

## Local Democracy and Development in Comparative Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

There are two desiderata of developmental local government (DLG): efficiency and participation. Most of the arguments for DLG focus on efficiency, especially on the comparative advantages of scale, information and accountability that come with having government 'closer to the ground'. The metrics of success for the efficiency view are the 'hard' indicators of development: better housing, better services, more effective forms of integrated development, more local economic growth. If the policy literature and multilateral donors have focused on the efficiency dimensions of DLG, civil society groups and social movements have tended to emphasise participation. More decentralised and democratic government, it is argued, creates more opportunities for ordinary citizens (or at least activists) to engage the state and to play a meaningful role in shaping public allocations and local decision making. DLG can as such promote democratic deepening. The metric of success is better citizens and more accountable public authorities.

Officially, almost all parties to the debate support both dimensions of democratic decentralisation. The World Bank (2006) now routinely underscores the importance of promoting 'empowerment', and civil society-based actors and their academic supporters argue that even while participation is a desirable outcome in its own right, it can also promote more just and efficient development outcomes. In practice, of course, both sides of the debate tend to have zero-sum views of the double desiderata. Those who emphasise efficiency (let's call them the *technocrats*) believe that too much participation can overwhelm new and fragile institutions (echoes of Huntington), and those who emphasise participation (let's call them the *associationalists*) believe that an over-emphasis on institution building crowds out civil society.<sup>2</sup> These two zero-sum views are echoed in the academic literature, both along disciplinary and ideological fault lines. Economists, and, to a lesser extent,

political scientists, are more preoccupied with getting the incentives right in order to achieve the optimal allocative equilibrium, whereas sociologists and anthropologists are more concerned with getting the process right by levelling power asymmetries. Ideologically, the fault line is between those who put their faith in formal institutions — high modernists of both the left and right — and those who put their faith in civil society, which can mean either an emphasis on the virtues of ‘communities’ or on the virtues of the public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Both of these perspectives ultimately fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the local developmental state. The technocrats fail because they assume that, if built correctly, the institution will work irrespective of the power equations in society. While this view may hold some water in contexts characterised by robust and evenly distributed associational capacities, in most young democracies, associational capacities are circumscribed by a range of extrainstitutional constraints, and the actual capacity to ‘work the institution’ will vary dramatically across social categories. Under conditions of pervasive social inequality, institutions are likely to be captured by elites or governed by logics that have exclusionary effects. The associationalists fail because they invariably presume that communities or disadvantaged groups have some innate associational capacity — be it social capital or mobilisational energy — that simply needs to be harnessed. But even if we accept that collective capacities and learning are central to both the normative and instrumental case for participation, there are still two fundamental problems that this view leaves unresolved. The first is that associational life is in many ways an artifact of institutional design, and that promoting participation requires building new kinds of institutions. The second is what could be called the transmission problem, i.e. the issue of how participatory inputs actually get translated into actual outputs. Both problems require very serious attention to institutional design, including complex issues that are generally the purview of the technocrats and often shunned by the champions of civil society and social movements.<sup>4</sup>

I emphasise these divisions because this tension between technocrats and associationalists, and between the desiderata of efficiency and participation, has become the most troublesome fault line in South Africa. The problem — addressed at length by contributors to this volume, such as Oldfield (Chapter 22) and Smith and Morris (Chapter 19) — is generally presented in policy and political circles in stark oppositional terms as a conflict between service delivery and participation, top-down versus bottom-up planning, ‘hard’ versus ‘soft’ development, the African National Congress (ANC) as party-state versus social movements, the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) versus the civil society Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). But while these fault lines are very real — if in no other sense than that they have become the locus of political contention — they provide an overly stylised picture of the problem that glosses

over much of the political and institutional complexity of building DLG. From the perspective of developing a transformative politics, what is most problematic about these stylised narratives is that they present state and society as locked in a battle of irreconcilable logics, leaving little room for positive-sum configurations and workable strategies to achieve the double desiderata of DLG.

Following the editors' call to unpack and disaggregate the complexities of the South African situation, I examine the challenges of building more democratic forms of DLG in South Africa through the lenses of two of the most carefully researched cases of participatory decentralised government in the developing world: participatory budgeting in Brazil and the People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning in the Indian state of Kerala. The chapter has two goals: firstly, to bring into sharper relief the state-centric logic of the South African case by showing how participation has contributed to institution building in Kerala and Brazil, and, secondly, to inform a discussion about the possible synergies of technocracy and associationalism.

## THE COMPARISONS

Though the contexts for each of these three cases are, of course, dramatically different, there is a basis for comparison. Firstly, all three are robust and consolidated democracies. Secondly, in all three cases, strong and well-organised civil societies have a demonstrated capacity for playing an active role in local government. Thirdly, in all three cases, the challenges of surmounting accumulated inequalities and entrenched forms of social exclusion are enormous. Finally, in each case, an identifiable agent of change — left-of-centre programmatic parties — has created significant opportunities for promoting more democratic forms of local government. More specifically, these are three cases where the concern with strengthening participation in local government has not come at the behest of multilateral institutions, but rather has emerged from domestic political processes (including active social movements) and has been enshrined in legislation.

