



# Participate

Knowledge from the margins for post-2015



What do we know about how to bring  
the perspectives of people living in  
poverty into global policy-making?

*'The present crossroads of history can be navigated more confidently by listening to ordinary citizens. The transitions of today can be responded to more assuredly with the strength of citizens' voices. For the journey through the next millennium is to be undertaken by citizens.'*

The Commonwealth Foundation (1999: 20)

**Front cover:**  
Children participate  
in a disaster  
management  
meeting  
G.M.B. AKASH  
(PANOS PICTURES)

Previous global consultations with people living in poverty have promised new opportunities for those most marginalised to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and for relationships to be built between ordinary people and the institutions which make those decisions.

However, for many these processes have been experienced as 'extractive' listening projects, as opposed to ongoing conversations – with people left feeling that their voice has been used for political ends which are not their own. There are considerable lessons to be learned about what to do, and what not to do. If the future of development is to be characterised by a tangible degree of 'ownership' by those who are affected by it, then it is crucial to learn these lessons.

The consultations reviewed here are: Voices of the Poor (The World Bank 2000); a collection of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (The World Bank and the IMF 1999-ongoing); Citizens and Governance: Civil Society in the New Millennium (The Commonwealth Foundation and CIVICUS 1999); The 2011 Global Fund Partnership Forum e-Consultations (The Global Fund 2011).

### Call to action for the High Level Panel for Post-2015

By providing a review of what has come before in global consultations with people living in poverty, we hope to offer a framing that will support the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons to ensure that knowledge from the margins is at the centre of their recommendations on a global development agenda beyond 2015.

*Please note that this review has been accelerated to meet the timetable of the High Level Panel. A more comprehensive version will be produced for publication.*

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# What do we know about how to bring the perspectives of people living in poverty into global policy-making?

Participatory approaches to consultation generate unique knowledge of people's realities to inform decisions about how to address poverty, exclusion and injustice.

Participatory methodologies bring to the policy process the complex and rapidly changing realities of people living in poverty. They have added a diversity of perspectives and broadened the kinds of actors who engage in policy processes (e.g. children in urban slums). This has led to an increasingly multi-dimensional understanding of poverty.

*Large global consultations which have attempted to engage people in participatory ways have had mixed success, and there are important lessons to be learnt from them:*

- **When synthesising people's voices and realities they must not be disembodied, de-contextualised, or homogenised.**  
The process of synthesis acts to exclude some perspectives. This can mean that people's 'voices' used in policy-making are taken out of context. There is also a challenge in synthesis of homogenising the experience of poverty. To understand the complex realities of people's lives, dissonance is as important as patterns of similarity in synthesis.
- **Participatory consultations can exclude significant and important elements of the population, in particular, the voices of those who are poorest and of those who do not participate in formal spaces are often missing.**  
In almost all cases spaces for participation have been exclusionary. Many large-scale consultations have equated listening to the poorest as listening to NGOs. However it is important to go beyond the level of NGOs and reach citizens and the spaces within which they organise directly.
- **A commitment from policy-makers to question established ways of looking at social, economic and political issues is important for meaningful change.**  
Unless fundamental challenges to the way in which development is constructed are seen to be a legitimate part of a participation process, it is difficult to see how the fundamental change



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required to make it responsive to the very poorest can come about.

- **Spaces for policy influence in participatory consultations cannot be closed or pre-determined, they must allow for ideas to emerge from the ground up.**  
Participation is often restricted to the development of policy proposals which already have predetermined narratives. This closing down of policy space is further compounded by the fact that real decisions are often made in terms of budgeting and financing where participation is highly restricted. In addition, the agendas of those with power over the process of the consultation (for example, the sponsoring institutions) can have influence over which messages are communicated.
- **There must be mechanisms for holding global decision-making and policy implementation to account at the local-level.**  
To ensure accountability, those closest to the issues must drive the participatory process and set the agenda. National-level coordinating mechanisms can help ensure ongoing local ownership and accountability at the country level and provide a space for reflection and reassessment of decisions.

