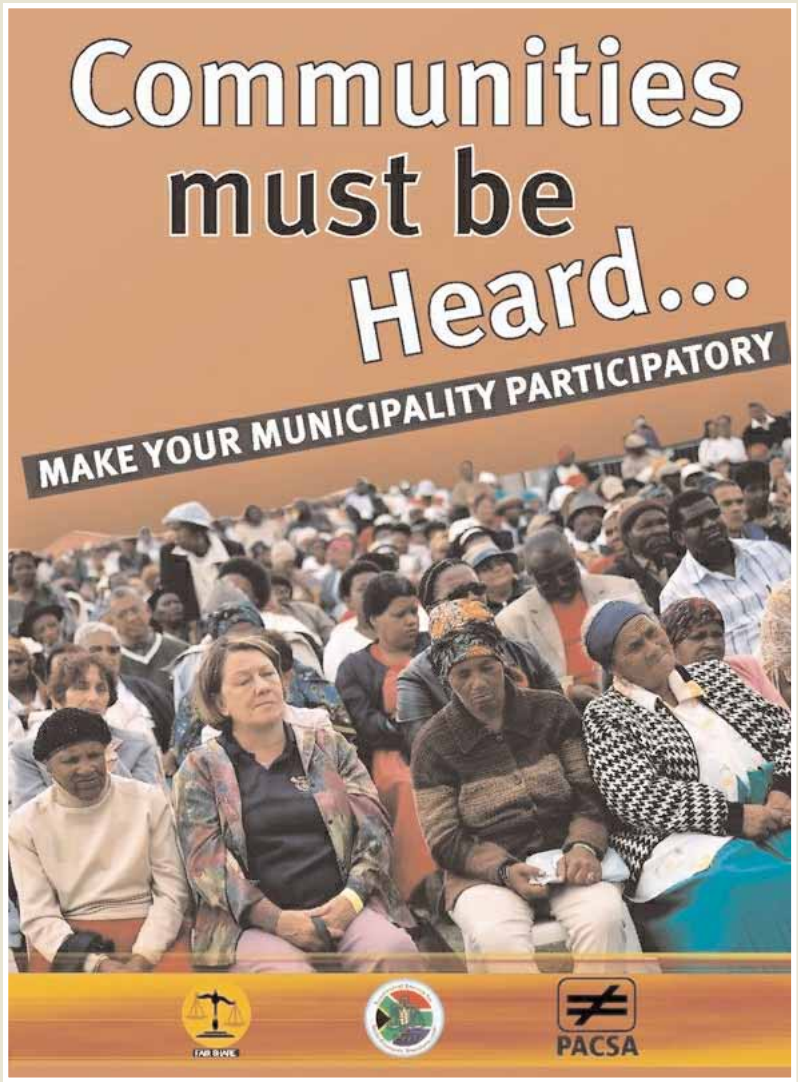
Norwegian Church Aid Regional Conference

Citizen Engagement For Accountable Local Governance



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NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

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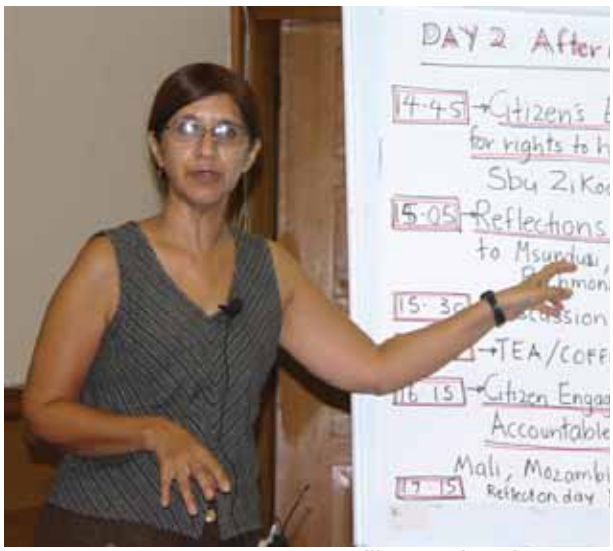
Introduction

Situating the Workshop

The regional conference targeted NCA partners, many of whom are church related organizations working on or planning to work on issues related to local governance.



Facilitator Shamim Meer

The need to promote the participation and influence of poor and excluded men and women through democratic political processes is the key motivation for NCA's engagement in governance work in Southern Africa.

Many countries in Southern Africa have undertaken to decentralize government institutions – ostensibly to deepen democracy and to improve service delivery, especially to poor and rural communities. Yet, in most countries local government is perceived as the weak link in efforts to consolidate democracy and reduce poverty.

Citizen Engagement for Accountable Local Governance is a key priority within NCA's overall regional governance program. Over the past 3 years NCA has cooperated with a number of partner organisations in Southern Africa on this theme, and in March 2007, NCA brought together partner and resource organisations to reflect on their work, to strengthen their country level initiatives and to facilitate learning and exchange within the region.

Some 40 delegates came from Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa and were joined by NCA staff from Mali and Oslo. All were keen to explore issues of governance and to learn from each other's work.

The regional conference targeted NCA partners, many of whom are church related organizations working on or planning to work on issues related to local governance. With this conference, NCA aimed to provide a space for partners and resource organizations to reflect critically on lessons learned, exchange experiences of best practice, and to explore strategies to improve citizen engagement in local governance, as well as strategies to hold local governments accountable to the communities they are meant to serve.

Many countries in Southern Africa have undertaken to decentralize government institutions – ostensibly to deepen democracy and to improve service delivery, especially to poor and rural communities. Yet, in most countries local government is perceived as the weak link in efforts to consolidate democracy and reduce poverty. In some countries, local government has failed to fulfill their constitutional obligations on service delivery and has not lived up to communities' expectations for accountable and democratic governance.

In other countries, the decentralization process is

quite recent and it is more appropriate to speak of local administration rather than local governance. In these cases there are no elected local assemblies and there are few formal structures for average citizens to hold local governments accountable to their needs. This is the context for the issues the delegates grappled with during three days in Durban.

NCA Motivation to support partners working for Citizen Engagement in Local Governance

The need to promote the participation and influence of poor and excluded men and women through democratic political processes is the key motivation for NCA's engagement in governance work in Southern Africa. Participatory democracy is an end in itself and also a process by which poor citizens can translate basic rights into essential services.

Through a process of consultation with NCA core partners in the region (mainly churches and church related organizations) in 2005, four priority areas were identified for NCA's regional governance program:

- Gender equality in power and governance
- Churches engagement in SADC and NEPAD
- Faith Communities for economic justice
- Basic services as basic rights

Over the last 3 years of cooperation with partners, the work around basic services as basic rights has increasingly focused on service delivery at local levels of governance. In future, basic services such as basic rights will therefore focus on, ***citizens' engagement for accountable local governance***, and hence the focus for this conference.

Through the focus on citizen engagement in local governance, NCA seeks to support the right of all citizens to participate in the governance of their own country, and the right of every human being to a decent standard of living, education and basic standard of health.

Ideally, local government should be the front line of democracy, providing citizens the opportunity to participate in the decisions that most directly affect their lives. Citizens' participation in governance is a right in and of itself. However, for poor men and women it is crucial that this participation also leads to real improvements in their lives. Many communities in Southern Africa continue to live without access to basic social services, despite policies and structures designed to meet these basic social and economic rights.

Decentralization processes in the region have increasingly placed responsibility for service delivery to poor and rural communities in the hands of local government. Depending on the country and level of governance in question, local authorities are responsible for services such as basic health and education, water and sanitation, housing and electricity. While local authorities have been given the responsibility to deliver these services, they often lack the authority, capacity and financial resources to do so. Another major constraint is the domination of local government organs by ruling party members and program platforms. This means local government representatives are often more interested in implementing party priorities and gaining favor with their superiors, than in consulting local communities and campaigning for plans and budgets that reflect the communities' expressed needs.

While there is much that must be done to improve institutions of local government, citizens also have an important role to play in demanding more accountable governance. Well-informed and organized citizens are fundamental to participatory democracy. Churches with their broad membership and institutional structures in almost every local community in the region can play an important role in equipping poor people to be active citizens and holding local governments accountable. This work must also be seen as foundational work for preventing corruption at higher levels of government. ■

The structure of the report

Section One of this report provides an overview of the key substantive issues around which the conference was organized.

Section Two of this report summarises the presentations made during the conference, as well as key points discussed.

Section Three highlights the main issues emerging from the conference that constitute challenges for ongoing action and follow up.

Section Four sets out conclusions and commitments for follow up actions.

Section One

Substantive Issues Raised at the Conference

Group Work, South Africa

Understanding the role of local government in different national contexts and reflecting on the role of civil society, with an emphasis on churches/FBOs, in promoting accountable governance

This theme on understanding the roles of local government, civil society and faith based organisations in promoting accountable governance was the focus of Day One of the conference, and set the framework for ongoing discussion over the following two days. Key presentations and discussion within this theme included:

- Why and how churches should engage in the promotion of accountable local governance
- The ideals and realities of decentralization in Southern Africa
- Perspectives from the different country contexts on the role of local government, how they engage with citizens, and successes and failures in meeting the needs of the poor and excluded
- Churches as change agents for accountable local governance.

Examining Practice – examples of citizen engagement in local governance

Day Two of the conference involved examining practical ways in which citizens were engaging with local municipalities. This examination took the following forms:

- Exposure visits to four sites within KwaZulu-Natal where participants met with communities and in some cases with local government officials and communities.
- An input by the chairperson of the shack dwellers association – Abahlali base Mjondolo
- A moderated panel discussion to highlight experiences in Mali, Mozambique and Zimbabwe

Reflection on strategies, best practice and implications for future work

Day Three, the final day of the conference focused on strategies and implications for the future. Reflections included the following:

- Bible reflection on church engagement in local governance
- Reflection on strategies to strengthen citizen agency
- Reflection on strategies to increase the accountability of local government.
- Consideration of how to follow up the key issues emerging from the conference in ongoing and future work to increase citizen engagement in accountable local governance. ■

Section Two

A Summary of Conference Presentations and Discussion

"Churches are the custodians of morality – churches have a responsibility to protect the rights of the poor and those at the margins of society."

Group work, Mozambique

Why should churches engage to promote accountable local governance?

Bishop Ivan Abrahams, Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Bishop Ivan Abrahams

Bishop Ivan Abrahams addressed a key question for churches and faith based organisations – why should we engage in promoting accountable local governance?

In responding to this question, Bishop Abrahams stressed that perhaps the more difficult question that we should focus on is – how and in what fashion the church should engage government?

Drawing on South Africa's transition form apartheid to democracy, the Bishop noted that while there is much to celebrate there is still much to strive for.

Changed laws do not necessarily mean changed hearts. The legacy of racism can be seen in every area of life including the church; unemployment is at unacceptably high levels. Workers and the poor bear the brunt of the rainbow nation's success – they suffer disproportionately. While the last 10 years have been very profitable for business, wages and salaries have dropped. There are growing numbers of people living with HIV and AIDS and this exacerbates the poverty.

The anger of the poor, as expressed in the many social protests in South Africa, threatens to tear apart the fabric of society. Fires of dissent are fanned by the lack of access to services and basic infrastructure. The human face of poverty in South Africa is rural, black and female.

These realities constitute the biggest challenges

to our democracy and our faith. What is the role of the church in this situation?

The church has a long history of working against poverty. Churches mobilised local and international communities against apartheid. The ecumenical movement resisted resettlement and pass laws. The ecumenical movement provided shelter, supported detainees and struggle parties.

But the church also has a history of vacillation, and mainline churches are often a mirror image of economic and political struggles – being shaped by the context in which they are located.