These are then all cases of decentralisation of a special *democratic* type, where there has in particular been a concern for promoting more participatory forms of local government. There are, however, also significant differences. On the one hand, as I have argued elsewhere (Heller 2001), what most distinguishes South Africa from Kerala and Brazil is its dominant party system. In Brazil and Kerala, a highly competitive electoral arena has pushed parties of the left to work closely with civil society and social movements. Thus, both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala and the Partido dos Trabalhadores, or Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil have favoured participatory reforms as part of an overall political strategy of strengthening the associational capacities of subordinate groups. In the absence of a viable

threat to its electoral hegemony, the ANC has had little incentive to work with civil society, and has instead emphasised the political objective of consolidating its control over public institutions. On the other hand, in building DLG, South Africa has a clear and distinct advantage that can only be fully appreciated when it is examined in comparative terms. Historically, and especially in urban areas, the local state in South Africa has been deeply involved in planning and allocating resources, in large part in response to the highly engineered forms of social and spatial control that apartheid necessitated. Building DLG has been about deracialising the apartheid city, but has not required devolving resources, as in the cases of Brazil and Kerala. Viewed comparatively, then, the capacities of the local state in South Africa, and especially in the former white-dominated areas, are dramatically more sophisticated and extensive than in either Kerala or Brazil, where intergroup domination never required the minutely organised forms of social control of apartheid. The higher degree of state penetration and greater capacity of the South African local state is manifest in institutional, infrastructural and material terms.

In institutional terms, the South African local state enjoys a high degree of Weberian stateness, i.e. highly professionalised state managers who operate within an institutionally robust environment of rule-bound behaviour and accountability. The Brazilian state is notorious for its degree of penetration by political interests (some 'islands of efficiency' notwithstanding), and municipalities have long been ruled by oligarchical interests who have transformed budgeting and planning into little more than an exercise in organised rent seeking. The Indian state, with the 'steel frame' of the Indian Administrative Service inherited from the British, has been characterised as semi-Weberian (Evans 1995), but at the sub-national and local levels, the bureaucracy has been deeply penetrated by patronage politics. Even in Kerala, where the provincial state has been widely celebrated for its ability to deliver basic services (Sen 1999; Heller 2000), organised rent seeking is endemic, amounting by some internal estimates (Heller et al. forthcoming) to over 50% of public expenditures. In institutional terms, moreover, the local state (i.e. municipalities and rural governments) had few developmental functions before the reforms of the 1990s.

In infrastructural terms, the sheer capacity of the local state in South Africa to reach into society is in a category of its own. This is visible to the naked eye in terms of physical infrastructure, but is even more powerfully revealed in comparisons of the tax capacity of the state. Lieberman (2003) has shown that while South Africa has one of the highest tax collection capacities of any developing world state, the Brazilian state is almost powerless to collect anything but the most regressive of taxes. Much the same is true of India. The most startling difference is simply that the local state in South Africa can and does collect local property taxes that account for as much as 90% of the revenue of the local authority, a

source of revenue that is insignificant in Brazil and India. Similarly, the technical capacities of the local state in South Africa, including the use of technology (e.g. Geographic Information System or GIS), planning know-how, budgeting systems, specialised knowledge (engineering in particular), rationalised lines of authority, procurement practices, tracking and monitoring of capital investments — in sum, all the systems and functions of a bureaucratic state — are all far more advanced than in either Brazil or Kerala (cf. Savage, Chapter 13, and Berrisford and Kihato, Chapter 17, in this volume).

Finally, in material terms, the local state in South Africa is much better positioned than its counterparts. Not only can it collect property taxes (rates) and service fees, and has long enjoyed the autonomy to do so, but it has a powerful political and constitutional mandate for redistribution. In Brazil, the endemic fiscal crisis of the state, the political clout of elites (including entrenched organised lobbies of formal-sector workers) and the fact that even under President Lula there has been no specific redistributive agenda (only various poverty alleviation measures) have severely constrained the resource base for local development. In Kerala, a redistributive developmental mandate has long dominated politics, but its sub-national status, coupled with the liberalisation of the economy in 1991 and the ensuing severe fiscal crisis, have left governments with only very painful options.

These two fundamental differences in political configurations (South Africa's dominant party system) and state capacity have in turn produced dramatically different trajectories of building DLG, which, when compared, bring into sharp relief the tensions and complexities of the technocratic and associational views of DLG. I draw on the existing literature, as well as a number of research projects that I have been involved in, to make the case that while in comparative terms the efficiency side of the equation is highly developed in South Africa, the participation side of the equation remains poorly developed, and has in fact suffered from many of the conventional zero-sum assumptions that pervade the literature on decentralisation. In contrast, the efficiency of local developmental government remains highly problematic in both Kerala and Brazil, but the participatory institutions that have been built are quite effective and have directly addressed many of the obstacles to participation that are often singled out in South Africa as intractable. Most notably, institutional reforms in Kerala and Brazil have had a direct impact on building civil society capacities and providing subordinate groups with meaningful and consequential opportunities for shaping local development. Given the severe fragmentation and increasing desolidarisation of South African cities (Harrison et al. 2003; PCAS 2006), as well as new emerging forms of social exclusion, the cases of Kerala and Brazil offer at least some suggestion of what is possible even under high-inequality, low-state-capacity conditions.

## THE CASES

The Indian state of Kerala (population 31 million) has long been recognised for its achievements in promoting social development (Sen 1999). But despite the strength of mass movements (most notably organised labour) and a high literacy rate, Kerala, as is true of all Indian states, has been governed in a highly top-down fashion. Vertically organised state departments have exercised a virtual monopoly in service delivery and development, and local government — i.e. municipalities and rural governments — have enjoyed very limited powers and virtually no resources to promote development. Until recently, DLG in India more or less meant provincial states, with average populations in the tens of millions. This began to change in 1993 with the passage of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments, which gave new powers to local governments, but left the details of implementation to states. Most did very little, but when a coalition of left parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) returned to power in 1996 in Kerala, the government launched the People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning (the Campaign hereafter). All 1,214 local governments in Kerala — municipalities and the three rural tiers of district, block and *gram panchayats* (rural local governments) — were given new functions and powers of decision making, and were granted discretionary budgeting authority over 35–40% of the state's developmental expenditures. In addition to devolving resources, state officials sought to directly promote participatory democracy by mandating structures and processes designed to maximise the direct involvement of citizens in planning and budgeting.