Voting for and against the performance of services

# Case examples of previous global consultations

## Voices of the Poor

*The World Bank, 2000*

Voices of the Poor gathered the voices of 60,000 people living in poverty from 60 countries. The study consists of two parts: a review of participatory poverty studies conducted in the 1990s covering 40,000 people in 50 countries around the world; and a series of new studies undertaken in 1999 in 23 countries engaging over 20,000 people, using a range of participatory methodologies. The project was managed by the World Bank and undertaken to influence the content of the World Development Report (WDR) 2000/01 on poverty and development.

The overall objective of informing the WDR 2000/01 and the tight deadline that was associated with this put pressure on the participatory process. The fact that it was directly commissioned by the World Bank also meant that political and contractual influences were significant.

### Participatory Poverty Assessments at the World Bank

In the 1990s the World Bank began to conduct Poverty Assessments routinely in order to identify the main poverty problems within countries and to link the policy agenda to issues of poverty. In order to complement the Bank's statistical data with an assessment of poverty by people living in poverty themselves – the World Bank also developed the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). PPAs initially focused on producing texts for donor agency analysis, but have more recently focused on country level policy processes (Norton 2001).

A PPA is an iterative research process that seeks to understand poverty in its local social, institutional, and political context, from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders and to directly involve them in planning follow-up action. (Narayan, with Patel, Schafft, Rademacher and Koch-Schulte 2000a).

### The evolution of a participatory research framework

The Voices of the Poor research was driven by the premise that people living in poverty are the true experts on poverty. The aim of Voices of the Poor therefore was to enable a wide range of people living in poverty in diverse countries and conditions to share their views in such a way that they could inform and contribute to the concepts and content of the WDR 2000/01.

*'A policy document on poverty strategies must therefore be based on the experiences, priorities, reflections and recommendations of poor people, women and men.'*

World Bank website, Voices of the Poor

In discussing the idea of a participatory poverty study to inform the WDR 2000/01 tensions and differences emerged regarding the approach. The methodological framework is described as drawing upon the epistemological traditions of sociology, anthropology, and participatory research, particularly PPAs. The participatory methods in the Voices of the Poor field research tended to offer 'invited spaces' for participation rather than linking the research to collective action at the community level (Chambers 2002).

In developing the framework differences arose as to whether to strive for depth or breadth in the number of sites involved; whether to carry out an analysis of existing data or to conduct new studies; and whether to give country researchers ownership over national level research design or to standardise the methodology. It was agreed that a systematic review of existing studies would be conducted while the new comparative studies were undertaken. The new study would be conducted in 23 countries using a range of participatory methods. The aspect of the



Community members discuss issues in a drama

framework that was most criticised was that the range of issues was restricted and the study undertaken according to a standardised methodology guide with limited room for local adaptation (Cornwall and Fujita 2007).

### Key lessons for participatory consultation

#### Participatory methodologies bring to the policy process the complex and rapidly changing realities of people living in poverty

Voices of the Poor made an essential contribution as a tool for demonstrating the interconnectedness of the issues that affect the lives of people in the poorest communities, and their rapidly changing realities. Understanding this rapid change is essential for policy-makers as it highlights complex issues and development challenges such as an increasingly mobile world.

*'A central learning from the Voices project was the rapid rate of accelerating change for poor, vulnerable and marginalised people. This was both in the conditions*

*they experienced and in their awareness, aspirations and priorities. In recent years, change has become even faster: for example, the revolution of the mobile phone is one obvious dimension; and in many contexts social change, as with gender relations, appears to have become increasingly rapid. Accelerating social change is now paralleled by many decision-makers in development becoming increasingly isolated, out of date and out of touch, and increasing dominance of a paradigm that values measurement, predictability and set best practices, as opposed to valuing judgement, unpredictable emergence and practices which tailored to fit different changing contexts and purposes. These conflicting trends have led insidiously to a crisis which damages development and demands countervailing actions.'*

Robert Chambers 2012: discussing the current relevance of the Voices project

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Informal conversations with women whilst baking during a Reality Check

Participatory methodologies that enable development partners to be more in touch and up to date with what is happening for marginalised people are constantly evolving. Recent Reality Check methodologies used in Bangladesh have clearly demonstrated the rapidity of social change, and have highlighted conditions and developments which policy makers were not aware ([www.reality-check-approach.com](http://www.reality-check-approach.com)).