Where political space is closed, churches had no alternative but to play a prophetic role. Churches in that context found the voice to overcome conservative trends. Today in a situation of legitimate government and considerable political space, churches are challenged in new ways to fulfil a spiritual and prophetic role. The credibility of the church depends on promoting peace and democracy. Churches are capable of reaching every corner of the country to promote justice, peace, an equitable society, to foster human rights and encourage people's participation in decision making. Churches are the custodians of morality – churches have a responsibility to protect the rights of the poor and those at the margins of society. To do this, churches need to collaborate with other social actors who share the value of a preferential option for the poor.

The litmus test of public policy is what difference does it make in the lives of the poor. The post apartheid theology of engagement with state has been called one of critical solidarity. However, churches need a critical distance to practice critical solidarity. This means providing genuine support to government in progressive measures of mutual concern eg service delivery, while reserving the right to criticise government when necessary. There is the potential that we can be co-opted by party political agendas, and we should resist this.

Many churches have not made the transition from a theology of resistance to a theology of reconstruction, a public theology. In contrast to a privatised theology a public theology ensures that internal reflection and analysis within the church must lead to outward actions. At present, the Church lacks a public theology that speaks to itself and to government and which is able to speak factually and in language understood by policy and legislation developers. At the same time such a public theology needs to be able to converse with civil society, at the same time assisting the Church to understand and speak the truth about our faith experiences into the reality of political and social ideologies as well as their achievements (and/or lack thereof).

Conclusion

In conclusion and to quote Bishop Abrahams:

I am convinced that the genuine participation of churches in accountable local governance is an investment in the democratic ideal.

We ought to engage local government because it is our moral and constitutional obligation to do so and also because we enhance the culture of democracy born through the first democratic election of 1994. Furthermore, we are required to work together to protect the public space with the endowment of democratic participation.

Churches are an immense resource, have a distinctive critical and constructive role to play in the civil discourse and their absence will leave the discourse poor and unsustainable – I would argue that society is impoverished when religious perspectives of life is excluded and marginalised.

There is a great African proverb which says. "If you want to walk fast, walk alone but if you want to walk far, walk with others" hence I call for much closer cooperation and interaction with all those involved in a vision for a new society. Citizens of faith have a prior moral and legal responsibility for accountable governance – governance that protects and cares for the vulnerable, the poor, the excluded and the marginalized. The Book of Proverbs (31:8-9) puts it plainly: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Defend the rights of the poor and needy." Such is our calling – no more – no less.

It is my prayer that at this meeting we will drink together from the calabash of collective wisdom, we will draw new energy, vision and commitment to work for justice and peace.

Let us remember that the greatest gift that we can bestow upon this and the future generations is to wrestle together with the challenges of our time to build a more human and prosperous society.■

Local Government and Decentralisation in Southern Africa: Ideals and Realities

Prof. Aslak Orre, Christian Michelsens Institute

Aslak Orre of the Christian Michelsens Institute in Norway noted that there is a frustrating discrepancy between promises of democratic and participatory local government and the shortcomings we see in everyday life. The reality in Southern Africa is one of centralized, authoritarian and bureaucratic public cultures.

Orre interrogated the various meanings of decentralization and made the point there is no a priori reason as to why more localized forms of governance are more democratic.

The current discourse on decentralisation

Tracing how we got to the current discourse on decentralization he noted that in the early 1990s African governments and international institutions such as the World Bank and bilateral donor organisations came together and promoted decentralisation as part and parcel of a good governance and democratization agenda.

For their part civil society, community activists, and pro poor activists also welcomed decentralisation as an agenda to promote participatory democracy, under the premise that the closing decision making was to local communities, the better.

However it soon became clear that while the development aid bureaucrats and the national political elites – the drivers of decentralization – seemed to be talking the same language as community activists, they actually meant something entirely different.

Among the drivers of decentralization, technocratic thinking and rolling out central state administration to local communities seem to override the agenda of participatory democracy and addressing real felt needs of the population.

The technocratic oriented politicians and donor technocrats are steeped in a world view dominated by elitism – where order and rule is more important and where real popular participation upsets order and rule. They tend to argue that there can be “too much democracy”.

Political elites believe decentralization is good in order to extend the state into territories where the state has had little foothold after independence. The concern is to extend political control of the center within localities, not primarily to tend to the needs of the poor or increase service delivery capacities.

As civil society, it is important to understand that here are two main motivations for decentralization: deconcentration and devolution. Deconcentration focuses on decentralizing the central administrative structures of the state. Lines of accountability go upwards to central ministries. Devolution entails the devolution of power from central to local structures, which are often locally elected and therefore, in principle, practice downwards accountability to local communities. A model of devolution is more consistent with the ideals of participatory democracy.

What is the ideal of democratic local governance?

Perhaps the ideal is made up of:

- A pro poor turn – away from elite and technocratic agendas to an agenda that promotes service provision rather than control.
- Participation of the marginalized as an end in itself, a way of ensuring accountability and relevant services, and promoting participatory planning.
- A turn to democratic devolution where local governments are elected (an important mechanism of representation and accountability), have clear functions, powers, and resources.

In this scenario the state encounters and interacts with citizens and civil society in structures and institutions which some have referred to as “spaces for change”.

Research shows that decentralization contributes to deepening democracy if and when it expands the scope and depth of citizen participation in public decision making. Deepening democracy means incorporating previously marginalized or

disadvantaged groups into public politics.

Expanding the scope means bringing a wider range of social and economic issues into the authoritative domain of politics. In other words, democratic decentralization entails redistributing power both vertically (incorporating citizens) and horizontally (expanding the domain of collective decision making).

Participation, representation and accountability are all key ingredients in democratic local governance. But all three ingredients need to be interrogated to make sure that technocratic and political elite versions of these concepts do not hold sway and thus weaken agendas for promoting democracy.

Participation in what and who participates need to be interrogated. Participation is important in spaces that matter, in cases that matter, and in spaces for change. Who participates should include the poorest, and women. There is need for these groups to overcome the traditional and cultural hurdles that usually promote participation of those who speak well, or have resources (power, wealth, education etc).

Representation should not merely reflect existing structures of inequality, but should be used to transform these structures.

Accountability is the ability to hold someone responsible. Accountability exists if someone must answer for his or her actions – and that wrong doing is actually met with consequences. The practice of accountability requires transparency and checks and balances.

Accountability can hinder abuse of power and corruption, can ensure pro poor local government, and responsiveness to marginalized people's needs. The fundamental question is to whom are local government officials and structures accountable: to central structures and elites or downwards to the citizenry? To whom are representatives of participatory institutions and NGOs and CSOs accountable?

Conditions for decentralization include:

- High degree of central state capacity
- A well developed civil society
- A political project in which an organized political force, with strong social movement characteristics, champions decentralization.

Southern Africa – state, parties and civil society

We should not focus solely on grassroots action for it is not necessarily true that whatever is suggested from below will turn out well. Grassroots processes may be helped at times through creating new spaces for change – new institutions of local government and citizen interaction. But new democratic arenas do not easily translate into more participatory democracy deepening or development gains. We should not substitute politics and institution building with civil society and grassroots activism.

Across Southern Africa we see the slow but steady re-invention of *de facto* one party states. One reason for this is the operation of the neo-patrimonial logic where political patrons distribute patronage in exchange for party political support. Decentralisation threatens these existing patronage networks. Consolidation of one party states ensures centralisation and accountability upwards. The issue of democratic decentralisation is very, very political and must be thought of as such.

In relation to Mozambique and Angola one may ask whether the decentralisation reforms are means for the political elite to maintain control of the rural areas, or can the new institutions of local government prove to be real spaces for change?

What are the consequences for church activists working for pro poor local governance?

Churches in different national contexts need to find the right balance between engagement, opposition, cooperation and confrontation in relation to the state.

As civil society we need to interrogate our perspectives and strategies? We must not judge the poor when they revolt. Responses from people who are poor and excluded rarely come in the packages technocrats want. We need to interrogate whether we as churches/civil society are mainly speaking on behalf of the poor? Perhaps we need to concentrate more on assisting the poor to seize new spaces where they can speak for themselves?

Civil society also needs to find ways of extending new spaces of participation so that they are schools for citizenship, where seeds for change are planted. ■

To serve or be served: Perspectives on how local government is engaging with citizens

Working in country groups, participants mapped out their responses to the following questions:

- Are there elected representatives of local governance in your country?
- What are the key accountability mechanisms for local government in your country?
- What are the key bottlenecks to more accountable local governance?
- What space is there for poor citizens to participate in local governance and how has this increased the responsiveness of local government to poor citizens needs?

The following summarises their responses:

Angola

There are no elected authorities at the level of local government – it is more a system of local administration. The last national level elections were held in 1992, but hopefully elections will be held in 2008.

Structures of local government are not well established.

Councils of traditional leaders are not acknowledged constitutionally, but they do exist and are quite influential in decision making at local level.

There is little political space for active citizen engagement in governance – civil society relies on the good will of the ruling party. International solidarity is important for helping to open new spaces for participation.

Malawi

The legal policy and institutional frameworks have been established through various acts and legislation during the period 1995-2003.

The first local government elections were held in 2000, so mechanisms for citizen participation exist, but local councilors or donors might have different agendas from the agendas of the people.

District Development Plans are the key mechanism for holding local government accountable.

It is very difficult to measure what faith people have in the structures or how local government is performing for poor people, since Malawi has only had local government for five years.

Mali

Local elections are held in eight regions, with chiefs having a role in local governance. Very few women have been elected – over all women make up 12% of those elected, and 3% of those elected in the North. Of 37 mayors only one is a woman.

Formal structures in place eg for elections and for debates on budgets. Laws describe roles and responsibilities but structures are not always functioning well. There is a high rate of illiteracy, lack of capacity/knowledge, and this hampers performance of elected reps and local administration and the informed participation of the population. Added to this is the lack of transfer of resources to the local. Responsibilities are transferred to the local for education, health, water, sanitation, but money and other resources are not transferred. Minutes of meetings not made public, or when they are it is in a language people do not understand.

The agenda of the elected representatives is not the agenda of the poor. The elected representatives do things for votes and not for people.

The poor are reluctant to participate and lack knowledge, but at the same time have faith in the system. Some support mechanisms are in place to support community participation.

Attending to the poor will take a long time. In north Mali there is greater dependency on external actors such as NGOs, and donors. Overall we face the challenge of mobilising local resources, of fighting corruption.

We need to be aware that among civil society organisations many of the newer organisations work for their own members.

Mozambique

The administrative division in Mozambique is as follows: Province, District, Post, Locality, Community (about 200 families) all headed by a functionary of the State administration. Municipalities (33 urban centres) sit within the territorial division of the Province, although they are autonomous from the Province.

Besides the national elections (for the executive and parliament), and provincial elections (for a provincial assembly, which is not yet in place), there are two parallel systems of local governance in Mozambique:

- In urban centres, the municipal council is elected and joins civil servants for the management of public affairs (devolution). It is funded through local taxes and through transfers from the state budget under well defined competencies
- In rural areas, the district consultative council (CCD) is chosen through informal elections, and is composed of civil society, "district government" and private sector representatives. It advises and monitors the work of the "district government". The "district government" is not elected, its competencies are those delegated to him by central government (deconcentration). The State administration has power over the CCD. The CCD is the apex of a series of similar councils at lower levels. The district receives a fund for investments and "local initiatives" to finance activities not funded by the sectors at provincial level.

These two parallel systems createe confusion – we have elections in urban areas but not in rural areas. This makes it very difficult for people to see how to participate and demand greater accountability.

We see abstention from political processes, such as elections, as a world wide phenomenon. People expect to see immediate results in their lives from the electoral process. When they don't see immediate results, they lose faith.

A key problem in Mozambique is the centralisation of authority and resources: everything depends on the centre.

South Africa

Local government representatives are elected from among political party candidates and independent candidates. The system assumes everyone belongs to a party and, in practice it is quite difficult for independent candidates to get elected on a platform of local community issues. Ward Committees are the main structure to ensure people's participation in local governance, but it is unclear what role poor people play in setting the agendas of Ward Committees. Very often political party agendas dominate local community agendas.