In Brazil, the origins of the local participatory government were quite different, but bore interesting parallels to Kerala. The return to democracy in 1989 marked not only a significant political transition, but also the ascendancy of civil society organisations (CSOs). The new Constitution (1989) introduced a wide range of participatory mechanisms, including popular councils in health and education, and new powers and responsibilities for local government. But local politics in Brazil are dominated by traditional elites, and the take-up of these new participatory opportunities was limited. The exception was participatory budgeting (PB), first introduced in the city of Porto Alegre in 1983 by a PT government. Initially, the PB process was little more than a set of practices promoted by CSOs that allowed citizens to play a role in shaping the annual capital budget. Each year, under the impetus of what is by all accounts one of the most sophisticated local civil societies in Brazil, the institutional infrastructure and design of PB evolved, expanding the scope and reach of participation and fine-tuning the procedures to ensure that participatory inputs were translated into budgetary outputs. Because of the success of PB in Porto Alegre and other cities, the PT gained a reputation as a party of good governance (which has since been seriously tarnished at the national level).

Over the past two decades, PB has been embraced by a wide range of local parties and has been expanded to over 400 cities, including large metropolises such as Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo.

While the actual design of the Campaign and PB are different, the political origins are very similar, as are the foundational principles. Much as is true of the participatory thrust of the South African White Paper on Local Government (DPLG 1998) and the RDP, PB and the Campaign were specifically conceived as vehicles for deepening democracy, and had their roots in civil society.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in each case, associationalist and technocratic logics converged, and the case for participation was made both in terms of building active citizenship in a context of thin citizenship, and capturing the efficiency gains of increased accountability and mobilising community resources. This convergence was neither fortuitous nor the product of the international development community. Rather, it emerged directly from the organised strength and public influence of social movements in challenging existing elite-dominated state structures. These challenges included sophisticated normative and efficiency critiques of the limits of representative democracy, and resulted directly in demands for more inclusive and participatory forms of local democratic control.<sup>6</sup>

But PB and the Campaign parted from the South African vision of DLG (as represented in the RDP) in being much more explicit about the institutional challenges of promoting participation and the political obstacles to be surmounted. In South Africa, the terms of the transition had produced a ruling party that saw itself as the incarnation of transformative politics and as the sole legitimate heir of the National Democratic Revolution. So even as the RDP reserved an important role for civil society in the transformative project of deracialising South Africa, it viewed civil society's role as largely complementary to the goals of the ANC. As a truly hegemonic force, the ANC could in effect subsume civil society. This political logic, born of the broad and encompassing mandate that the transition conferred on the ANC and to the quite extraordinary state capacities inherited from the apartheid regime, explains why structures and processes that were originally presented as providing autonomous spaces for civil society participation in DLG, such as community development forums and integrated development plans (IDPs), were quickly (and especially after the introduction of GEAR and its emphasis on managerialism) either brought under the control of party structures or substituted with more technocratic forms of decision making.

In contrast, the political circumstances under which participation was promoted in Porto Alegre and Kerala came against the backdrop of a crisis of political party systems and the left's loss of faith in the traditional top-down, command-and-control transformative state. In Brazil, PB was publicly presented as an alternative to the traditional local clientelistic state and as a means for dislodging oligarchical party control. In Kerala, the challenge was less public (supported as it was by a party in



power), but the architects of the Campaign and its civil society progenitor — the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, a 50,000-member organisation with a long history of engagement in local level development — were determined to challenge the power of patronage politicians, and especially what is locally referred to as the ‘bureaucrat–politician nexus of corruption’. In Brazil, the challenge to politicians was frontal: the PB process was designed to operate in parallel to the official budgeting process and to circumvent elected councillors. In Kerala, the Campaign was designed to integrate locally elected *panchayat* officials, but to carefully contain their discretionary powers through participatory structures. In Kerala, moreover, the goal was not just to clean up local government, but to build local government by in effect devolving traditional line department functions to *panchayats*.

Another point of contrast with the RDP and the vision of participatory DLG is that PB and the Campaign both viewed institutional reform firstly and foremostly as a means to providing new avenues of mobilisation. The emphasis was less on promoting development and extending service delivery and more on nurturing new forms of state–citizen engagement, and specifically on changing the way in which choices about development are made. In Brazil, PB has been closely tied to the new discourses of active citizenship that grew directly out of the democracy movement. When the PT came to power in Porto Alegre as a coalition of diverse social movements, there was actually little agreement as to what a PT government should do other than increase popular participation (Baiocchi 2003). The rallying cry of the first PB became the ‘inversion of priorities’, i.e. reversing the traditional pattern of elite-dominated budgeting. In Kerala, the political logic of the Campaign was succinctly summarised by a key Planning Board official: ‘Politicians and bureaucrats want to hold onto power and the only way to dislodge them is through a social movement’. The link between mobilisation and development was, moreover, made very clear. Making his case for democratic decentralisation, especially with respect to Kerala’s economic problems, the architect of the Campaign, Thomas Isaac, writes as follows:

Defending the public infrastructure in education, health and other sectors is no longer possible without improving the quality of their services. All these necessitate a reorientation of the mass movements towards direct intervention in the development process in order to improve productivity or improve the quality of services (Thomas Isaac & Franke 2002:45).

