, the budget, and other development programs, and promotes representative democracy. Councilors elected by the citizens residing in the wards bring the people’s development concerns, views, and grievances to the council for discussion and settlement. The council meets every 3 months for this purpose. Councilors serve for a term of 5 years. Those who do their work well are normally reelected. The residents’ power to retain
councilors in their posts compels the latter to be attentive to the residents’ concerns. In this way harmony is promoted and strengthened at the grassroots level.

The council functions through committees responsible for finance and planning, administration and establishment, social services, economic services, and education. The policies passed by the council are implemented by the administrative staff under the director of the local authority, who is appointed by the council on the basis of merit.

The Ward Development Committee (WDC)

The ward is a political and administrative structure from which councilors are elected. Administratively, the ward functions under the ward executive officer (WEO), who is appointed on the basis of merit by the council. The WEO attends to the day-to-day management of the ward, including the building of roads, schools, and dispensaries and the resolution of conflicts among the residents. The WEO functions under the ward development committee, whose membership is made up of the ward councilor, street government (mtaa) chairpersons, and council administrative staff responsible for the various activities in the ward. No policy making takes place at the ward level. The WDC is another grassroots structure that is well placed to detect nascent conflicts and resolve them before they can endanger harmony. The WDC meets every month to review the development status in the ward.

The Mtaa (Street) or Village Government

The mtaa (street) government exists under sections 14(1)–14(5) of Acts of Parliament Nos. 7 and 8 of 1982, and the village government under sections 22(1)–22(3) of the same acts. Each of these local governments functions under an assembly in which all mtaa or village residents 18 years old and over can formulate and approve by-laws and policies for the development of the mtaa or village. The chairperson of the assembly is elected by the residents and is assisted in planning and carrying out approved policies by the mtaa or village executive officer. Like the local authority council, the mtaa or village assembly works through committees, each of which deals with a specific functional area such as safety and security, education, health care, environment, women and children, water, and discipline. The assembly likewise promotes representative and participative democracy, and detects and resolves disagreements among the residents.
Ward Land Tribunals and Village Land Councils

Land is a resource for which every citizen strives to acquire for survival. As the struggle for land acquisition goes on, the likelihood for conflict to emerge increases. To forestall such potential conflicts the Government established ward tribunals under the Act of Parliament No. 7 of 1985. The role of ward tribunals is to receive, examine, and settle citizen disputes over land. In 2002, under the Land Dispute Settlement Act No.2, the Government established village land councils, whose role is ensure that equity in land allocation is observed. The act also ensures that land so allocated is put to productive use. Essentially, both the ward land tribunals as well as the village councils seek to maintain harmony at the ward and village levels by addressing residents’ land disputes before they turn into conflicts.

The 10-House Cell

The 10-house cell is the grassroots structure that is closest to the people. In this structure, 10 households work under a chairperson, whom the household members elect. The 10-house cell mobilizes residents for development activities such as maintaining general cleanliness in the area, and resolves disagreements among the household residents. The disagreements relate mostly to demarcation between households, misunderstandings between spouses, drunken behavior, theft, and sexual abuse. Cases that demand higher expertise are normally referred to the mtaa or village government committee for action.

Some Lessons for Reflection

Despite the seeds of disharmony, Tanzania has been a model of relative peace and stability in Africa. Tanzania’s public administration has managed to contain and resolve local disagreements. From the foregoing, we can draw a number of lessons.

First, the Tanzanian experience clearly shows that ethnic or geographical diversity does not necessarily lead to societal disharmony. Tanzania’s public administration managed to unite the entire population, with more than 125 ethnic groups, by developing and using a common language, Kiswahili. Predominantly spoken in eastern, southern, and central Africa, Kiswahili borrows its vocabulary from the Bantu, Arabic, and European languages especially Italian, German, and English. More than 90% of the people of Tanzania now speak the language. Social identity has been strengthened and attempts to weaken peace and stability have been forestalled. Throughout the struggle for independence (1954–1961) the nationalist leaders strongly
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preached and emphasized the values of unity in Kiswahili. Ethnic parochialism
and false notions of ethnic superiority were strongly condemned, and policies
were later formulated to help do away with such harmful attitudes. So the
leadership factor is critical here.

Second, public administration with its expertise in human behavior and
social science research should be able to investigate and find out the causes of
disharmony in society. Public administration must therefore devise and submit
relevant legislative proposals for this purpose, for approval and implementation.

Third, it is not necessarily true that the wrongs of the colonial
administrations cannot be corrected. The postindependence regimes should
be able to do away with the ethnic divisions.

Fourth, citizens’ participation in the processes of government is critical
in strengthening societal harmony. The public administration, in consultation
with stakeholders, should design appropriate structures to allow the people to
express their views and concerns regarding policy issues. Only if the citizens,
too, take ownership of the processes of government can they identify themselves
with the government and support it. The village assemblies, ward development
committees, and local authority councils are some of the structures that
Tanzania’s public administration has put in place to facilitate and promote
citizens’ participation and representative democracy and ultimately strengthen
societal harmony.

Finally, the education of citizens is a must. It is difficult and expensive to
lead an ignorant citizenry. Shortly after independence, Tanzania embarked on
a long-term citizen education program, which involved full subsidy for primary,
secondary, and university education. This made it possible for children,
especially those from poor families, to acquire an education. Under the same
program, all adults were compelled to register for literacy classes. At present,
95% of the population can read and write. The citizens can understand their
leaders and can question the soundness of their policies. They can also call on
their leaders to explain their actions. The leaders are thus compelled to provide
good leadership. Sustainability mechanisms have been put in place to ensure
that these achievements do not die away. The public administration must
analyze training and determine the knowledge and skills required to achieve
the society’s goals, and see to it that the capacity-building programs are
carried out.
Conclusion

Societal harmony is a prerequisite for development. But it must be created and strengthened through purposeful public policies. Since societal harmony is for the people’s benefit, the people should have a hand in its creation so that they give it the proper value. They need structures through which they can help create societal harmony. Public administration should set up and sustain those structures and generally facilitate the process of creating societal harmony. It must have the political will to do what it ought to do.
References