**Standardised questions and categories limited the scope of those living in poverty to express their reality**

The researchers leading the synthesis of the country level consultations had the power to categorise and frame the realities of those who participated. Given the time constraints in particular, there were vast challenges related to letting categories emerge and being open to new framings, and researchers felt forced to collect for certain topics (Chambers 2002; Rademacher and Patel 2002).

Voices of the Poor opted for a standardisation of data to enable a comparative study (rather than a dynamic, open-ended research process which was tailored to local conditions). Participatory research emphasises exploring people's own categories and meanings and using these as an entry point for analysis. The methodology guide was comprised of pre-framed conceptual categories and questions (e.g. 'social exclusion', 'gender') and thus framed what was possible for respondents to say. This restricted 'the space for creative improvisation and iterative learning that has been deemed so important by participatory research' (Chambers 1997, in Cornwall and Fujita 2007: 53).

**Some findings were contested or diluted by decision-makers**

In the initial stages of the study, World Bank experts were convinced that violence against women had increased. However, Meera Shah who analysed all the site reports found that in some places domestic violence had increased, but overall it had decreased. This conclusion was not accepted at first. Site reports had to be analysed four times before it was accepted (Chambers 2002). Another concern raised by many marginalised people was the level of police brutality and corruption. This message in the Voices of the Poor was strong but was diluted in the WDR 2000/01.

**Opportunities for local-level action and influencing national-level policy on poverty reduction were strengthened when consultations were linked to networks and development processes on the ground**

Influencing national policy-makers was never the guiding objective of the Voices of the Poor research. However, wherever possible studies were linked to existing projects from the outset as a principle mechanism for ensuring that the research would feed into action. Adan, Brock, Kabakcheiva, Kidanu, Melo, Turk and Yusuf (2002) showed that the strength of links with existing projects was an important determinant on the impact the process was able to make. For example linking to the Vietnam PPA maximised impact on the national policy agenda, while the partnership with ActionAid and CBOs in the Somaliland case gave an opportunity for the work to contribute to local change. The greatest impact occurred where the Voices research was situated within existing networks of policy actors or local activists. Not only were there opportunities for action, but existing and new partnerships built around poverty reduction issues were strengthened (Adan *et al* 2002).

*'The broad lesson that the case studies suggest is the importance of viewing participatory research as a process rather than as an episode of research whose findings need to be disseminated. This process needs to be based on an understanding of the local context and designed accordingly.'*

(Adan, Brock, Kabakcheiva, Kidanu, Melo, Turk and Yusuf 2002: 99)

*now reproduced, at the global level, the unadulterated, unmediated local voices of people living in poverty.'*

(Rademacher and Patel 2002: 175)

It was also argued that the selection of 'voices' served as much to legitimise and give authority to pre-constructed policy positions as it did to demonstrate the capacity of policy makers to listen: 'they are used as disembodied voices to humanise the analysis presented in the text and to give it moral authority' (McGee and Brock 2001: 34).

### The 'voices' drawn upon in policy-making were disembodied and de-contextualised

Critics highlighted the way in which the 'voices' selected to affirm policy positions were turned into engaging 'quotes' largely stripped of their original social and political context (Chambers 2002; Cornwall and Fujita 2007). Losing the context made it difficult to discern exactly what was meant by words that could be misinterpreted. It also meant that by the time the 'voices' reached the global synthesis stage they had been processed through multiple layers of abstraction and mediated through the eyes, powers and agendas of institutional actors.