A permanently mobilised civil society thus emerges as the primary goal of the Campaign and PB, and, in stark contrast to the technocratic view, planning becomes ‘an instrument of social mobilisation’ and specifically a means of re-engaging citizens in the process of public decision making.



## INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

It is possible to identify four design principles that both these cases share in common:

- 1) giving citizens a direct role in city governance by creating a range of public forums (micro-regional councils, district councils, sectoral committees, plenary meetings, delegate councils) in which citizens and/or delegates can publicly articulate and debate their needs;
- 2) linking participatory inputs to the actual budgeting process through rule-bound procedures;
- 3) improving transparency in the budgeting process by increasing the range of actors involved and publicising the process; and, by the same token, reducing the possibility of elite capture; and
- 4) incentivising agency by providing tangible returns to grassroots participation.

In Kerala, the Campaign is part of the annual plan exercise led by the Kerala State Planning Board. The process begins at the local level, where each of the states' 990 rural *panchayats* is granted 'untied' funds (between 35–40% of total plan expenditures) and mandated to produce a local plan and to design and budget for specific projects across the full range of development sectors. *Panchayats* are required to develop their plans through a series of nested participatory exercises in which citizens are given a direct role in shaping policies and projects. In a first stage, open, public *gram sabhas* (ward-level assemblies) are held to determine broad priorities and to elect delegates to task forces for each of ten development sectors.<sup>7</sup> The task forces — which include one government official and one elected representative — then develop a shelf of projects to be presented to the *panchayat*. The *panchayat* finalises a budget based on projects proposed by the task forces and presents the budget (which is distributed in advance) to a second *gram sabha*. All budgeted projects that involve targeted beneficiaries (e.g. housing for the poor) are required to have a beneficiary committee and to publish lists of beneficiaries for *gram sabha* approval. The plans formulated at the *panchayat* level are submitted to the higher level (the block), which formulates its own plan by integrating *panchayat* plans. The cycle is then repeated at the district and finally the state level. Fully 35–40% of the final state-wide plan is as such a direct product of this bottom-up planning exercise.

The most successful and carefully researched case of PB in Brazil has been Porto Alegre, which has become a model administration and a point of reference for other PB initiatives. The current format of citizen participation in Porto Alegre has evolved significantly from the original model of neighbourhood assemblies and a city-wide budget council of delegates from the neighbourhoods. Since the early

1990s, the structure of meetings throughout the city has become more complex, evolving to include thematic forums where participants can debate city priorities that are not necessarily specific to one district or neighbourhood. The process begins in March of each year, with district-level assemblies in each of the city's 16 districts in which citizens participate as individuals and as representatives of various CSOs (neighbourhood associations, cultural groups, special interest groups). These popular assemblies are followed by meetings in subsequent months by delegates elected from each assembly who deliberate about the district's needs and specific projects. By the end of the year, projects and priorities are passed on to a municipal council of the budget made up of representatives from each district, who then reconcile demands with available resources and propose and approve a municipal budget in conjunction with members of the administration. The municipal legislative then approves the budget. The projects proposed are then monitored by participants in subsequent months and years. Every budget proposal in Porto Alegre has been accepted. The popularity of PB has enabled PT administrations to carry out a number of ambitious reforms, such as introducing land use taxes targeted at wealthier citizens that have funded many PB projects. Studies of other PB cities show that the general structure of the process is similar, involving popular assemblies and elected delegates. Key differences have to do with the extent to which delegates are bound by clearly defined priorities established by the popular assemblies and the extent to which the popular budget is binding.

When compared to South Africa, a very interesting contrast emerges. Even if the architecture of participation is quite similar (conforming to the four points of institutional design at the beginning of this section), in South Africa participation in DLG has been much more formally institutionalised, at least as measured by the range and detail of enabling legislation and the wealth of legally mandated procedures. Kerala comes very close to South Africa in this respect, but much of the more fine-tuned regulation of the participatory process was introduced *after* the mass mobilisation phase of the Campaign was launched. In Porto Alegre, the principles of the PB process are enshrined in the Constitution, but it has never actually been given any formal legislative support, and exists entirely as a set of highly developed practices. In both Kerala and Brazil, this lack of institutionalisation was in part by design. In Kerala, the architects of the Campaign feared that over-institutionalising the process would empower the bureaucracy and politicians at the expense of civil society. In Brazil, a long history of corporatism and clientelism made the proponents of PB especially weary of giving the initiative to the state. Indeed, in Porto Alegre, the PT leadership refused to institutionalise the process, on the grounds that this would deprive civil society actors of the ability to make up new rules and to learn from practice.