Mechanism to hold government to account exist and these include local elections, the constitution, Integrated Development Plans, budget processes, and *imbizos* or public meetings.

The question is how well do these established structures function for the poor? We see violent protests in many poor communities over the failure of local government to deliver basic services. Part of the problem is lack of resources and poor capacity of elected councillors and of local government administration. Part of the problem is that local government is a puppet of a macro economic framework that has not adequately addressed issues of poverty and inequality.

In conclusion, there is good political space, but it seems poor people are either not using the space effectively, or that there is little opportunity for the poor to actually set the agendas within the existing political space.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is divided into 10 Provinces and further into districts. Some big districts have been further divided into committees, to make governance more manageable. The structures of local government are well defined and there are acts which define the role and function of different levles of local government: Rural Councils Act, Urban Councils Act, Local Government Act. The structures are good, but they don't work in practice.

As regards mechanisms of accountability, there

are constitutional provisions for regular elections at local levels of government. Elections are held but these processes have their limits. The Minister for Local Government can overrule the outcome or defer elections. There is no effective system – such as district plans and budgets – by which communities can hold local authorities to account. Contentious legislation such POSA (Public Order and Security Act) and AIPPA (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act) also makes it difficult to hold authorities accountable.

Party politics clouds local government, and at present, local government does not serve the poor and marginalised

"How we practice our faith in the public arena is a key question we need to address. The church can play a big role by becoming a site of struggle, by allowing civic education to happen, so that people feel free."

Discussion

Church's role

One participant raised the role of the church as important in enabling civic education. He noted that all the country presentations noted the lack of civic education, that while paces have opened for participation, we are not making effective use of these opportunities. To some extent this is not surprising – some churches believe that Christians should not participate in politics.

The missionaries made us focus on life after death, and we have not led people away from this missionary theology. The issue the bishop raised that we need to revisit public theology is important. We can participate in local government – we need to challenge the view that good Christians do not participate in governance.

How we practice our faith in the public arena is a key question we need to address. The church can play a big role by becoming a site of struggle, by allowing civic education to happen, so that people feel free.

A second participant felt that the Bishop's comments on the church playing a prophetic role was important. Today the church is so quiet, and I am so disappointed in the church. The church is not saying anything on AIDS; people are dying in Zimbabwe and the church does not talk. The relevance of church is today in question.

A third participant noted that we must be aware of constant changes in the world situation. We blame ourselves as churches. Yet I think we are doing much, but the situation is changing constantly. How do we stay relevant? Churches in South Africa wanted to be a prophetic voice.

The Bishop raised a good question: How do we ensure that churches play this prophetic role being aware that governments and rulers are trying to use us for their own interests?

Scepticism regarding the role of church

Another participant responded with scepticism regarding the role of the church. He noted that in some cases the church itself restricts space. While it has been prophetic in relation to the outside world, space within the church is extremely restricted. For example the Catholic church does not allow women to be ordained. Ordination is about governance, so this leaves governance in male hands.

Government intransigence regarding public participation

Government in some cases – as in Angola is intrasignent, refusing to allow people to participate. There can be no real development without participation of citizens in governance.

In Angola when people are not allowed to participate the result is that people destroy schools, the public water supply, what has been given to them. Why is government so intransigent about public participation?

The need to build a democratic culture

In South Africa there was the belief and hope that the government we elected would deliver.

Today we see pockets of protest and resistance, because people see that government is not delivering. Democracy is a new concept for us. We do not have a democratic culture. In our houses, for example, we see the ill treatment of women and children. We see women ill treating their husbands. We were not born and brought up with democracy.

Recognizing genuine civil society from state-led CSOs

We have not talked much on civil society's role and its participation. While civil society has an important role we also need to be aware that at times – like in Mozambique – the strongest CSOs are led by former government members who identify with the regime, and will not do anything different than what government is doing. These CSOs are not interested in genuine participation where people are asked what their problems are and to contribute to how there could be resolved. Instead there is a pretence of participation in processes which entrench government control.

Political polarisation in Zimbabwe hampers the prophetic role of the church

In Zimbabwe churches, as well as civil society, are overtaken by events. They are not able to play a proactive role. It is very difficult to anticipate government actions, and difficult to sustain CSO initiatives. Being prophetic in this situation is extremely difficult.

Government has infiltrated civil society organisations. The political polarisation in the political arena seeps into church structures and systems. The prophetic voice of the church has died down. We also need to go deeper than being prophetic to look at our conscience.

An important question for us is, how can we be involved in a public theology which would promote collective action?

The need to balance criticism and support for elected governments concerned about the poor

The situation in Southern Africa is complicated. It has been interesting to hear the different voices in this debate, and I want to comment on the Brazil experience in relation to some of the points made.

Lula was elected in Brazil by the social movements who all voted for him. When in office he asked a lot of these people to join him. He needed 7 000 people in the bureaucracy and government. The difficulty that this created for those social movement members who went into Lula's government was where would their loyalty lie – to the people they worked for or to the government?

In the first two and half years there was not much delivery by the Lula's government and both the social movements and the people were disappointed. The question is, how can you balance this?

A government needs critics, it needs an opposition. It is important to get direction from the left. If not conservative parties would have greater influence.

Participation to promote human dignity and human rights

One thing I have been reflecting on is how to get the balance right between the romanticism of participation, that the people have all the answers and the belief that the state has all the answers. Sometimes people living in poverty can be quite entrenched as victims of tradition and power relations, and lacking any other vision they tend to promote existing traditions.

We need to strive for the right balance to achieve real participation where the poor set agendas, and where these are based on values of human dignity and human rights. ■

An important question for us is, how can we be involved in a public theology which would promote collective action?

Churches as Change Agents for accountable local governance: The role of ecumenical organisations versus local congregations

By Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, CEO of KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council

Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela

Faith groups should be directly involved in governance and democracy if they are truly concerned about the promotion, preservation and dignity of life. Not being involved in these areas results in churches and other faith groups leaving the ruling of the world in the hands of a few people who may neglect the sanctity of life. In KwaZulu Natal, churches and faith based organisation use a multi-pronged approach to mobilise, train and deploy structures within the church to engage local or provincial government, local business and church leadership for change.

Involvement of Church Leaders

An organized group of church leaders called KwaZulu Natal Church Leaders' Group (KZNCLG) meets bi-monthly, with the KwaZulu Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) serving as their secretariat. Among their activities the church leaders engage in programmes of ecumenical organisations. Examples include the following:

- Church leaders are involved in intervening in issues of the abuse of human rights for farm workers. They meet and decide on appropriate actions to address human rights abuses of farm dwellers. The interventions include having dialogue with farm dwellers, farm owners and the Dept of Land Affairs, and accompanying the abused with their court cases.
- Taking a decisive side with the "less people". These are the so called homeLESS, LandLESS, JobLESS, etc. The interventions include collecting and donating clothing, food and shelter. Various meetings are held to seek lasting solutions to these social and economic problems.
- HIV and Aids are serious problems in KZN. Church leaders meet and share stories from various parts of the world. They discuss ways of intervening from various angles such as support of orphans, counseling, rights of the infected and affected, etc.
- Political and criminal violence have been on the increase. KZNCC mobilsed church leaders to discuss these issues. They subsequently met with the Minister of Safety and Security to air their concern, and they also produced a pastoral letter to be used to mobilize church members against any form of violence.

Involvement of Churches

KZNCC and ecumenical organizations work together on deepening democracy through a consortium which mobilizes different stakeholders through different initiatives:

- Church leaders and
- Church based activists in processes to:
  - Organize communities,
  - Build capacity through training
  - Deploy trained people for action to transform their conditions (citizenship; participating in council meetings, participating in elections, participating in economic and political development, etc.)
  - Support and monitor the work of changing their communities
  - Form a partnership with University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Religions and Theology in critical analysis and Theological reflections.

Pastors, men and women recruited from churches, are trained and deployed to engage local and provincial level of governance in:

- Demanding delivery of basic services
- Participating in local government meetings (stakeholders meetings)
- Influencing the municipal government's meeting agenda and budget processes

- Advocacy and lobbying work on various issues such as HIV, poverty, racism, etc.

Through our Social Analysis Conventions, we bring together ordinary Christians and Theologians of the Struggle now in Power to engage the current provincial and local government authorities. Through this forum we mobilize the ecumenical movement to engage the Premier's office on issues such as **HIV and Aids** as well as on **Morality and Power** questions. Partly through our efforts, the Premier has just opened an Inter-religious Affairs Desk which is under the leadership of a church leader. This is also an opportunity for us as the ecumenical movement to openly demand follow up on some of our concerns.

However, this recruitment of Church leaders to work as commissioners or coordinators in local government is a great challenge to the church. People get confused about church people working in government – Is it cooption, cooperation or coup where government is taking over church leaders?

Involvement of Women in Lobbying and Advocacy

KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) and participating member churches and ecumenical organizations are conscious of the importance of creating space for the participation of women. However, the inclusion of women in a system that has not been transformed poses challenges – there is little real space for women to take part in decision-making or little commitment to taking women's interests into account.

In the democratic South Africa, the state has generally moved faster that the churches in addressing gender imbalances. What we would like to see is a total shift from inclusion demands (i.e. numbers participating) to transformative demands.

It is our collective responsibility to challenge all systems that exclude any group of people. All marginalized groups usually focus on working for justice, for the inclusion of their group, but because we all believe in the sanctity of life, we all should stand in solidarity with them.

In conclusion

We have strong individual activists engaging local municipalities for accountable governance. However there is still a lack of organized action initiated and led by the churches, and church leaders have been reluctant to support social movements. The church has to strengthen this area and be more visible in community marches and meetings.

More work also needs to be done to involve local congregations in issues of governance. ■

Discussion

Training to be empowered citizens

Training should aim to get people to see themselves as citizens with power so they know how to relate to government.

Women's leadership in church structures vs diakonal organisations

At present, there is one woman Bishop in South Africa. Among the ecumenical organisations in KZN, there are at least three women directors, which implies that the diakonal organisations have moved faster in including women in top leadership positions. It also means that the face of church leadership in the province is changing, because these women sit in the Church Leaders Forum.

Women leaders work in a system dominated by men. So for example Members of Parliament who are members of churches operate using different ways of being in each setting. While they are powerful in parliament, they often have very limited space to even impart their skills in the church.

Is involvement of church leaders in state structures a trap?

Delegates raised the concern that church leaders entering government structures could be co-opted. The question arose as to whose interests would these church leaders serve once they were in government? An Angolan delegate noted that when a church person is in government he or she loses the ability to defend the poor and excluded.

Douglas Dziva from the KZNCC shared the following experiences and reflection on their work with these issues in KZN and South Africa.

Summary

The following are Ecumenical Structures forming the ecumenical democracy consortium with KZNCC

KZNCC is a coordinating body that works with ecumenical structures covering five regions within the province. These structures include:

PACSA

A human rights organisation active in supporting oppressed communities in and around Pietermaritzburg. PACSA's Participatory Democracy and Governance Project focuses on equipping local communities to participate in local government processes, especially around the Integrated and Development Plans of the local municipalities and monitoring service delivery. This is to be achieved by integrating democracy with economic justice and service delivery issues.

The goal of the Governance and participatory democracy project is the creation of vibrant, well developed, self sustained communities and church structures with the capacity to challenge and influence municipal processes and to participate in their community initiatives independently.

Diakonia Council of Churches

The Diakonia Council of Churches are in Durban functional area. It has over the years developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Ethekwini municipality, characterized by critical engagement, acknowledgement of each others roles and functions, and constant feedback on how best the municipality can improve its service delivery and expand participatory space.

The Diakonia Council of Church has committed itself to create a platform for local churches to engage directly with municipality representatives through these briefings which enable local church members to engage, challenge and express churches perspectives on policy, by-laws, and on municipal obligation such as service delivery, and public participation with specific focus on issues such as the IDP and the Budgeting processes. Training and capacity building enables informed participation of church representatives in these fora.