*'It is impossible to discern the construction of the self and deployment of agency in the global narrative; the placement of the speaker is largely lost, along with many local-level insights about what each speaker might have actually meant. That is to say nothing of the local encounter, and the local production of the PPA itself...'  
'... At the scale of a global narrative of poverty, however, references to the quotations as 'voices' can be easily distorted, and should be read more as an aspiration to amplify a human experience than as an actual assertion that we have*

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## Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

*The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, 1999 – ongoing*

Participatory  
Ethnographic  
Evaluation Research  
– separate  
discussions between  
men and women

PRSPs were designed to be comprehensive policy documents that laid out a country's strategies for poverty reduction. In order to do this, PRSPs assessed the extent of poverty within countries with a view to developing macroeconomic, structural and social strategies to generate growth. Introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in 1999, two of the five core principles of PRSPs emphasised participatory political processes. These were firstly, that broad-based civil society participation in the PRSP process should lead to national ownership of the proposed strategies and secondly, that the PRSP should be orientated towards partnerships between government, donors and in-country stakeholders.

*'The needs of the poor were central to the new [PRSP] strategy, and furthermore, 'the poor' were to be given voice to express these needs. Their representatives – civil society organisations – were to be granted access to policy-making circles in order to formulate and implement appropriate 'pro-poor policies'.'*

(Lazarus 2011: 1207)

The WB's and IMF's stated view of participation was one in which 'stakeholders influence and shared control over priority setting, policymaking,

resource allocations, and/or program implementation' which would help to generate a national consensus on, and political support for, policy priorities (Lazarus 2008: 1206). Participation was therefore envisaged as a public consultation exercise, which could take many different forms.

### Forms of participation

**Participatory Poverty Assessments** were donor-driven and funded, and although in Uganda **consultation workshops** allowed for some grassroots ideas about environmental issues to permeate into the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) they were more often used to disseminate information. Civil society organisations (CSOs) were given opportunities to **review draft PRSPs** but often at very short notice (in Honduras they were given only 24 hours) and not available in local languages. **Sector Working Groups** or **Sector Commissions** did encourage dialogue with CSOs and in Uganda, for example, operated to legitimise and formally recognise the role of CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Informally the process encouraged media coverage, popular debates, songs and drama. Exclusion from PRSPs or dissatisfaction over the nature of

participation led CSOs to organise alternative events, including mass marches in protest, counter proposals to government poverty reduction strategies, regional workshops, task forces and consultations, and parallel sector-focussed groups. In most cases these findings were published and made available to governments and donors.

### Constraints to participation

Many constraints to participation were identified. These included: time scales and pressure to complete PRSPs; lack of skills, capacity and material resources in civil society; inadequate provision of information about PRSPs and failure to provide additional information on budgetary processes; the ad-hoc nature of invitations that were often only sent out at the last minute; civil society's failure to assert that they had a right to participate; the closed nature of the writing process; the technical nature of the language used and the dominance of English or Spanish rather than local languages; participation fatigue; CSOs participation restricted to commenting on drafts – not debating alternative strategies; a lack of government capacity to host participatory forums; failure to consider country specific contexts (electoral cycles, civil war, social unrest, institutional pressures, funding streams, prevailing processes etc.).

*'In the case of Uganda, the pressure was on for the PRSP to be completed as quickly as possible. There was great internal urgency to qualify for debt relief... As a result, the PEAP process, in which civil society had been meaningfully involved become constricted to a six month PRSP process from which they found themselves, to some extent, squeezed out.'*

(Dube 2005: 8)

## Key lessons for participatory consultations

### Participation in sectoral domains (education, environment etc.) tended to emphasise technical explanations and mostly failed to review underlying political issues

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (or GPRS) mainstreamed environmental issues. It focussed on economic growth through land intensification and environmentally-friendly technology, the need for environmental audits and technical impact assessments, the idea of land as equity and therefore the necessity for the reform of the land tenure system. Central to this approach was the importance of economic growth and market-led change, an emphasis on technical ways of understanding and controlling the environment, and a view of the environment that was largely

limited to natural factors, with little acknowledgement that natural resources were inseparable from and encumbered by social, political or economic factors. This approach did not explore who had rights to, or control over land and ignored political struggles over how the environment might be defined. Alternative narratives broaden the scope and allow understandings that include deliberation about how, and on what terms, local people can participate. A serious questioning of an apolitical technical framing is necessary if policy decisions are going to be able address fundamental and intractable problems which militate against poverty reduction programmes.