## PARTICIPATION

A number of studies have already established that in institutional terms the Campaign has resulted in a significant reorganisation of the state and governance, and that the level and scope of decentralisation surpasses what has been achieved in any other Indian states since the 1993 constitutional amendments (Thomas Isaac & Franke 2002; Véron 2001; World Bank 2000). Firstly, the increase in the discretionary portion of village *panchayat* budgets has been dramatic, jumping from Rs. 1,000 million in 1996–97 (the year before the campaign) to Rs. 4,204 million in 1997–98, and over Rs. 5,000 million in each of the three years following. A World Bank report (2000:28–29) found that Kerala has the greatest degree of local expenditure autonomy and is the most fiscally decentralised state in India, and is second only to Colombia in the developing world.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the campaign has brought very significant devolution of authoritative decision-making powers. In our survey of key informants in 72 randomly selected *panchayats*, we found that in every single case *gram sabhas* were held on a regular basis, task forces were constituted, development plans were created and beneficiaries committees were set up (Heller et al. forthcoming). Thirdly, the most decisive impact of the Campaign, as documented in a number of studies, has been on the level and composition of participation. Data collected by the State Planning Board from all 990 *panchayats* for the first two years of the campaign shows that 10.3% of the electorate participated in the first annual *gram sabhas* in 1996 and 10.6% in 1997 (Chaudhuri & Heller 2003). The social composition of the campaign, moreover, improved drastically in the second year. If in the first year of the campaign ‘scheduled caste’ and ‘scheduled tribe’ (SC/ST)<sup>9</sup> participation was well below the average rate (relative participation was 0.53, with 1.0 indicating the participation rate of the general population), but by the second year it was 1.44, meaning that SCs/STs were participating in greater proportions than non-SC/STs. Similarly, women’s relative participation increased from 0.57 to 0.82, with women constituting 40% of all participants in 1997–98. Data collected from the sample of 72 *panchayats* found that representation of women and SCs in task forces (the bodies charged with designing projects) was less high than in *gram sabhas*, but still impressive. If participation was broad and inclusive, it was also effective. In a survey of 858 key respondents (including activists, government officials and elected officials), almost two-thirds (64%) of our sample answered that ‘felt needs’ expressed in the *gram sabhas* are ‘always reflected’ in the final plan. Similarly, task forces were also very effective: 80% of our respondents said that task force projects were ‘almost always’ or ‘always’ included in the final *panchayat* plan. Finally, the associational spillover effects of the Campaign have received extensive commentary. A whole new generation of younger activists and politicians came alive with the introduction of the Campaign. Over 14,000 local elected officials who previously

were limited to largely ceremonial roles were given meaningful functions. Local CSOs that had no local state to engage with found a new partner in *panchayats*. A number of local studies have explicitly tied the rapid rise in self-help groups (generally formed by lower-caste women) to the matching funds made available by the campaign (Chathukulam & John 2002; Manjula 2000; Seema & Mukherjee 2000). Registration data that we collected from 72 sample *panchayats* shows a three-fold increase in the number of self-help groups during the campaign.

In Brazil, it is also very clear that PB has invigorated associational life (Abers 2000; Avritzer 2002). In cities where PB has been sustained, participation has tended to increase each year. Single case studies have shown that PB has had a 'crowding-in' effect on civil society, and Baiocchi (2005) has pointed to significant ripple effects. In Porto Alegre, he found that women who participated in the PB process formed new alliances and became active in other areas, including the policing of domestic violence. In a survey of 833 delegates from 11 PB cities, Wampler (forthcoming) found that participatory institutions 'are rewarding group-oriented behavior among individuals from lower socio-economic classes'.

One of the methodological problems with most studies of PB is that they select for the dependent variable, making it difficult to isolate the impact of PB from other variables. The observed success of PB could thus simply be a reflection of favourable preconditions, such as an active civil society. A study that I and my collaborators conducted corrects for this problem by pairing five cities that adopted PB with cities of the same size and political configuration (as measured by PT support) that did not introduce PB (Baiocchi et al. 2006). The findings are telling. As the associational democracy literature has emphasised, institutional reform matters. The paired analysis shows that measurable increases in the associational activity of CSOs and of their capacity to effectively engage government took place in four of the five PB cities, but remained constant (i.e. dominated by clientelistic ties) in the five non-PB cities. The introduction of PB made it possible for existing CSOs to abandon either clientelistic or 'combative' strategies in favour of direct rule-bound engagement through the PB process.<sup>10</sup> The varying degree of success did reflect the pre-existing strength of CSOs. The *municípios* (municipalities) where CSOs had enjoyed significant organisational strength and autonomy before the introduction of PB were the *municípios* where the introduction of PB had the most significant impact. This is not surprising, but what is extremely revealing is that in the two *municípios* where civil society was weak to begin with (i.e. dependent on clientelistic ties) and where the budgeting process had traditionally been dominated by local elites, the introduction of PB did bring civil society demands directly into the budgeting process and weakened clientelistic practices. In these cases, weak civil societies became more active, but only under the protection of a reformist state. There is one cautionary case. In

one of the PB cities, the introduction of PB actually increased the control of a political party in power over civil society. CSOs that once enjoyed a high degree of autonomy (but no opportunities for engaging the state) compromised much of their self-organisation in exchange for inclusion in the governance process. This underscores the importance of designing participatory processes that protect, and ideally promote, the organisational autonomy of CSOs.

One must be cautious about making generalisations about the conditions for successful participation based on these two cases. There has been enormous variation within each case. In Kerala, the Campaign had a much greater impact in rural areas than in municipalities, in part because political efforts were focused on *panchayats*. Even across Kerala's 990 *panchayats*, the level of participation varies enormously, and in statistical tests does not correlate with regional factors (which might act as a proxy for social capital) or any of a large number of stock variables (such as population, population density, economic measures, etc.) (Chaudhuri & Heller 2003). There is, however, a strong correlation between proxy measures of rural union organisation, suggesting a link with existing mobilisational capacity. A similar picture emerges in Brazil. The pre-existing strength of civil society is clearly linked to both the adoption and the relative success of PB. But there are also notable exceptions, as in the city of Camaragibe in the north-east, where a very slight shift in electoral distributions displaced a traditional oligarchical elite in favour of a quite successful PB process (Baiocchi et al. 2006). What the study of five paired cities underscores is that the success of participation depends in large part on local configuration of power and pre-existing state–society conditions. When this is coupled with the finding from Kerala that rates of participation of subordinate groups increased rapidly after the first year of the Campaign, it becomes clear that participation is highly plastic and is very much an artifact of politics, both in the sense of formal political opportunities that result from institutional changes (that follow, for example, from changes in ruling party) and social movement politics that can strengthen civil society capacities.

## DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACTS

The developmental impact of participatory decentralisation is extremely difficult to evaluate. Simply identifying measurable indicators itself raises a range of questions about what constitutes development (e.g. for housing, does one measure the units, the location, the quality, the distribution or the sustainability of projects?). Even if one could resolve such problems, actually isolating the effect of the participatory component of the budget and comparing it to non-participatory inputs while controlling for other variables is so difficult that I am not aware of any study that

has done this successfully. The fragmentary evidence that is available does, however, suggest that, in Kerala and Brazil, participatory decentralisation has resulted in three broad developmental gains. Firstly, expenditures have been more carefully aligned with democratic preferences. Secondly, because of higher levels of participation and greater accountability, the level of leakage has been reduced. Thirdly, allocation patterns are now more redistributive.

In Kerala, the survey of key respondents produced very clear results (Heller et al. forthcoming). All respondent categories (officials, politicians and civil society) saw the Campaign as having improved the effectiveness of development services and projects in all 13 categories they were asked about. Improvement was much more marked in providing housing and child care than in promoting local economic growth. The survey results also point to a clear redistributive impact. Firstly, the high impact areas of the Campaign were in housing to the poor, child services and roads. All three of these areas have a pro-poor impact.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, 89% of respondents indicated that the primary beneficiaries of the Campaign were the 'socially and economically disadvantaged', with only 4% indicating the 'socially and economically advantaged'. Similarly, when asked if 'beneficiaries selected for various schemes under the campaign were more or less likely to be poor than under earlier schemes', 88% indicated 'more likely under the Campaign'. Finally, when asked if corruption had increased or decreased with the Campaign, 74% said 'decreased' and 6% said 'increased'. Even a majority of the *heads of opposition party branches* point to a decrease. These survey findings also find support in a recent report by the Planning Board in Kerala, which found that while corruption was still a significant problem, the Campaign represented a dramatic improvement.<sup>12</sup>

If the Campaign was a matter of building institutions of DLG where none existed before, PB has been about making existing local government structures more participatory rather than building entirely new structures of governance and delivery. In this respect, the direct developmental impact of PB is even harder to assess. Scholars who have conducted case studies generally find that PB has made capital expenditures (and, in a few cases, operational expenditures) more responsive to developmental needs, and there is also ample qualitative evidence that the transparency of the PB process has reduced the wholesale rent seeking of the past. A statistical analysis of the cities that adopted PB in the period 1996–2000 found that they were far more successful in reducing poverty, even when a range of possible confounding variables are controlled for (Baiocchi et al. 2006). The evidence from Porto Alegre – which is the only PB city with a significant time lag – is unambiguous, both with respect to the efficiency and the redistributive nature of PB outlays (Baiocchi 2005; Abers 2000). The paired cities study discussed earlier also found that CSOs felt that the introduction of PB led to a dramatic improvement in the

targeting and quality of public investments and, in many cases, in the performance of service departments.

Evaluating the developmental impact of participatory reforms is clearly an area that calls for more research and better methodologies. Having said this, the near-consensus view among researchers is that the Campaign and PB have had significantly positive effects on developmental outcomes. In both cases, the mechanisms at work have been the increased accountability of officials and elected representative and the greater transparency — or, more accurately, the increased publicness — of the budgeting process. Stated somewhat differently, participatory structures have reduced the transaction costs of influence for traditionally marginalised groups and increased the transactions costs of influence (and capture) for traditional elites. Many of the officials and CSO leaders we interviewed in PB cities were able to provide clear, detailed and precise information about the budgeting process in such cities, in sharp contrast to their counterparts in the non-PB cities. In the case of Kerala, there is also excellent qualitative evidence that decentralisation and participation resulted in the much better use of local information, and also triggered significant innovation and horizontal diffusion of new, grassroots ‘best practices’ (Thomas Isaac & Franke 2002).

The problems that remain, however, are significant. *Panchayats* in Kerala remain institutionally weak. The process of building local institutional capacity has been slow, and the quality of the systems in place remains quite poor. A number of critics have pointed out that *panchayats* often have had difficulty in spending their money and maintaining even the most basic accounting practices. The Planning Board openly acknowledges that the quality of planning — as measured by the formulation of strategically integrated projects — was highly uneven. At the *panchayat* level, plans were more often than not little more than aggregations of ward or sectoral demands, and the process of integrating *panchayat* plans into block and district plans has not worked at all. In Brazil, while some PB cities have introduced thematic forums that allow for the discussion of city-wide issues, many have not progressed beyond neighbourhood participation and the listing of priorities. And in both Kerala and Brazil, the participatory process has only had a limited impact on the operational budget and on transforming the silo culture of line departments. In Kerala, some line services such as agriculture have been successfully integrated into the new *panchayat* governance structures, but most department personnel remain beholden to their bureaucratic superiors. And in Brazil, there is as yet no evidence that PB has fundamentally changed the notoriously fragmented nature of the Brazilian local state. Finally, when compared with South Africa, it becomes particularly clear that as highly developed as participatory structures are, the technical quality of planning and the capacity of departments to deliver remains underdeveloped.



## SOME TENTATIVE LESSONS

In scope and depth, the Campaign and PB have been widely recognised as significant and fairly successful cases of promoting decentralised participatory development. These are extremely complex institutional reforms that display highly uneven levels of implementation and impact. Drawing out any lessons must be done with care and with many qualifications. The most important qualification is that there are no ready-made transposable solutions, given that institutional performance is always conditioned by history and context, most notably existing state capacity, the quality and activity of civil society, and the underlying political configuration. For proponents of participatory forms of DLG in South Africa — where the promise has been great, but the results to date frustrating — these two cases pose some interesting points of comparison, especially with respect to the fundamental tensions between efficiency and participation. Because of space limitations, I present these observations in a very stylised form.