Young Men's Christian Association

The KZN Regional council of YMCAs oversees the work of 8 eight local associations based in greater Durban, Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas and Esikhawini. YMCA mobilizes youth from throughout the province to work with their local communities on issues of economic, social and political justice.

After the training, the YMCA participants are in the process of engaging their local churches to become lobby group members by doing presentation in their local churches. The process of engaging the local municipalities differs from each local association. Durban YMCA have developed a working relationship with Safer Cities (an Ethekwini municipal structure). Esikhawini YMCA and Student Y have attended ward committee meetings, and are developing a relationship with their local councilors.

KwaZulu Regional Christian Council

The KwaZulu Regional Christian Council provides leadership to churches working on Development issues in the KwaZulu Natal north coastal region areas as Ulundi, Empangeni, Richards Bay, Phongola, and Eshowe.

Key issues addressed include landlessness, poor edcuaction levels, traditional leadership and house-lessness, etc.

Reverends and Politics: Cooption or cooperation?

An input from Douglas Dziva, KZNCC

What should be the role of the church in a democratic South Africa? This question leaves many people with more questions than answers, and also leaves many people disillusioned and even cynical about the role of the church. Some of the questions are:

- Where is the prophetic voice of the church in post apartheid South Africa?
- What theology is guiding the church in the post apartheid/post liberation South Africa?
- One theological position is that the church should be in critical solidarity with the government – but should the church be in critical solidarity with the government or with the poor?

A National Scenario

- The Director General in the President's Office is a Reverend.
- The President, Thabo Mbeki has initiated the National Religious Leaders' Forum that he meets regularly, and consults with faith communities on various issues about the nation? This National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF) is invited to sit with the president now and again, to offer their wisdom on where the country is going. People wonder if the President is taking religious leaders on board a government ship? Are they being co-opted? When the president says I have consulted the NRLF, does this mean that members of these religious groups have been consulted and their view adequately represented? This is a bothering issue for many. To a large extent, these religious leaders do not represent ordinary people on the ground. Given that this Forum is the President's creation, to what extent will it ever be critical of the government policies?

A Provincial scenario – KZN Province

- The spokes person of the Premier is a Reverend.
- The General Manager in the Premier's office is a Reverend.
- Various Provincial Commissions have been formed: For example, the Transport Department is headed by a Reverend and the Planning Commission in the Premier's Office is headed by a Bishop.

When the Premier says I've consulted church leaders, civil society says we should question this scenario – *again are ordinary congregants represented?*

The Bishop and Reverends in the commissions, as well as the reverends that are civil servants are on the payroll of a government department. On Sunday they are in church at the pulpit, on some days they are in government departments – advising, caucusing and praying. *Are we right to suspect that here the churches are being mobilised to support politicians?*

Are they not engaged in propaganda for government when they are in the pulpit preaching on Sunday?

Lastly there are many party politicians who are reverends, such as Rev Musa Zondi, an executive member of KwaZulu Natal Christian Council and an IFP spokesperson and government leader. *How does he separate himself from church duties and partisanship? The question remains where is their allegiance?*

Is the employment of all these reverends a coincidence?

We think that it is not a coincidence that the provincial government has employed a lot of ordained ministers and influential elders in the church. Our analysis has been that the government is slowly co-opting religious leaders and faith communities into government. This co-opting them is a creation of institutional prophets, and systematically silencing the prophetic voice that would otherwise be the voice of the voiceless, the conscience of the world, and the voice of the marginalized.

Those clergy (Bishops, Reverends, Church based activists) finding themselves offered government jobs with lucrative packages are required to observe "table manners" – "You do not talk when you are at the table eating". So because they are at the table, they cease to talk especially, about the disgusting stories of the smelly poor. So the vociferous criticism of poor government policies has diminished, and there is less noise about the

poor implementation of good government policies. Now and again it is only the lonely voice of Archbishop Desmond Tutu that has refused to be lured into the "gravy train" and has continued to be vociferous.

Is this not a well orchestrated plan by government to muzzle the prophetic voice?

In 2006, the KwaZulu-Natal Council of Churches and its partners decided to invite reverends of the struggle now in government to discuss the above questions. The central and thorny question for discussion was – What should be the role of the church in a democratic South Africa? The gathering attracted an impressive collection of church leaders, academic theologians and religious leaders who are members of government and contributed to deepening the debate around these issues.

Bishop Rubin Phillip, head of the Anglican Church of Natal, in summing up the day's proceedings, called for a relationship of critical engagement with the local government. "You have a responsibility to challenge us, but we also have the responsibility to challenge you", he said. He added that with the flurry of change in the country, it appears the Church has lost its vision and confidence and no longer has a significant social agenda. He said the Church needs to focus on its own transformation, how to represent the voiceless, marginalized sectors of society and, most importantly, how not to loose its critical voice."

The Norwegian Church Aid Conference has helped us to revisit these questions again. The central questions asked are:

- What should be the role of the church in ensuring development at local level in a democratic South Africa?
- **What, where and how** can churches and the ecumenical movement link with the local and provincial municipalities?
- **What** post liberation theology is in place in the post apartheid era?

With Norwegian Church Aid provoking us with these questions, the KZN ecumenical Democracy Consortium are planning to host a 3rd Convention in 2007 involving Church-based ecumenical activists and Theologians of the Struggle now in power. The draft of the Theme of the Convention will be "*Local Churches Engaging Local Municipalities for Development*". ■

Examining Practice: Citizen Engagement in local governance

Sbu Zikode: Abahlali baseMjondolo and the struggle for citizen engagement for accountable local governance

Sbu Zikode from Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement South Africa (an association of shack dwellers) spoke of life in the shack settlements.

Life in the shack is dangerous, the air we breathe is poisounous, the words we utter are a threat to the state.

Our children in the shacks are burning in shack fires, dying from diarrhoea and not much is done about it. Gandparents see grandchildren orphaned by AIDS. Poverty and unemployment are threats to stability of shack dwellers lives.

Zikode noted that the voices of the poor against their suffering are getting louder, that the movement that started in Durban through anger and frustration is growing.

His organisation works to deepen democracy and citizen's participation in local government.

However it is a challenge to get respect for shack dwellers from the state. The police criminalise shack dwellers because they are poor, state repression evictions, and arrests continue to terrorise shack dwellers. Some have lost their lives at the hands of police shootings. The rights to freedom of expression and association remain uneasy, the rights to basic services, land and housing is an ongoing crisis.

We stand up for our rights not only to speak but to live, to breath, to eat, to sleep, to work in dignity and safety. But the state sees this as a threat and labels us a third force.

I challenge delegates to think of solutions to the problems we shack dwellers confront. I am not here to entertain but to listen and receive ideas for taking up our struggles.

I call on you to live in a shack settlement for a week so as to understand why shack dwellers block roads, why we march.

We made the country rich, our forefathers worked in the mines, in the kitchens of the rich. The same reason we live in the shack makes this country rich.

We know exactly the current preparations for the 2010 soccer world cup marginalizes the poor and makes the country richer. The budget meant to uplift communities goes into stadiums to impress foreigners.

We all want to look good, to be seen to be doing good work.

We are experts and masters in our own suffering. We want your support. You must ask how can we help you instead of assuming what we want. That you in this conference are listening to the Mjondolos is a turn of the tide. We are more often told who the hell do you think you are.

We have not been given the platform to think for ourselves and to participate a citizens. We have democracy only on paper in South Africa. In reality conditions are far worse than you think. As a movement we encourage people to participate in community activities.

Project visit Abahlali

We want direct support. One question I pose is that as parents we do whatever it takes to support our children. As a country what is it that we do to support those in need? I am critical of conferences at a high level. We take conference to people.

My question is what can we do as the poor of the poorest to bring our issues up? We have participated in all democratic processes, engaged the ward councillor, and provincial government. All we get is who the hell are you.

How do we get recognised as human beings? The struggle is for recognition as human beings. People who are poor are said to be people who cannot think for themselves. We are asking to be listened to as human beings.

What would you do in our situation? You thought you were a human being. You begin to realise you are not. How can you prove this. You scream, make noise, you say I am a human being. What is it you want us to do?

This is my challenge to the group. We are all from families and communities and we cannot ignore what we have spoken of. I cannot accept your silence.

Project Visit to Richmond

Richmond is a rural farming area, with a population of about 60 000, and a very high unemployment rate situated in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. It was one of the bloodiest areas during the apartheid era, with over 50 000 families displaced. Richmond is still economically depressed, with the unemployment rate among the youth reaching over 80%, which makes it a highly unstable community.

PACSA has been working in Richmond since 2003 with organizations as Independent Projects Trust (IPT) and Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA, Sinani-Survivors of Violence, KZNCC, University Peace program, etc.

With KZNCC PACSA has formed and started working with local ministers to form a Ministers Fraternals, which was launched in 2004. The fraternal has a very specific agenda, which is to uplift especially the youth in the area through establishing social and economic development programmes in the area. Its dream is to establish a Youth Skills Development and Information Centre in the area, and it already has begun negotiations with the Methodist Church for its disused Seminary buildings for this purpose. KZNCC's lobbying and advocacy desk has brought in other role players such as Feedback, an organization that collects left over food from hotels, farms and agricultural market and distributes it to the needy communities. Through lobbying and advocacy desk we have also developed links with the Richmond local government, where we meet regularly to share and discuss community development and partnerships. Other organizations like Sinani-Survivors of violence work on healing of memories and reconciliation and development.

Project Visit to Msunduzi Municipality

The Msunduzi municipality, commonly known as Pietermaritzburg, is the second largest city within KwaZulu-Natal, and the main economic hub within uMgungundlovu district municipality. Its location has a strong influence on regional channels of investment, movement and structuring of provincial investment, for growth and development

KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council, Fairshare, Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), Independent Projects Trust (IPT) and Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) are some of the organisations working on democracy deepening issues in the Midlands and Pietermaritzburg areas.

The group that visited Msunduzi noted that they saw some good things at the municipal council. A legal framework and structures are in place and there seems to be interaction between people on the ground and the municipal office. We also noted a lot of shortcomings. The two people from council who talked to us were technocrats, who claimed to know how the system operates. It was not clear to us who drives the agenda in the ward. Participation seems to be top down and not bottom up. The system is working to some extent.

Project Visit to Ugu District – South Coast Area of KZN

The delegates visited two areas: one led by an African traditional council, KwaMadlala and the other by a Municipal Mayor and councillors, Hibiscus Municipality. KwaMadlala Traditional Authority is a rural area falling under the Hibiscus Municipality in the Ugu District/South coast area. The area is approximately 20 - 25 kilometers from the nearest town, Port Shepstone, and is currently under the chieftainship of Inkosi Prince Ngamizizwe Madlala.

History of the area

From the late 1970's to the 1980's the communities of KwaMadlala were seriously affected by the faction fighting which was caused by the conflict around the issue of KwaMadlala chieftainship. Again many people of KwaMadlala were made victims of this violence which resulted in loss of lives and the destruction of so many homes. Many people lost their lives in this fighting and many families fled the area and sought refuge in the other parts of the district.

While the communities in this area had suffered so much during the faction fighting, KwaMadlala did not escape the flames of political violence which engulfed almost the entire South Coast region from the late 1980's up to the first democratic elections in 1994. This drastically affected social, political and economic development initiatives.

Current state of affairs:

- After 1994 peace returned to the area and some families who had fled were able to come back and resume normal life. Relative stability prevails in KwaMadlala, however, conflict between the two groups who were involved in the fighting has not been resolved as yet and tensions rise whenever matters related to the chieftainship are mentioned.
- Like most of our rural areas, KwaMadlala is characterized by high levels of poverty and unemployment and many families are struggling to cope with HIV and AIDS and the effects of this epidemic.
- Despite all the above, the communities of KwaMadlala are in the process of reconstruction and there is evidence of some development taking place in area in terms of delivery of basic needs in parts of the area, although so much still remains to be done on a number of issues such as the roads and the other basic needs.
- Practical Ministries and other NGOs and CBOs involvement with the communities of KwaMadlala work mainly around the issues of development, peace building, capacity building of local people, etc.