### In almost all cases, spaces for participation have excluded significant sections of the population

There is widespread consensus that rural communities were largely omitted, with citizen participation in PRSPs being predominantly urban, middle-class NGOs and CSOs. People living in poverty, faith-based groups, women's organisations, disabled people, women, non-traditional NGOs, the private sector, national parliaments, local authorities, and trade unions were among the categories of people excluded.<sup>1</sup> These exclusions were sometimes rectified in second and third generation PRSPs. In some instances, government line ministries were also excluded, along with their closely-allied associated international donors or organisations.

### The process of creating a synthesis excluded some voices and tended to homogenise the experience of poverty

In the 2004 Ugandan PEAP, the drafting team working on the chapter on agriculture and the environment received eighteen submissions, in the form of sector papers consisting on average of about 50 pages, from which the team had to determine priorities. Government representatives and a hired international consultant mediated the drafting processes and excluded environmental NGOs. Civil society actors complained that their submissions were altered during this process: 'it has been turned around, it is not what we submitted'. NGO representatives summarised their experience in relation to the drafting process as follows: 'Government has the legitimacy to do everything on our behalf'. Yet, people on the drafting team reflected on the difficulty of synthesising all the material without turning it into an extensive wish list, commenting that it was 'incredibly hard to be true' to the sector and very difficult to include everything 'properly'.

<sup>1</sup> There have, however, been exceptions, such as the inclusion of the Kenyan Pastoralist Strategy Group.

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**Participation was generally restricted to the development of policy proposals, while real decisions got made when budgets were set**

Budgetary allocations generally took place behind closed doors, in discussions between governments, the World Bank and the IMF, and with no civil society participation.

*'In some cases, clear channels are established for the outputs of consultations or feedback on drafts to filter into the deliberations of the government task force or steering committee responsible for drafting the PRSP... But in many, what is said at consultations is perceived by participants to have disappeared into a 'black box' where Ministry of Finance officials, equipped with donor-supported technical assistance and budgetary information are not available to the public, write a plan which little reflects their inputs.'*  
(McGee, Levene and Hughes 2002: 8)

**In some cases donors lacked a commitment to implement changes which were proposed**

Participatory processes often served more to enhance donors' position and control than to deliver outcomes that the communities wanted.

*'The completed PRSP or Estrategia Boliviana de Reduccion de la Pobreza (EBRD) was discussed with civil society representatives at a workshop called Gobierno Escuchai or 'the Government listens'. This discussion did not result in many changes to the document.'*  
(Curran 2005: 4)

*'Furthermore, issues that had been agreed in the consultations were often changed in the final document without general consensus.'*  
(Curran 2005: 7)

**Participation added a diversity of perspectives and broadened the kinds of actors who engage in policy processes, which has led to an increasingly multi-dimensional understanding of poverty, its causes and solutions**

Through the PRSP process the policy community did become wider and civil society was more empowered to engage in policy processes. More weight was given to cross-cutting issues (gender, HIV/AIDs, food security, livelihoods), the policy emphasis was more pro-poor (addressing water provision, insecurity, social services etc.) – although the reality on the ground may not have been, and new, sensitive issues such as corruption, lack of accountability, poor governance were placed on the political agenda.

However, there were also deep underlying flaws with the process. Participation did not enable a questioning of existing PRSP frameworks. Issues such as stabilisation policies, World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, liberalisation policies and international financial institution (IFI) conditionalities were excluded from the participatory process. There was no space to challenge existing development paradigms and assumptions – for example the contested assumption that growth is beneficial to the poor, or that it is adequate to construct development policy around male livelihoods without properly recognising the role of the household economy and women's unpaid labour. Unless fundamental challenges to the way in which development is constructed, are seen to be a legitimate part of a participation process, it is difficult to see how the fundamental change required to make it responsive to the very poorest can come about.