Firstly, the most important lesson is that not only is it possible to create institutions that allow for meaningful forms of citizen engagement, but that the conditions for participation are quite plastic. When offered genuine opportunities for participation, local actors will get involved. Participation is not a function of stock variables such as human capital and social capital, which can only be accumulated slowly over time. It is a function of much more malleable factors, such as institutional design, openings in the opportunity structure, alliances and new incentives. When poor people do not participate, it is not because they don't have the skills or the determination, but because the obstacles to participation are too high. There are transaction costs to participation, and careful design and political action can go a long way in changing those costs. A related point is that participation can have dramatic knock-on effects. This is true not only in the sense of demonstration effects (more groups and communities join as the returns become clear), but also in the sense of expanding the possibilities and meanings of citizenship. Of the many obstacles the poor face, none is more debilitating than the cultural constraints of limited cognitive horizons and limited experience of working the system. The 'performance of competence and innovation' that even the most modest forms of participation offer confronts these constraints by nurturing what Appadurai calls the 'capacity to aspire' (2004). In sum, participatory institutions that are carefully designed and properly scaled can significantly expand opportunities for the poor and the most marginalised groups to practise citizenship.

Secondly, the two most common technocratic objections to decentralised participation — that poor communities don't have the capacity to engage in local planning and that too much participation can be disruptive, time-consuming and even lead to conflict — simply don't hold up. Before the Campaign, local citizens had

few, if any channels through which to influence public action and no prior experience of planning or local development. Existing structures of local government were paper thin. The Campaign strategy was in effect to build institutions through mobilisation. The process was messy and has required extensive fine-tuning from year to year, yet *panchayats* in Kerala have managed to produce annual local plans, design thousands of projects across a wide range of sectors, and basically transform and more often than not improve on the command-and-control line department delivery mode of the past. Though critics argue that local government still has significant institutional weaknesses, there is widespread recognition that the Campaign has created forms of popular governance where none existed before.<sup>13</sup> The fact that all political parties in Kerala's extremely partisan polity now publicly support the Campaign underscores its broad-based legitimacy.

Under PB, ordinary citizens have proven more than capable of making city budgets and negotiating with department officials. Indeed, as Abers (1996) has shown, popular participation actually forced city officials to transform a cumbersome, opaque and needlessly complicated budgeting process into a much more streamlined, clear and transparent one. The fact that neighbourhood assemblies were in many cases supplemented by the creation of thematic groups to take up city-wide issues suggests that territorially based participation, rather than producing local particularisms, can have learning and scaling-up effects. Indeed, the extralocal networks created through thematic forums in Brazil and through the many district and state-level conferences of Campaign workers in Kerala (both for training and 'best practices' diffusion) have created new ties *across* communities, movements and sectors, generating precisely the kind of bridging ties that many analysts have argued promote development (Storper 2004). Rather than unleashing parochialisms in what are extremely heterogeneous societies, democratic participation has increased interactions among groups and levelled the playing field. Women, *dalits* and the poor have become more organised in Kerala and have benefitted the most materially from the Campaign. Participation in PB has been far more pronounced in working-class and poor communities, and has opened doors to CSOs of blacks, gays and the homeless (Wampler forthcoming; Baiocchi et al. 2006). Both cases would appear to confirm the argument made in the deliberative democracy literature that meaningful public spaces for deliberation and joint collective decision making nurture thicker civil societies with more cross-cutting ties. To borrow from Hirschman's famous formulation, promoting the politics of voice can act as a counter to the politics of loyalty (clientelism, communalism) or the politics of exit (apathy, crime, flight). Given the involuted dynamics of so many poor urban communities in South Africa and increased concern with social disintegration, this may be an especially important lesson.

Thirdly, even as it is important to bear in mind the power equations that often pit technocrats against the associationalists, bureaucrats and politicians against civil society, and institutional logics against mobilisational logics, we must also recognise that local government is often an arena where alliances across the state–society boundary can develop and produce synergistic outcomes (Evans 2002). The most unexpected finding from the Kerala survey data was that local department officials — widely perceived to have opposed the Campaign — in fact had extremely favourable views of it. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere (Heller 2005), the Campaign itself was made possible by the support of key factions in the bureaucracy and the political class. Similarly, in Brazil, many of the government officials we interviewed in the paired cities study welcomed PB as a way of developing ties to partners in civil society. This fits neatly with Chalmers et al.'s (1997) argument that the decline of corporatism and populism in Latin America has opened up room for 'associative networks' that cut across traditional state–society boundaries. The resulting dense ties between officials and civil society actors, moreover, neatly replicate that embeddedness that Evans (1995) has argued was critical to the success of the East Asian developmental state. If such ties were critical to promoting industrialisation under conditions of authoritarianism, it only stands to reason that they are even more critical to promoting social development and redistribution under democratic conditions (Heller 1999).

Fourthly, even as we recognise that participation has been possible and consequential in Brazil and Kerala, and that it has in large part emerged from civil society and social movements, we must not slip into the voluntarism and spontaneity of the associationalists. As Watts (2000:82) has noted, 'the danger of conceiving of development as dialogue and negotiation — even if the powers of rights driven social movements are upheld and enforced — is that development's primary reality remains struggle, strife and conflict'. To make full sense of PB and the Campaign, one has to acknowledge the historical and political configuration that made them possible and, specifically, that created a balance of power that was amendable to reform from below. Three key elements of a favourable 'ecology of actors' (Evans 2002) for participatory decentralisation can be identified: reformist elements within the state that recognise the limits of traditional command-and-control developmentalism; civil societies that enjoy sufficient organisational capacity and operational autonomy to align with, but not be coopted by, the local state; and a programmatic left-of-centre political party that can orchestrate the necessary political conditions for reform.