Discussion following presentations Abahlali and the other field visits

The church and faith based organisations need to take action

In responding to Sbu Zikode delegates noted:

- I am struck by the Abahlali experiences. What are churches and SACC doing? Are they aware? Are they failing? Do they need assistance?
- Fighting for human rights is not easy – organisations like SANGOCO can help. NCA support to Abahlali struggles can help, through alliances with international organisations.
- What vehicle for change do we have to deal meaningfully with the experiences of suffering communities? The Abahlali situation makes me heart sore.
- We need an attitude shift as NGOs. FBOs -- not to represent others but to facilitate that municipalities to go meet people in need directly, hear their issues and work out the way forward. We have to shift away from wanting to be the go between so as to get the credit.
- The gap between what is on paper and what is in practice is clear.
- As a pastor in an informal settlement, I can identify with the issues Sbu raised in his talk. People in municipal offices often lack skills. They have suddenly been called on to govern, with the demise of apartheid. Two constituencies church has to empower are poor citizens and city managers/officials in local government. During apartheid church leaders led. We must lead today.
- Following three hundred years of colonialism, South Africa has had 13 years of democracy. Education is our biggest struggle: we were not supposed to be here, in positions of leadership, given the design of Bantu education. We have come far in 13 years – on issues of housing, HIV/AIDS, malaria. But I feel bad about what still has to be done. Do leaders see what has still to be done, given their distance from the people? We can encourage stepping up the pressure, and empower people to stand up and fight their own battles.

Comments on the other field visits were as follows:

- We hoped to have more practical information on issues such as housing, service delivery etc in Msunduzi and Richmond.
- Maybe we did not have the information we need to engage municipalities – Msunduzi is in practice one of the most accessible municipalities in KZN.
- In Richmond we met with various groups who were involved in conflict resolution, food security, advocacy groups at local level. A church leaders group is active in this area.
- Church needs to translate the talk and documents into action! ■

A Conversation: The Practice of Local Governance and Citizen Participation in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Mali

Discussion with Domingos Joao Antonio

Domingos Joao Antonio Programme Manager for NCA Angola moderated a lively and interactive panel discussion with three participants representing governance experiences from three different countries:

- Gabriel Manyangadze from Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe,
- Fatou Cisse from NCA Mali
- Sarah Blin from Care Mozambique

Domingos: There are similarities in the situation of all three countries as we heard in yesterday's presentations. The first question I want to ask each of you is: 'Does government have a good relationship with the people in each of your countries?

Gabriel: The relationship between government

and the people is polarised. People want justice. In South Africa we see there is a framework. In Zimbabwe there is no framework, and this results in abuse. The individual is not protected. Legislation outlaws discussion of more than five people.

Sarah: A framework exists for the participation of citizens but government defines participation as presence of citizens, and uses the terminology of engagement and consultation. This blurs participatory democracy. When people talk too much, they have been killed. People live in fear. The culture that has existed from colonial times, through the communist era, continues and does not allow people to speak out. While formally all people are equal, the most vulnerable are not included in local or district level formations. The biggest challenge is to get the poor to be heard. The framework to get the poor heard is there but to actually make it work is an issue. FRELIMO has used decentralisation to its advantage.

Fatou: How to engage citizens in Mali is an issue. It seems resources in Mali are more vertical than here. We have the big problem of communication, competence, and capacities. Also there is tension between municipal and traditional council levels.

Domingos: In Zimbabwe is it possible to empower the community?

Gabriel: We have trained community leaders, for example the Kariba Area Committee. We have spoken to councillors, the district administration, and the Member of Parliament. We put across issues such as employment and housing. We quoted provisions in the legal system. But we are hampered in our efforts by an absence of a framework which allows for discussion.

Domingos: Is there need to make the constitution more democratic?

Gabriel: This is an issue. There is need to make it more democratic. It protects the powerful to the detriment of the powerless.

Domingos: How easy is it to engage government on social issues?

Sarah: In Mozambique, Care tries to facilitate a larger process of dialogue, we try to support both local government and citizens.

Fatou: In Mali you can't say anything unless the sheikh approves. By training local government staff in legal frameworks, you can make a difference. Best performing are those districts where NGOs have been present and supported processes over time.

Domingos: Sarah, what kind of citizens do you have in Mozambique?

Sarah: We have…men and women! Active citizens are emerging, but there is still fear.

Domingos: Gabriel what is the solution for Zimbabwe?

Gabriel: There is high potential for changing the course of events, but as civil society we are not yet making use of that potential. We have some 2000 civil society organisations, but we are not are not organised in terms of critical mass.

Domingos: Can the church play a role is each of your three counties?

Gabriel: The church is fragmented. Government appoints pastors who mislead the people of Zimbabwe. The church itself is polarised along lines of government and the opposition. And justice is denied. A new dimension is the economy as a rallying point for everyone. People are looking for a way to solve economic problems

Sarah: Care in Mozambique does not work directly with churches.

Fatou: Mali is 90% Muslim. We have mosques, CSOs, strong women's organisations, many small NGOs and associations. Also we have a confederation of women's organisations and many strong professional organisatons which get involved in these issues.

Domingos: What do you think of the Abahlali position: "No Houses, No Votes!!"

Gabriel: If you cannot give me what is due to me I will not give you my vote. We seek justice. Party politics is fraught by tricksters. We should seek justice through the ballot box!

Sarah: It is not helpful to be confrontational. We don't want another war. We have to find a middle ground between consensus and confrontation. By empowering local citizens, we can enlighten them on the context, framework and abuse of rights. This is a slow process.

Fatou: This could be a claim for one group. In Mali, we could also say, "No Education, No Vote!" We can apply this to many problems.

Domingos: Do people in Zimbabwe still believe in democracy?

Gabriel: They do believe in democracy - that things will work one day. That's why people took so long to take action. The National Constitutional Assembly are fighting for a new constitution. For most ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe, this is an important demand. The hope for democracy in Africa must link with solidarity across the continent from Cape to Cairo. Leadership should be accountable to the people of Africa and not to the brotherhood of presidents of Africa.

Domingos: In Africa, we have democracy but no food. What is your comment?

Sarah: This is a big problem. People want immediate results from democracy. People should be comfortable with the state they live in. There must be a search for democracy the Mozambican way.

Fatou: There is hope for democracy in Africa. This is the best thing that has happened to us. Sometimes we deny grassroots people their say, but they have something important to contribute. Democracy and participation will take time. But we will arrive! Many believe in it. But there are many challenges and we have to attack. We need to change attitudes and mobilise our financial and human resources.

Bible Reflection on Religion and Governance

Dr R. S. Khumalo, Ujaama Centre at University of KwaZulu Natal

The Bible has been used to subjugate and to liberate. As people of faith, we should use the power of the Bible to liberate the oppressed. Sbu yesterday spoke of shack dwellers' lives. Even the poorest of the poor in shacks have Bibles or Korans. Sacred texts appeal to people in poverty and oppression, and can mobilize them to be active and engaged citizens.

People as stewards of creation

All the Abrahamic religions adhere to the biblical account of creation, where God created the earth and handed it over to human beings to work and look after it as good stewards. (Genesis 1:26-28, 2: 1-15). This reminds us that human beings were placed on earth to govern creation responsible by looking after it and this creation includes human beings themselves. So humanity is both the object and subject of governance as it is part of creation. This means that God has given them authority to govern themselves and heir society. Religious organizations including the church are custodians of God's vision for the world, therefore they need to see that good governance and responsible stewardship is enacted I the world. Therefore they cannot step aside and live the governance of the earth in the hands of secular institutions and people alone. They need to be involved with that, by virtue of representing God on earth.

Equality of human beings

Linked to the story of creation and people's rights as stewards over creation is the fact that people are equal and so have equal rights to participate in the running of their country. People have a right to influence the processes that influence their lives. The link between democracy and the equality of humanity is well expressed by Oskar Wermeter when he says:

> *Democracy is based on deeply held convictions of the fundamental equality of all human beings, the unity of the human race and the value and dignity of every human person (Wermeter, 2003:18).*

If human beings are equal therefore each and every one of them has a God-given right to shape and influence the way their society is organized and government. This conviction must guide the church in encouraging ordinary citizens to take advantage of "invited" spaces and participate in governance structures.

Servant hood as a principle of governance

One of the biggest complaints by citizens is that their leaders are not available, or even when they are available to them, they bossy them around. They behave like masters and mistresses who must be served by the electorate. This came out constantly during the conference. The Bible teaches us that one of the basic principles of leadership is God's household is "servant hood". Those who have been elected need to understand themselves as servants of those who have elected them instead of the other way round. Public office must be understood as an opportunity offered to one to serve the rest of the nation. There is

something Godly about these values, for they call for humility for public servants that can only be inculcated to human beings and sustained through continuous spiritual nourishment and teaching which only religious organizations can offer. Religious organizations have the opportunity to draw important resources from their tradition and sacred texts such as the Bible, Quran and Hindu Philosophy, spiritual resources that can nature and enhance the values of servant hood that are needed by elected representative. If religious organizations do not offer this, then who will?

Strategies to Strengthen Citizen Agency

Mpho Putu, Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa

The Greek work *politikos* means, "matters of the citizens." In the context of a growing attitude that we should leave politics to the politicians, I am suggesting that citizens need to take back politics and make politics work for them. This presentation will therefore focus on different definitions of citizen participation, the importance of citizen participation for accountable governance and some definitions and strategies for citizen agency.

Citizen Participation

Within the development discourse, citizen participation has a diversity of interpretations, ranging from invited participation in development projects initiated by others to the rights and responsibilities of citizens and how these link to democratic governance.

Generally, we can say that citizen participation takes place in two arenas: invited space and invented space. **Invited space** refers to arenas created by government. For example in South Africa, legislation has established specific arenas for citizens to participate in governance of their own communities: Ward committees, Community Policing Forums, Integrated Development Planning processes (IDP), and Community Development Forums. **Invented space** refers to those spaces which citizens organize themselves, e.g. through community based organizations, NGOs or other interest organizations existing outside the realm of the state. Both invited and invented space are important arenas in which citizens participate to influence decisions and help ensure government sensitivity to the needs of the people

Governance and citizen participation

Governance is described as a reform strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent, and more democratic (Monique, 1997:4 in Gaventa and Valderrama). In recent years there has been a move from the concept of government (elected officials and state institutions) to *governance.* This concept holds that governance is not a separate entity from its citizenry but the two are closely intertwined. (Atkinson 1989:43; Kooiman 1993). This has important implications for the idea of citizen agency, which is based on the ideal of governance being owned by the people or the community.

In South Africa, we face a number of challenges to citizen participation in governance: The culture of democratic practice is new:

- Poor citizens lack skills and education to engage with government
- There seems to be a bias for investing in infrastructure before investing in human resources
- The language used by government is often very technical
- Political will on the part of those in power is often lacking
- There is an over dependence on experts providing the solutions, at the cost of real community engagement.

IDASA has defined the importance of citizen participation to democratic governance:

- Citizen participation is critical to representation, for example through voting in elections.
- Citizen participation is essential for transparency and accountability. Citizen participation in governance between elections is essential to ensure that leaders do not abuse their powers and that the interests of citizens are advanced.
- Citizen participation is vital to keep a government in touch with its people. It enhances the quality of government by constantly bringing diverse needs, concerns views and perspectives in the decision making process.
- Citizen participation enhances implementation. Citizen participation may also take place through local and community structures.

IDASA believes that community participation is imperative for a vibrant democracy. Community participation refers to informing local government and development agencies in a structured way what their development needs are.

Citizen Agency

The concept of citizen agency is about citizens taking ownership of their lives.