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# Citizens and Governance: Civil Society in the New Millennium

*The Commonwealth Foundation and CIVICUS, 1999*

*'It is a truism that the state exists to promote the well-being of its citizens. However it is only now becoming accepted that the only true definition of well-being can come from citizens themselves, because it is they who have to live with their problems, their needs, their hopes and their aspirations.'*

**Eminent Persons' Support Group (Civil Society in the New Millennium Project 1999: 1)**

Civil Society in the New Millennium was a two-year participatory research study sponsored by the Commonwealth Foundation and CIVICUS. Using a variety of participatory techniques at local, regional and international levels, and involving an international, multicultural team of researchers, the research sought the views of 10,000 citizens in 47 countries of the Commonwealth and worked with them to build a description of their idea of a good society and how to achieve it.

There was strong institutional support for the research, with the Commonwealth Heads of Government asking for the results to be implemented (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Durban, 1999). This commitment, combined with a space for reflection within the Commonwealth Foundation at the turn of the century, helped to shift the weight of internal discussions on governance to the study's emphasis on ordinary citizens. This in turn facilitated the launch of the organisation's five year Citizens and Governance programme which generated huge country-level mobilisations.

## Research methodology

To find out what kind of society citizens wanted to live in and how government and citizens could create this, three basic questions were asked:

- 1 What is your view of a 'good' society? To what extent does such a society exist today?
- 2 In order to build a 'good' society, what roles are best played by citizens and what roles are best played by state institutions and other sectors?
- 3 What would enable citizens to play their roles more effectively in the development of such a society in the future?

To encourage people to share their views candidly, these questions were asked in a variety of creative and sensitive ways and settings including individual interviews, focus groups, community dialogues, and through radio talk shows. Since



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these are abstract questions, answers to them were commonly obtained by asking about people's experiences – their stories, and about what they feel their needs, rights and responsibilities were. This framework, though precise, was not intended to be entirely prescriptive and researchers had a certain leeway in order to take local conditions into account (Knight, Chigudu and Tandon: 2002).

**Citizen score card for assessing community health service performance**

*'For me, the study reflected a methodology of capturing voices from below on issues that affect citizens but are considered to be very complex by experts; the deep insights of collective reflections by citizens of the Commonwealth surprised their leaders too.'*

**Rajesh Tandon, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (2012)**

## Key lessons for participatory consultation

### Unmediated citizens voices need to be at the centre of analysis

The main unit of analysis in this participatory methodology was what citizens said, so the insights that were generated had the increased authenticity and legitimacy of wide usage among citizens themselves. The emphasis of the research was on listening to those whose voices were rarely heard – the 'invisibles'. The research was envisioned as a bottom up approach where the

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issues and concerns raised by ordinary citizens were carried forward to their leaders and interlocutors (people who were in a position to fulfil the vision of a good society) for their responses. Around 70 per cent of people consulted were 'ordinary citizens', 20 per cent were 'citizens' leaders' and 10 per cent were 'people with influence' (interlocutors):

*'This study was designed to correct what was seen as a narrow view of civil society, more or less restricted to the role of NGOs, by offering a subaltern view of the world that would go to the heart of issues such as participation, gender equity, sustainability and poverty reduction. The objective was to include the opinions of citizens, who are normally invisible, and to enlist their help in formulating a new people-centred consensus.'*

(Knight, Chigudu and Tandon 2002: 31)

#### **To understand the complex realities of people's lives, dissonance is as important as patterns of similarity in synthesis**

The broad-ranging nature of the Civil Society in the New Millennium study meant that analysis concentrated on the similarities emerging across the national studies. In the output report the authors deemed this as inevitable for the purposes of synthesis. However, such similarities, couched in general terms might conceal differences in emphasis, even in meaning, when taken out of their original contexts.

*'A general complaint, for instance, about the state of law and order in a country where civil strife is endemic is very different from a similar one in a country where standards of policing are felt anecdotally to have declined over a generation.'*

(Knight, Chigudu and Tandon 2002: 31)

People living in poverty and those most marginalised are not a simple homogenous group. In understanding the complex and changing realities of poor and marginalised people it is important that dissonance and tension in

perspective is valued to the same extent as our determination to find patterns is.