A final lesson is strategic. The Campaign and PB were made possible by openings from above, but were born of experiments that were developed and elaborated through a continuous process of learning-by-doing. What made this possible was reversing the conventional logic of first putting institutions and systems in place and then inviting participation. As intellectual elites who see themselves as

equipped with solutions, academics and policy makers tend towards high modernism, i.e. an imperial and exaggerated sense of the actual predictable effects of state intervention (governmentality). What results is an apolitical, incrementalist view of institution building that presupposes the existence of good governance blueprints that can be implemented by committed experts and capacitated state agencies. The reform sequence that is proposed is one in which institutions and all the necessary procedures and systems are in place before real power and resources are devolved. The architects of the Campaign and PB proceeded from a very different set of assumptions. Having taken note of the many well-intentioned institutional reform projects in India and Brazil that have repeatedly been scuttled or nibbled to death by vested interests, they argued for an approach that reversed the sequence, i.e. devolving resources first, and then building the institutions (Thomas Isaac & Franke 2002). The approach was, of course, not quite so crude, since, as we have seen, the Campaign was built on an elaborate institutional architecture, and the PB process benefitted from the rich repertoire of participatory forms developed by Brazil's social movements. But there is no doubt that the sudden introduction of binding participatory control of significant portions of the budget represented a shock to the system and of business as usual. The strategy — and it was every bit a self-conscious strategy — was predicated on two assumptions: firstly, that only such an approach could dislodge vested interests and pre-empt various elite tactics of resistance; and, secondly, that this sudden opening of institutional spaces could trigger a mobilisational response that would create its own momentum of reform. The birthing pangs that critics have pointed to notwithstanding, this approach quite clearly was successful in opening up the institutional and political space for sustained reform. In light of this, posing the question of what might have happened in South Africa if the spirit of the RDP's commitments to people-driven development had been fully carried through — for example, if community development forums had been maintained, if IDPs had been formulated through binding community inputs (rather than consultants) and if housing projects had been developed by beneficiary committees — takes us well beyond dry exercises in counterfactual analysis and back to politics as the art of the possible.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This paper draws on two separate research projects conducted in India and Brazil. For India, I would especially like to acknowledge my research collaborators, Shubham Chaudhuri of the World Bank and K. N. Harilal of the Centre for Development Studies, as well as the Ford Foundation for its generous funding. For Brazil, I am indebted to my collaborators — Shubham Chaudhuri, Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Marcelo Kunrath Silva — and to funding from the World Bank.
- <sup>2</sup> Bardhan (1999:189) divides the terrain into two camps of ‘technocrats’ (which includes ‘positivistic economists, die-hard Stalinists ... leftover Fabians, mandarin administrators and technocrats’) and ‘anarcho-communitarians’. If I agree with his characterisation of the former, I think the latter is too lumpy. With the exception of some fringe and not very serious groups, most of the non-governmental organisations, social movements and other civil society organisations that support democratic decentralisation do not romanticise community life and in fact favour institutionally supported forms of participation as a remedy not only for the deficits of technocratic decision making, but also the inequities of communities.
- <sup>3</sup> For an elaboration, see Castell’s (2003) discussion of reactive versus project identities.
- <sup>4</sup> Even Habermas, the most influential and sophisticated exponent of deliberative democracy, falls into this trap. In his most recent direct contribution to the debate (1996), he explicitly argues that while civil society can problematise and mobilise around issues and exert influence over the political system through the public sphere, it should have no direct power over decision-making processes.
- <sup>5</sup> For the most comprehensive overview of the Campaign’s origins and design, see Thomas Isaac and Franke (2002); for PB, see Baiocchi (2005), Avritzer (2002) and Abers (2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Though I can’t develop the point here, it is worth noting that the civil society-based critiques of the limits of representative (aggregative) democracy that emerged in all three cases were almost identical, and almost exactly replicated the general terms of the debate in the academic literature between advocates of deliberative (and associational) democracy and advocates of formal, representative democracy.
- <sup>7</sup> I focus on rural *gram sabhas* because the research summarised here only covers rural areas. Each *panchayat* has an average population of 27,000. *Gram sabhas* are held at the ward level (10–12 per *panchayat*). The *panchayat* council has one elected representative from each ward. Elections are held every four years and are fiercely contested.
- <sup>8</sup> In a study of six states, Jha (2000:2614) found that in 1999–2000, the average size of the *gram panchayat* budget in Kerala was Rs. 8,900,000. The next-highest of any state was Rs. 200,000.
- <sup>9</sup> ‘Schedule caste’ is the bureaucratic designation for ‘untouchables’, now referred to as *dalits*. ‘Scheduled tribe’ is the bureaucratic designation for ‘tribals’, now referred to as *adivassis*.
- <sup>10</sup> Wampler and Avritzer’s (2004) study of Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, as well as Wampler’s (forthcoming) survey of delegates in 11 PB cities also found that the introduction of PB weakened traditional practices of bargaining for public goods through clientelistic ties in favour of group-based negotiations.
- <sup>11</sup> Because the rural road infrastructure is already highly developed, it has been argued that new roads primarily benefit marginalised communities.
- <sup>12</sup> As reported in *The Hindu*, 11 May 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> One of the most respected and sceptical commentators on the campaign, K. P. Kannan, has maybe offered one of the most succinct assessments: the Campaign has not only created a ‘public platform for a vigilant civil society’, but has also ensured an ‘enabling environment for development’ (Kannan & Pillai 2004:39).