Sometimes this is called self rule. The focus is on citizens managing their own communities, with less reliance from the government or experts. Citizens can mobilise resources to organize and build their own power. Unpacking the idea of citizen agency, IDASA has looked at three models defining citizens and how they practice citizen agency:

a) Citizens as Voters

Citizens have rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Central to this notion of citizenship is the right to vote. Once citizens vote a government into power, government is expected to deliver the goods, and citizens are seen as recipients of government services. When services are not delivered or are inadequate, citizens have the right to protest or vote the current leaders out of office.

b) Citizens as Volunteers

This model focuses not only on rights, but also on responsibilities. Citizens are encouraged not only to claim rights, but also to be aware of the rights of others and to take responsibility for protecting and fulfilling them. The “good citizen” is neighbourly, takes care of others, and is concerned about the community at large.

Participation in public life is seen as a duty, but interaction with other citizens is favoured above interaction with government.

c) Citizens as Co-creators

The richest view of citizenship is based on the idea of the citizen as co-creator. This means that citizens with government together address society’s problems (big and small), and develop solutions of lasting, public value. Public life is thus not determined only by government (through formal structures or channels of communication), but is created by citizens themselves. Decisions are not made from the top down. Citizens themselves work together to identify issues, diagnose problems, develop strategies, form coalitions, and work on problems to effect political change, and to create things of public importance. The belief here is that ordinary people of all ages have different talents, insights and skills to help solve complex problems that government cannot solve on its own. The joint work of citizens and government is a way of co-creating the world we live in. It can be called “public work”.

Strategies to develop citizen agency

- Design programmes to capacitate citizens at the lowest levels, targeting youth, women and the poor.
- These programs need to address issues like:
  - How local government works
  - Role and responsibilities of the elected officials
  - Rights, role and responsibilities of citizens
  - Budgetary systems
  - Gender issues
- Empower citizens to name and frame their own issues
- Teach and allow communities to solve their own problems. The golden rule of organising is, "Do not do for others what they can do for themselves
- Encourage citizen partnership and relationship with government to address society's problems
- Focus on solutions with long lasting public value.
- Start small self-education/empowerment groups such as Study Circles, Umrabulo (adapted from the Scandinavian countries). This has also been called the “Jesus method” based on the concept

of each one teach one. Consist of 5 – 10 people learning together.

- Public Forums – engage communities in discussions and empower them to raise their voices in public meetings
- Start advocacy projects, and lobby government around a specific issue through letters, petitions, meetings or phone calls,
- Encourage discussion and debate in different fourms, including schools, religious institutions and in the workplace
- Encourage citizens to participate as an election monitor or election official.

The richest view of citizenship is based on the idea of the citizen as co-creator. This means that citizens with government together address society's problems (big and small), and develop solutions of lasting, public value.

Discussion on Citizen Agency

Two challenges

First, where do we focus in our work – on citizens as voters, volunteers or co-creators? Second how do we strategically target our training? It takes up to two months to train people in how government works. Is this the information people need? We capacitate and then what? Should we rather gear our training to help them with strategies on how to engage? How do we take minority struggles for example on language into account? We are pushed to develop advocacy training to claim teaching of indigenous language, changes to the education act. How do we work with shack dwellers on housing concerns? We need practical demands and actions.

Church

Church is at a distance – the Bible is not of this world. The church could feel excluded – in relation to promotion of gender equality for example. On radio and TV there is talk about gender equality, but in their homes people do not practice gender equality. If not promoted at home, it is very difficult to promote outside. Democracy in Africa is like a chick – if we rush we could trample it. We need to walk carefully with strong steps. Bringing government to community needs greater closeness between the two. Government is worried about elections and mainly sees citizens as voters.

Southern Africa

Which space dominates Southern Africa – Invited or invented space? How can we enlarge invited space? How can we deal with the challenge of political will and the political party domination of invited space. Democratic centralism in South Africa is cumbersome to ordinary people. Citizens are seen as consumers. Poverty is perpetuated.

Increasing women's participation

This is an important issue, and in Mali we have a programme to increase women's participation in public life.

Mpho response:

During the years of struggle and once we got a democratic government, we cried for participation. Government created space, but space is limited – for example to ten representatives in a ward. Parameters of the invited spaces are set by government. Often all they want is that people endorse what they are saying. We should make sure we do not simply endorse what governments are doing.

IDASA is developing citizen agency through capacity building. The question arose of certification via government Sector Education and Training Authorities. We asked are we certifying citizens? Should we? We don't issue certificates – will not succumb to them.

On the question of citizens as consumers: You could have a 5 roomed shack and be moved to a 2 roomed RDP house. Consumer mentality says I demand and want this. Apartheid government it is said built better houses with better resources. Community should build houses without government. We should be part of the solution.

Strategies to Increase Accountability of Local Government

Thabo Khaile, Fair Share, School of Government, University of Western Cape

This presentation seeks to address the following questions:

- What do we do when government gives no formal or invited space for citizen participation?
- What do we do when structures for citizen participation are there, but they don't work?
- What are some examples of strategies to hold local government accountable?

As regards the question of how to hold local government accountable, there are two basic approaches:

- To strengthen the processes of community participation, i.e. the ways in which poor people inform and influence municipal decision making processes.
- To establish mechanisms and processes that promote responsiveness of municipal councils by creating spaces for meaningful interaction between the elected representatives and communities.

Overview of formal or invited spaces for citizen participation

As we saw from the overview of local governance from country groups, many countries in the region have established formal spaces for citizen participation in local governance.

Formal spaces are those that are created through legislative provisions such as:

- Constitutional provisions on participation (South Africa & Mozambique)
- Rights (South Africa & Mozambique)
- National regulations – for uniform standards
- Municipal by-laws

Other Formal Spaces are created through:

- Municipal rules of order (guidelines which institutionalize citizen participation)
- Municipal council's established participation structures and processes
- Political Party Declarations
- Ward Committees – (South Africa)
- Community Consultative Structures (Mozambique)

Local planning and budgeting processes are also a potential arena where citizens can hold local government accountable.

These formal or invited spaces are important because: they can promote collaboration between communities and their respective municipal council structures; they minimise the arbitrariness of processes of participation; and they provide communities with a legal recourse when agreed guidelines for community participation go wrong.

What to do when there are no formal spaces?

As we heard, there are a number of countries in Southern Africa, such as Angola, where political space is limited and formal or invited space for citizen participation in local governance is nonexistent. What might be some civil society strategies when this is the context?

- Advocate for the creation of formal and meaningful spaces,
- Strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to empower and mobilize citizens,
- Utilise the media to influence municipal processes,
- Explore collaboration with other structures within municipal councils, eg administrative structures of governance,
- Explore the use of the courts and relevant public interest institutions, using legal frameworks to set precedence for citizen participation.

What to do when structures for community participation exist, but are not working?

First, it is important to understand why these structures are not working. Based on Fair Share's experiences working with both community based

organizations and local government in South Africa, we have identified the following as important reasons why existing structures fail poor people:

- Apathy of citizens
- Citizens lack information and capacity to participate
- Existing structures lack legitimacy, e.g. because they are dominated by political parties and ordinary citizens don't believe their needs will really be addressed,
- Lack of commitment from government to really make these structures work,
- Lack of support from both communities and municipal councils to work through the established structures. For example, in South Africa rich citizens see Ward Committees as a structure for poor people, as they can gain access and influence local government officials directly. On the other hand, local government officials often use Ward Committees or *imbizos* to sell their party platform instead of consulting and listening to the needs of communities.

How can we address these shortcomings? Here are some suggestions:

- Identify strategies to excite communities about participatory democracy – assisting communities to strategize around how to solve "burning issues" in their own community as opposed to general civic education training is one example.
- Strengthen the capacity of community organizations,
- Strengthen community links with municipal structures,
- Assist communities/sector/interest groups to hold structures accountable
- Taking ownership of structures, e,g. community getting their own representatives elected to Ward Committees,
- Work to set the agenda of existing structures. For example, in some areas of South Africa Gender Links has begun to assist Municipal government to plan municipal campaigns to address gender based violence.
- Ensure that these structures enhance participatory democracy, by practicing it in their own meetings, by laws etc.

Some examples how communities can hold local government accountable

In South Africa, Fair Share has worked extensively with budget monitoring at local government level. We have worked on both sides – empowering poor people as citizens and building capacity of local government officials.

Community based organisations' (CBO) participation in municipal planning and budget processes

Here are some of the strategies we have used to help community based organizations to engage their Ward Committees and participate in municipal planning and budgeting processes:

- Assist communities to carry out their own community or sector assessments of needs,
- Assist communities with prioritisation exercises, so they have clear demands,
- Assist communities to develop lobby and advocacy strategies
- Engage in planning structures and processes
- Participate in municipal budgeting processes
- Participate in budget formulation
- Establish capacity and mechanisms to monitor municipal expenditure
- Access municipal budgets and publicise auditor's reports.

From this work we have seen the crucial importance of Community Based Organisations (CBOS):

- CBOs should be the source of Ward Committees' mandate and legitimacy,
- CBOs must provide support and participate actively in matters of ward committees,
- Ward committees should represent the interests of CBOs.

Women's participation in municipal budgets

A second example that Fair Share is in the process of piloting is women's participation in municipal budgets. Unfortunately this research is at early stages and we don't have clear findings as yet. However, some of the emerging trends are as follows:

- In general, participation of women in local budget processes is very low,

- Women's participation in budget is not very structured, and thus not very results-oriented.
- In general, women's involvement in budget is not informed by a gender specific agenda. For example, though there is a relatively high representation of women in local government in South Africa, issues of gender based violence which affect women and girls disproportionately are generally not on the agenda of local government.
- Work with women and budgets does not receive support from the municipality and or other organizations. This is a challenge! ■

Group work Mali

Discussion

Key questions that emerge from the presentation are "Do we as citizens and civil society choose to engage or disengage?" How do we think through the slogan of Abahlali "No Houses, No vote?" If the only legitimate political party does not deliver, does that mean we don't vote at all? How do we address the lack of women's participation?

Ward Committees should be spaces for the poor. Studies on women and budgets show that there is often no solidarity between women in community and women representatives.

For us in NGOs our business is to work with the poorest.

An important question is are we working on an agenda of deconcentration or devolution?

Response from Thabo:

We need a combination of the both engagement and confrontation (disengagement). Mayors are elected by council. Political party processes decide who becomes mayor at local level. Ward committees are premised on an understanding that we want to participate, that we are active citizens. Ward committees are intended to coordinate this participation. But is the assumption wrong that we as citizens are ready or want to participate in our country's governance?

White communities and middle class people do not want to participate on ward committees. We looked at what type of citizens we were before 1994 – that the momentum of engagement would be carried into the democracy, that people would be excited about participation. But the wealthy and the connected have their own foot path to the mayor's office. The rich can opt out of democracy and citizen participation – and by essential services from the private sector. This is a real challenge.

Question: Is there real participation in budget processes? And why is there participation in some areas but not in others?

Question/ observation: There is an assumption that we all belong to a political party. Mayors are decided upon by branches or regions of political parties. In practice, we don't really choose our leaders: the few decide for the majority. We still feel indebted to those who liberated us, as is the case in the rest of Southern Africa. There is need to educate people about this. The liberation movements helped liberate us, but they are not necessarily best placed to lead us in democracy.

Question/Observation: I see apathy as an important reason why citizens don't participate in governance. Coming from Kwa Makuta, I have observed fear paralysis. I believer poor people will participate if they are mobilized around issues that directly affect them.

It was generally agreed that participation was more likely when there was a burning issue at hand.

Section Three

Key challenges emerging from the conference

Group work Angola

Supporting Churches to develop a public theology

A key issue raised in many of the presentations and picked up in discussion by participants was that of the need for churches to develop a public theology – that is a theology that stressed the need for actions to improve the conditions of the poor in the here and now.

The point made strongly was that while churches had played a significant role in the era of liberation struggles in the region, drawing in many cases on liberation theology, the role of churches today was far from adequate in meeting present challenges.