#### **A commitment from decision-makers to question established ways of looking at social, economic and political issues is important for opening up opportunities for social change**

The Civil Society in the New Millennium project was situated in a context of concerns, questions and issues implicit in what was then seen as the dominant model of societal development- a trinity of actors operating towards the development of a society: Government and democracy; private enterprise and the free market; and civil society. The research sought to question this consensus, in particular how the construction of 'civil society' had left out the participation of citizens. The aim of the research was to specify the kind of society that citizens want, with awareness that these would be at odds with the top-down view of reality imposed upon them.

*'The results of the research shake up the established ways of looking at social, economic and political issues ushering in a new way of bridging the gap between theory and practice.'*

(Knight, Chigudu and Tandon 2002: 5)

#### **Participatory research is a catalyst for action at ground level**

In this study, participatory research was defined as involving people in generating knowledge about their own condition and how it could be changed. Participatory research therefore differs from conventional research because its techniques are not only used to understand the nature of a 'good society' but to bring it into effect. As such the purpose of the research was to identify ways to strengthen, promote, encourage and catalyse a wide variety of initiatives taken by citizens and to address issues and problems of their everyday life. Reflecting this, attempts were made to select national research partners who would be interested in carrying the process forward beyond the period of time allocated to the research (India Country Report 1999).

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# 2011 Global Fund Partnership Forum e-Consultations

## *The Global Fund, 2011*

In 2002, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was created to substantially increase resources to fight these three devastating diseases. Central to achieving this goal was the collective action and commitment of all sectors of society. The governance framework embodied this commitment. Every two years or so a 'Partnership Forum' was convened to consult with all stakeholders on their policies and strategies. Each Partnership Forum was run in a participatory way with a view to ensuring that all sectors of society were engaged in collectively shaping the work of the Global Fund.

The 2011 Partnership Forum was unique in that, with a view to increasing the breadth of the consultation, the Global Fund invested in a lengthy e-Consultation process.

### **e-Consultation methodology**

Working within the scope of the overall theme '*Working Together, Shaping the Future (Access, Accountability, Rights)*', the 2011 Partnership Forum consultations were made up of:

- A multi-language e-Survey, produced in English, Spanish, French and Russian online for six weeks, promoted across the globe.
- A moderated e-Forum discussion in four languages – English, Spanish, Russian and French over a six week period. A Chinese language e-Forum discussion was also hosted.
- Country-level interviews in seven countries with a variety of Global Fund stakeholders.
- An in-person consultation in São Paulo, Brazil over four days.

## **Key lessons for participatory consultation**

**Where participatory consultation is directly connected to a decision-making process there are increased opportunities for influence, although these can be 'closed down' by institutional priorities**

The 2011 Partnership Forum consultations were undertaken at an important time for the Global Fund and its constituencies. They coincided with the implementation of a reform agenda and a new strategy for the period 2012 to 2016.

*'The 2011 Partnership Forum consultations present a key opportunity for broad, participatory input on the Strategy – to build on the Strategy Framework that was considered by the Global Fund Board in May 2011.'*

(Global Fund Partnership Forum e-Consultations 2011: 2)

However, despite this explicit statement of intent in the strategic plan there is no reference to influence of the e-Consultations on the strategic plan, just the traditional face-to-face consultations.

### **People living in poverty and those most marginalised were not engaged directly in the process of partnership building**

Participation in the Partnership Forum was open to a wide range of stakeholders, described as those that 'actively support the Global Fund's objectives'. These included representatives of donors, multilateral development cooperation agencies, developed and developing countries, civil society, nongovernmental and community-based organisations, technical and research agencies, and the private sector.

The Global Fund adopted the traditional way of thinking about engaging civil society – i.e. through people's participation in NGOs. However to engage citizens and their organisations it is important to go beyond the level of NGOs (where Global Fund resources are often being directed), and reach citizens and the spaces within which they organise. Citizens organise both individually and collectively to address the issues and problems of their everyday lives. To understand these issues, citizens themselves must be listened to; neither government, nor other civil society intermediaries can assume their voices.