The church stance of critical solidarity in relation to government needs to be interrogated – at times there is more solidarity with governments in the region and too little criticism even in the face of the glaring inequalities and persistent conditions of poverty and unemployment.

The strategy of churches working with government ministries and departments can result in co-option – that is unless churches give more attention to enabling and facilitating the voices and agency of the poor and marginalized.

Linked to this was the concern that churches might be leaning towards a more middle class constituency, losing sight of its mission among the poor, and especially so when the poor were so often portrayed as troublesome hordes engaged in civil disobedience and even in some cases accused of being led astray by a third force. The feeling was that the role of the church should be to work with (and not for) the poor in order to enable and facilitate both voice and agency of the poor.

In the South African context discomfort was expressed on the relationship of the church with the state. There was suspicion that churches are being mobilised to support politicians, and that reverends drawn into discussions and fora with the President and Provincial Premiers or employed as civil servants, may play a role in advancing government propaganda from their pulpits.

There were concerns that the National Religious leaders forum which is invited from time to time by

the country's President to offer their wisdom on where the country is going could be co-opted by state agendas.

Similarly when the Inter-religious leaders forum in the KZN province of South Africa meets with the Premier of the province whose agendas are these religious leaders advancing and do they represent the views of ordinary congregants?

Some government departments have appointed religious leaders as commissioners – for example the transport department has appointed a Bishop as commissioner. This raises questions as to his allegiance. Being on the payroll of a government department could taint the advice and counsel such a religious leader gave to his congregants.

Key questions that we need to consider are "to what extent do these religious leaders represent ordinary people on the ground?" And "How can these religious leaders be held accountable by their church constituencies?"

Further the point was made that rather than being obsessed with an ambulance ministry of bandaging injustices, as is often the case the church must work to bring a new world order. The church needs to better understand its role in a society that has moved from apartheid to democracy. In the present context the enemy is not clear cut and this is a challenge. Added to this the new generation of church leaders do not see the relevance in fighting for political causes; they do not know which issues to address. What is needed is political motivation and solidarity among church leaders. Education can play a role in this – advocacy training to get involved in political and social issues, political seminars to challenge more political thinking.

Key questions that we need to consider are "to what extent do these religious leaders represent ordinary people on the ground?" And "How can these religious leaders be held accountable by their church constituencies?"

Women's Rights and Governance

There was agreement that we need to ensure that women are in positions of decision making, within the church, in the various institutions of governance, and in society; and that we need to move beyond quotas in order to ensure that women are able to effectively participate once they enter such positions.

The barriers that keep women out of political office also serve as barriers to women's effective participation once in office. These include social conventions and attitudes about women's status in society, as well as restrictions on women's time given their responsibility for reproductive work.

While in many cases women's participation has improved, women have not been able to adequately address their concerns. The continuing high rates of GBV and women's greater vulnerability to HIV infections are two indicators of little improvements in women's situation.

Attempting to get more women into decision making positions and enabling women to participate effectively to the extent that they are able to raise their concerns and get these addressed is to challenge deeply held beliefs and institutionalized barriers.

At the ideological level gender inequality is justified as the natural order, with both women and men viewing the gender order as fixed. Not only that, but the existing gender power arrangement forms the basis of the identity of individual women and men, and of their communities. Hence to question this is to disrupt traditional ideas and is met with resistance, opposition and hostility.

Deeply ingrained gender power relations determine what it means to be woman and man in all societies. To be male is to be privileged, an autonomous human being, able to own property and to control one's movement. To be female is to be sexually subordinate to men, to lack autonomy, to have conditional or no ownership of property, and for most women to be not in a position to control one's movement or time. Women are seen as subordinates to men, as people whose voice is unreliable and as second-class citizens.

Women and their concerns are expected to be contained within the household. As daughters and sisters under the care of men, women have not been taken seriously as political agents.

Institutions, including faith based, political, and state not only mirror gender relations of male domination and female subordination, but also reproduce these relations.

In arguing the case for women's equal representation in elected assemblies activists and academics include the justice argument – that since women make up half the population they have the right to half the seats; the experience argument – that women and men have different experiences which need to be represented; the interest group argument – that women's and men's interests may at times be in conflict and thus men cannot represent women's interests; and that women as role models will encourage other women to follow into decision making positions.

A key mechanism advanced to achieve greater numbers of women in public office has been quotas or reserved seats for women. However deeply ingrained barriers to women's participation in institutions are seen in low figures of women in political office despite the activism of recent years – so by 2004 women made up only 15.6 percent of national parliamentarians world-wide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2004).

Accountabilty to women

Earlier approaches to get state institutions to answer to poor women and to enforce gender equality commitments took the form of women's entry into elected assemblies and state bureaucracies, and the setting up of gender machinery and gender focal points within government departments. Femocrats, as the women who entered the state were called, worked from within the state to shift organisational priorities, processes and procedures in ways that would enable attention to gender equality as a goal.

Gender machinery and gender focal points were seen as measures to ensure accountability to an equality agenda, alongside the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategy.

However these measures failed as accountability measures and did not ensure gender equitable outcomes. Besides the constraints of unwieldy state institutions, meager resources for the gender machinery, and their technical bent which led them to evade unequal power relations that were at the heart of women's marginalisation within development, a key missing ingredient in these initiatives was women's agency as a political constituency within civil society.

A more political approach to development is needed which brings voice and politics to bureaucratic change, and which hinges on the mobilisation of women as a political constituency actively engaged in determining their own destiny. Concerns with accountability within such an approach, and noting that accountability has two dimensions – answerability and enforceability – shifts the terms of the discussion to action by poor women as agents who can inform priority setting and decision-making; demand answers from policy makers; and enforce punishment for poor decision-making.

Gender Links just published a book, "*At the Coalface: Gender and Local Governance in Southern Africa*". All participants at the conference received a copy of this book which can be a resource for strategizing on how to address issues of gender in local governance in future.

A more political approach to development is needed which brings voice and politics to bureaucratic change, and which hinges on the mobilisation of women as a political constituency actively engaged in determining their own destiny.

New Strategies to promote citizen agency

It was noted that a key strategy adopted in promoting citizen agency is training. While training is an important response it was noted that we need to more actively link training initiatives with ongoing actions, organisation and accompaniment.

This requires that we look at citizenship in new ways – so that we see citizens not simply as voters, or volunteers, but rather as co-creators working within and outside of governance structures as agents able to shape their own destinies.

Democracy promises inclusion on the basis of ideas of equality, liberty, and choice for all human beings. Yet the actual experience of democracy for the vast majority of citizens in most democratic countries across the world is their exclusion from

the seats of power and from the heights of the economy.

Operating from the perspective that ordinary citizens have the right to demand state accountability, civil society organisations including grassroots organisations, need to bring the voices of the most marginalised to state processes.

An approach of building citizen voice would include strategies of advancing political consciousness, advancing and supporting organisation of the poor, and building demands in ways that link in with broader development priorities.

Operating from the perspective that ordinary citizens have the right to demand state accountability, civil society organisations including grassroots organisations, need to bring the voices of the most marginalised to state processes.

Need to seize spaces for change and use political space more effectively

We need to identify what space exists, and how space can be expanded, within state institutions and processes to enable civil society to play a legitimate role in ensuring accountability.

Participation of citizens is key in attaining accountability, not forgetting that participation is an end in itself, as well as a means to ensuring accountability and adequate provision of services.

When we speak of participation it is in spaces that matter – spaces where key decisions are made and where state and citizenry can encounter and interact with each other.

Accountability entails that someone is made to answer for a wrong doing. It entails checks and balances to enable someone to be held to account. Accountability functions are usually confined to state agents, with accountability being upwards to superior officials rather than downwards to citizens.

In order to engage with state institutions and processes organisations need to develop capabilities including understandings of how institutions function and how to promote change; a strategic sense for identifying spaces and opportunities; and skills to negotiate the complex and difficult role of working inside state institutions while located on the outside with a clear focus on the interests and needs of the poor.

That citizens are generally unable to hold state institutions to account relates to the deficit within democracy that citizens are excluded from accountability functions with the state on an ongoing basis. Within representative democracies, citizen participation is generally restricted to choosing government representatives through the vote in five-yearly elections. In between elections ordinary citizens are unable to demand accountability and responsiveness from the state. Accountability mechanisms are usually internal to the state, hinge on preventing corruption, on promoting efficient delivery, and focus on procedure rather than on outcomes. Even when overt statements are for pro-poor and gender equitable outcomes, accountability mechanisms usually have anti-women and anti-poor biases. So when state institutions are open to citizens, class, caste, gender and race power relations intervene to determine that the powerful groups in society have access, while socially disadvantaged groups are denied access. Access to courts, for example, require financial resources, and skills in legal literacy which disadvantaged groups usually lack. Not having access to state processes and not being in a position to enforce accountability is a function of being poor as well as a reason why the poor remain poor.

Concerns with accountability from a pro poor approach which stresses participation, and which notes that accountability has two dimensions – answerability and enforceability – stresses the need to support action by poor women and men as agents who can inform priority setting and decision-making; demand answers from policy makers; and enforce punishment for poor decision-making. ■

Participation of citizens is key in attaining accountability, not forgetting that participation is an end in itself, as well as a means to ensuring accountability and adequate provision of services.

Section Four

Priorities for Future Work and Recommendations for Future Cooperation

Recommendations from Country Groups

Delegates discussed in their country groups and made recommendations for how to follow up this conference. They were asked to identify:

- **Two main strategies or challenges they will take back to their own work.**
- **Two or three recommendations for future networking and co-operation in the region.**

Country groups reported back as follows:

Zimbabwe and Malawi

Priorities for own work:

- Create public forums which allow poor citizens to engage public duty bearers more directly;
- Promote and support churches to adopt a public theology.

Recommendations for future cooperation

- Organisation to organisation learning
- Linking to regional partners for capacity building, e.g. Ujamaa on Religion and Governance Training
- NCA to develop an inventory of regionally based resource organisations, by skill areas, to mentor partners on different aspects of governance work.

South Africa

Challenges:

- How will the church unpack the idea of participation?
- How do we wrestle power from existing formal structures/power holders? E.g. Ruling party domination of Ward Committees
- How do we as churches undertake more critical social analysis?

Priorities for own work:

- Education and awareness that enables people to look at alternatives, make choices and have capacity to hold local councillors accountable.
- Formation of strategic partnerships with spheres of governance and other actors eg social movements.

Recommendations for future cooperation:

- Form partnerships and networks around sharing of specific skills.
- NCA to develop an interactive governance web page to facilitate learning and exchange among partners.
- Consolidate and deepen provincial partnerships among different organisations working on local governance.
- Identify more specific issues for networking, e.g. training – lessons learned.
- Explore and intensify wider community networking

Mozambique

Priorities for own work:

Strategies and challenges reflect that democracy and local government asre still at an embryonic stage in Mozambique, and many citizens do not know about legislation.

- Inform and spread information on the non existence of local government elections and why local government is important.
- Find strategies to make civic education more effective, so communities and municipalities are equipped to provide solutions and make a positive impact in poor communities, eg like better provision of basic education.
- Strengthen organisation of community groups as social actors as the first step, and then mobilize and motivate then to engage with government.
- Inform citizens of rights so they can claim rights and hold local government accountable to good existing legislation and regulations.
- Eliminate exclusion of women, aged, those living with HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations for future cooperation:

- Establish networks and opportunities to exchange experiences, among Portuguese speaking countries in particular.
- Encourage civic education as a continuous process.

Mali

Priorities for own work:

- Move from training to action - we need to focus more to improve the quality of our interventions, and we need clearer strategies for follow up of those who have been trained.
- Make more effective use of invited spaces for citizen engagement
- Create new spaces
- Pilot work on budget monitoring

Recommendations for future cooperation:

- Within NCA, we need to promote more inter-regional cooperation and exchange, e.g. between Western and Southern Africa.
- More exchange on practical experiences, e.g. women in governance and budget monitoring.
- Exchange with Southern Africa on the role of religious leaders in promoting accountable governance.

Angola

Priorities for own work:

- To follow up the IDASA cooperation and build churches capacity to promote community participation in local governance.
- Develop capacity or ability to identify problems and find solutions, given the limited political space in Angola.
- Identify specific and concrete actions to promote gender equality, especially within the churches.

Recommendations for future cooperation:

- NCA and other donor organisations should work for public theology in churches in order to help and support the struggle for social justice. If public theology were a fact in our country, we would be better able to confront and deal with problems of social justice.
- We would like support from relevant NCA partners in the region to organise a conference in Angola on issues of public theology and churches' role in promoting accountable governance.
- In conclusion we would like more meetings of this type among church networks.

Discussion

- **Good to network**
- **Need to focus our discussions on more concrete issues**
- **Need to define more specifically the themes on which we want to network.**

NCA challenge is to action a process. Two years ago NCA had a broad based agenda for empowering partners. If there should be specific follow up it would be good to hear from partners what should be focus – for example public theology, participation, monitoring.

Looking Ahead: NCA Response to Recommendations for Future Regional Cooperation on Local Governance

Gwen Berge, NCA

How can NCA best support partners' efforts to promote citizen engagement for accountable local governance in the future? What commitments can NCA make to promote learning and exchange and ultimately better governance work in the region?

This conference provided a space for a rich exchange on experiences, challenges and concerns. It has provided us an excellent opportunity to deepen our understanding of the context we work in, of the strengths and weaknesses we face as church in promoting accountable governance and of the need for more effective strategies to build citizen agency and hold government accountable.

Together we have identified an agenda for future action. The following provides a summary of ways in which NCA commits to support partners in this work in the future:

Identify and support effective mechanisms for learning and exchange:

From the country reports, NCA noted partners gave high priority to learning and networking mechanisms. The conference format may not be the best mechanism, if we are now ready to move from more general discussions to a focus on practice. It may be useful to convene another regional conference in the future, but for 2008 NCA would like to support initiatives that include:

- Organisation to organisation exchanges, around specific issues or areas of work.
- Resource organisations mentoring or providing training for NCA partners in specific areas (e.g. such as the Fair Share – CCM cooperation in Mozambique or IDASA and CICA cooperation in Angola.)
- Systematic documentation of innovative practices.

NCA has some limited resources available from 2008 to support specific requests from partners in these areas. Partners are invited to make requests.

Other networking mechanisms that partners have recommended will require some further investigation as to actual level of interest from partners and approach:

- Interactive web site on citizen engagement in local governance,
- Regional inventory of relevant resource organisations, by skill area.

On these two items, we would welcome an indication of interest from partners and also recommendations on who should be involved.

Support innovative pilots or projects that address key issue areas:

The conference identified a number of emerging challenges for future work. NCA is interested to support innovative practice, pilots or learning and exchange groups addressing the following issue areas:

- ***Gender, power and governance*** – especially work that focuses on promoting women's participation in local governance, and strategies and interventions that help women to participate effectively so local government responds to their concerns (e.g. violence against women, vulnerability to HIV and AIDs, etc)
- ***Linking training of citizens to community mobilisation and advocacy*** – especially work that reflects on practice and lays out strategies for future work. Of particular interest are well documented case studies or stories that trace the process from training to community engagement with local government to improvements in community services/livelihoods.
- ***Opening new spaces for the poor to engage public duty bearers*** – especially public forums or meetings that facilitate space for poor and excluded groups to speak directly to decision makers.
- ***Religion and governance*** – especially initiatives that support people of faith (and particularly women, youth, poor) to articulate what “public theology” or church engagement for accountable governance would mean to them. If we are truly concerned with using theology to raise the commitment of churches to social justice, who does the theology is important. If academic men in the hierarchy of the church do it, there will be limitations.

Partners and resource organisations are invited to send NCA proposals for strategies to work

together on these issues, or to include these issues in their own governance projects.

Establish a Regional Governance Advisory Group

Finally in line with the recommendation from KZNCC, NCA commits to setting up an advisory group – a coalition of resource persons and partners – to advise and assist NCA in harvesting best practices of partners' work with accountable governance, promoting cooperation and exchange among NCA partners and resource organizations, monitor what we are doing and help NCA to be responsive, and to brainstorm next steps. NCA agrees to draft a terms of reference for the Governance Advisory Group and invite NCA staff, partners and resource organizations to express their interest in participating in the working group. The deadline for sending out the terms of reference and invitation to participation was set for mid April, and those interested should indicate their interest by 1 May 2007.

In conclusion, we must remember that our ultimate goal is to expand and deepen democracy and engage governments to be more accountable so that the poor and excluded of this region may have a life in dignity. The church has an important role to make sure voices of the poor are heard. It is easy to say we are working on behalf of the poor. But can we say we are working with the poor? ■

Closing remarks from NCA Leadership

Arne Dale, NCA Head Office

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this conference. It has been an opportunity to understand the pain and happiness of this region. I enjoyed the speeches, debates, discussion. Our mission is to train and mobilise people so they can develop methods and demands to take up their struggles.

The question of gender is important, we need to work with women and men. There are many difficulties and challenges. People need information on political realities, processes, structures. In North East Brasil the poor voted for large land owners for decades. The question was is it possible to change this? Will it make a difference? For decades the ecumenical movements mobilised, trained, informed excluded people. Last years election in the North East indicated change is possible. In all states the oligarchy lost influence and Lula's party was victorious.

Battles of excluded are worth it and can be won. Working with good governments nationally and internationally is important. I return to Norway with inspiration from this conference. ■

Goodbyes Merete, Julia Gwen

NCA Regional Conference:
Citizen Engagement for Accountable Local Governance

27-29 March 2007
Beach Hotel, Durban, South Africa

DAY 1:	**Understanding the role of local government in different national contexts and reflecting on the role of civil society, with an emphasis on churches/FBOs, in promoting accountable governance.**
8:30	Welcome by NCA • Introductions • Objectives for the conference
9:00	**Why should churches engage to promote accountable local governance?** *by Bishop Ivan Abrahams*, *Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church*
9:30	**Local government and decentralization in Southern Africa: Ideals and Realities** *by Aslak Orre, Christian Michelsens Institute, Norway*
10:15	Coffee/tea
10:30	Plenary discussion
11:00	Discussions in Country Groups: **To serve or be served: Perspectives on how local government is engaging with citizens – their successes and failures in addressing the needs of poor and excluded communities.** *(participants are asked to come prepared to give perspectives on issues raised above and to work together in preparing a short country presentation, with examples of engagement from their own work)*
12:30	Lunch
13:30	Country reports from groups (10 min each) + discussion
15:00	Coffee/tea
15:30	**Churches as change agents for accountable local governance:** **The role of diakonal/ecumenical organizations vs local congregations** *by Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, CEO of KwaZulu Natal Christian Council*
16:00	**Group work: (mixed groups)** • Recognizing our strengths and weaknesses as faith based organizations in promoting accountable local governance • Strategies for working together with other civil society actors
17:00	**Report backs** and reflections on the day
17:30	Close for the day
19:00	Dinner

DAY 2:	**Examining practice – examples of citizen engagement in local governance**
8:00	Exposure visits in Kwa Zulu Natal: 4 examples of citizens engaging local municipalities
13:30	Return to hotel
14:00	Plenary session – reflection on exposure visits
14:30	**Citizens engagement for the right to housing** Sbu Zikodi, Chairperson for Abahlali basemjondolo
15:00	**Examples from our own work: effective citizen engagement for accountable local governance -** *Presentations of selected examples*
15:30	Coffee/tea
15:45	**Examples from our own work,** continues
16:15	**Group work** (mixed groups) • Key lessons on effective strategies • Critical issues emerging
17:15	**Report back** and reflections on the day
18:00	Close for the day
19:00	Dinner

DAY 3: **Reflection on strategies, best practice and implications for future work**

8:30 Bible reflection: "Church engagement in local governance,"
Facilitated by Prof. Gerald West, Ujamaa Centre, University of KwaZulu Natal

9:00 **Strategies to strengthen "citizen agency"** *by Mpho Putu, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)*

- Breaking the passive participation trap
- Facilitating women's participation in local governance
- Examples of strategies for moving beyond training

10:00 Coffee/tea

10:15 **Strategies to increase accountability of local government** *by Thabo Khaile, Fair Share, School of Government, University of Western Cape*

- What to do when government gives no formal space for participation?
- What to do when structures for citizen participation are there, but don't work?
- Examples of strategies for advocacy and engagement:
    - CBO engagement with Ward Committees
    - Women's participation in municipal budgets

11:15 **Group Work:**

- Identifying good strategies that can work in our context,
- Recommendations and next steps for improving our work on citizen engagement for accountable local government Introduction of group work

13:00 Lunch

14:00 **Report back from groups and plenary discussion:**

- How will different country groups take the work forward?
- Potential for future partnerships/networking?
- Recommendations for further learning and exchange?

15:00 Coffee

15:30 **Conclusions and way forward**

16:00 Closing

NCA Regional Conference: Citizens Engagement for Accountable Local Governance

27-29 March 2007

Durban, South Africa

Participants List

Name	Organisation	Country
Partner Organisations		
Abrãao Kicuma	CICA, Benguela	Angola
Albertina Ana Teresa Dias	CICA, Benguela	Angola
Maria Tereza N'ka Tomás	CICA , Benguela	Angola
Julia Isabel	CICA, Uige	Angola
Bila Mpova	CICA, Uige	Angola
Boaventura Zita	Christian Council of Mozambique	Mozambique
Titos Macie	Christian Council of Mozambique	Mozambique
Jorge Eugenio Saiete	Justa Paz	Mozambique
Natercia da Natividade Tivane	Christian Council of Mozambique	Mozambique
Thembela Ngenga	ESSET	South Africa
Sanele Mngadi	PACSA	South Africa
Douglas Dziva	KZN Council of Churches	South Africa
Simanga Khumalo	Ujamaa Centre	South Africa
Stembiso Madlala	Diakonia Council of Churches	South Africa
Pixie Keteyi	SCAT	South Africa
Stella Natasha Chikombole	Public Affairs Commitee	Malawi
Gabriel S. Manyangadze	Zimbabwe Council of Churches	Zimbabwe
Joram Tarusarira	Silveira House	Zimbabwe
Resource Organizations/Persons		
Bishop Ivan Abrahams	Methodist Church	South Africa
Sara Blin	Care Mozambique	Mozambique
Shamim Meer	Facilitator – Freelance	South Africa
Thabo Khaile	Fair Share, UofWC	SA/Regional
Mpho Putu	Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa	SA/Regional
Francis Ng'ambi	Economic Justice Network	SA/Regional
Susan Tolmay	Gender Links	SA/Regional
Aslak Orre	Christian Michelsen Institute	Portugal/Norway
Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela	KZN Council of Churches	South Africa
Gerald West	Ujamaa Centre, UKZN	South Africa

Bjarte Erdal	Norwegian Embassy	South Africa
Teka Zefernio	Translator, UKZN	Angola
Anita Moen	Translator, UKZN	Angola
Mbuso May	Administration, YMCA	South Africa
Vicky Ireland	Administration, DCC	South Africa
Norwegian Church Aid		
Gweneth Eng Berge	Regional Governance Coordinator	South Africa
Nina Solberg Nygaard	Regional Representative	Botswana
Lazaro Ernesto Pascoal Bula	Program Officer	Angola
Domingos Joao Antonio	Program Manager	Angola
Gerard Chigona	Program Officer	Malawi
Hilde Skogedal	Program Coordinator – Western Africa	Norway
Fatou Cisse	Program Officer	Mali
Baba Diabate	Office Director – Gao	Mali
Arne Dale	Head of Thematic Advisory Division, International Dept	Norway
Merete Skjelsbæk	Program Coordinator-Southern Africa	Norway