### **To ensure accountability, those closest to the issues must drive the participatory process and set the agenda**

A particular challenge with online participatory processes is that they are constructed as a consultation exercise rather than being driven from the ground up. Like with the Voices of the Poor, the Global Fund consultations tended to reflect organisational priorities and not the issues most relevant to people affected by illness, their families and communities (including relevant implementing agencies). The Global Fund's

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Partnership Forum Steering Committee for example determined the overall theme and content of each consultation, as opposed to those themes being driven by the realities of those most marginalised and living with these diseases.

Where strong existing networks are established, such as those within the global HIV/AIDS community there is a critical opportunity for on-going engagement to ensure that these kinds of institutional participatory processes reflect the priorities of key stakeholders from the inception phase. For example via pre-consultations with the Global Forum on MSM and HIV the Global Fund could have accessed multiple Discussion Forums in each of their seven target languages. These forums exist to enable members of this diverse constituency to debate new ideas.

*'In my experience existing networks that represent specific marginalised groups or constituents in a specific country are essential to a successful participatory consultation process. Ideally we should focus on providing the systems and support needed to enable such networks to run pro-active consultation processes with their own members on their own terms. Often when they are involved in consultations the agenda has already been framed and the timeline is too short to allow meaningful participation.'*

Rob Worthington, Director, Kwantu (2012)

### **Technical limitations can foster exclusionary practices**

Participation in the e-consultation was limited only to those with reliable internet access. The short time frame of both the e-forum and the e-survey also limited the number of responses. Active participation from Russian and French e-forums was considerably less than English and Spanish – perhaps because there were fewer organised networks in these countries (e.g. in West Africa). In addition, the questionnaire was relatively long and complex, and required a certain level of understanding of the Global Fund. Although these were global consultations these limitations highlight the importance of organising the research at country-level. This would help to

understand the context and strength of national-level networks and also the information and communication technology infrastructure. Without this strong regional biases arise.

### **Country Coordinating Mechanisms can help ensure ongoing local ownership and ongoing accountability at the country level**

The Global Fund's approach to participatory consultation was not restricted to one-off centralised processes of decision-making. Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) were central to what they saw as an ongoing commitment to local ownership and participatory decision-making. CCMs are intended to promote country ownership, foster innovative partnerships to fight the three diseases, encourage in-country policy formulation and implementation, build upon national policies, priorities and partnerships, and promote accountability and transparency.

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# End note

Bringing knowledge from the margins into the global policy arena is a complex process. Past consultations with people living in poverty have shown that there are important lessons to be learnt about the way that this knowledge is generated and used, if it is to genuinely reflect people's lives. These lessons relate both to the process of consulting and to the way people's realities are translated into policy. The *Participate* initiative is committed to integrating this learning into our work. We hope that the High Level Panel will join us in this commitment.



# Participate

Knowledge from the margins for post-2015

The *Participate* initiative will provide high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate

## *Participate* aims to:

- Bring perspectives of those in poverty into decision-making processes
- Embed participatory research in global policy-making
- Use research with the poorest as the basis for advocacy with decision-makers
- Ensure that marginalised people have a central role in holding decision-makers to account in the post-2015 process
- Generate knowledge, understanding and relationships for the global public good

## Key activities include:

- Reviewing lessons from large-scale consultation processes
- Facilitating a global Participatory Research Group
- Analysing and synthesising recent and current participatory studies
- Encouraging policy-makers to spend time living with and hearing from people in the poorest communities
- Creating a Ground Level Panel to mirror the work of the High Level Panel
- Putting cameras in the hands of the poorest to make their own films that tell their own stories
- Building partnerships with NGOs and other agencies doing research in the poorest communities

*Participate* is co-convened by the Institute of Development Studies and Beyond 2015, but the initiative is only possible because of the energy, expertise and vision of numerous organisations committed to participatory research. *Participate* is funded by the UK Government.

For more information:  Web [www.ids.ac.uk/participate](http://www.ids.ac.uk/participate)  Email [Participate@ids.ac.uk](mailto:Participate@ids.ac.uk)