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States: Going Beyond Survival**

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Turmoil and Turbulence in Small Developing States: Going Beyond Survival

Theorising Democratic Participation in Development Policy: The Caribbean Case

In recent times, the link has been made between democratic participation and development. One of the assertions is that democratic participation is essential for attaining sustainable development. Civil society, by extension is seen as the vehicle through which participation in the development process can be achieved. In the Caribbean, there have been many attempts towards democratisation of the development process. However, there has been widespread dissatisfaction with the outcome of these processes. This may be because participatory processes in the region are largely premised on the liberal democratic framework with limited consideration for the principles of a participatory model of democracy. This problem may be resolved by theorising on the link between citizen participation, democracy and development. The paper argues for an alternative to the liberal democratic framework to inform participation in development policy. This is aimed at achieving good policy outcomes as well as empowering citizens which are both necessary for achieving sustainable development outcomes.

We believe that the Caribbean public was not kept fully abreast of the potential implications of the EPA for the course of the region's economic relations, not only with Europe, but with all other trading partners as it may become a blueprint for future trade negotiations. It is regrettable that Caribbean governments and responsible officials did not keep the public better informed...We believe that opportunities must be found to remedy this deficit in the future, and that the situation calls for full disclosure, for public explanation of the shortcomings as well as any anticipated benefit of the EPA, and for open participation in a discussion of its implications for our economies and for the livelihoods of our peoples (Statement by a Group of Concerned Caribbean Citizens Calling for Full and Public Review of the Cariforum-EC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), January 2008).

Introduction

The above statement is an indication of the perceived lack of genuine democratic participation in Caribbean development. The sentiments expressed are a reflection of the two distinct frameworks of democracy to which civil society and governments subscribe. Participatory processes in the region are largely premised on the liberal democratic framework with limited consideration for the principles of participatory models advocated by critics. This paper critiques the liberal democratic paradigm upon which citizen participation is based as a model for genuine citizen participation and argues for a participatory model of democracy as an alternative to the liberal democratic framework to inform participation in development policy. This is aimed at achieving good policy outcomes as well as empowering citizens, which are both necessary for achieving sustainable development outcomes.

The origin of the concept of Democracy

It is argued that the concept of democracy that exists today is a distortion of the original idea of “democracy” which meant people power or rule by the common people. The Greek origin of the word democracy or “demokratia” comes from the word “demos” which referred to the entire population and sometimes to the common people or to the poor. For most of the 20th century, this concept of democracy prevailed for the most part in the popular consciousness of the world. The idea of self rule was seen an attractive and empowering idea to large segments of the population across the globe – particularly to those under or fighting against colonial or despotic rule (Behrouzi 2005: 11).

Democracy – The Evolution

Starting from the early to mid twentieth century, this original concept of democracy began to change from its original formation. The original idea was infiltrated by other political concepts that were liberal in origin with no precedent from its Athenian origin. Among these liberal concepts was that of the ideals of individual rights and liberties and the sanctity of the individual’s private domains of life. The coupling of liberal principles with the ideal of democracy, led the popular consciousness of the world to think of democracy as meaning “a free society”. In the same period, a different form of perversion of the original term was taking place in the East, where it was interpreted as “rule by the common people or the poor” and became synonymous with economic

equality. This perversion of the meaning of democracy in the West was partly an ideological response to the Communist regime and the threat of the ideals of the Soviet Revolution posed to the capitalist system of the West. The general understanding of democracy as it exists today is based the practice of democracy in Western societies, ie. that democracy is a political system in which people are free to choose their governments (ibid:12).

One of the main arguments for this type of democracy has been that the nation state is too large and too complex to be ruled directly by the people, justifying the concept of “government of the people” or “government for the people” (ibid:12). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the size and complexity of industrialised societies and the emergence of bureaucratic forms of organization seem to have led political theorists to question the feasibility of attaining democracy in its original form. Among the proponents were Mosca and Michels, the former arguing for representative institutions. In the middle of the 20th century, democracy was still seen as the ideal but the emphasis on participation became questionable and with it the “classical formulation of democratic theory.” This suspicion stemmed from the association of mass participation with fascism and the post war establishment of totalitarian regimes based on mass participation. Consequently, participation became linked with totalitarianism rather than democracy. Another factor which led to the rejection of the earlier democratic theories was the fact that these earlier notions of democracy were value laden and normative and that modern political theory should be scientifically based and

empirically grounded in the facts of everyday political life. This was reflected in the work of Schumpeter which was important for understanding later works on democratic theory as they built on that foundation and definition of democracy. Schumpeter's main critique of classical theories of democracy was that the central participatory and decision making role of people had no empirical basis and that it was the competition among decision makers for people's votes that was of central importance. The only place for people participation was voting for leaders and discussion. The work of Berelson, Dahl, Sartori and Eckstein (which are in some ways different from the substantive work of Schumpeter) all built on Schumpeter's attack on the classical theory of democracy and has been termed a contemporary theory of democracy. "In this theory, "democracy" refers to a political method or set of institutional arrangements at the national level which is manifested in the competition of leaders (elites) for the votes of the people through the ballot box. Elections are fundamental to the democratic method, for it is primarily through elections that the majority can exercise control over their leaders. Participation in this context refers to the choice one exercises in choosing decision makers (Pateman 1970: 2-5). The role of participation in this theory of democracy is solely a protective one.

The role of the citizen in this liberal democratic framework is therefore restricted to that of questioning political authority, and engaging in public discourse about matters of public policy. The issue of keeping authority accountable arises partly from the fact that citizens elected representatives who govern in their name. The issue of engaging in

public discourse arises from the fact that government decision making should be public and subject to open and free discussion. The virtue of public discourse involves not only the willingness to participate in politics or to share ones view but also to engage in conversation, to listen, speak, to seek to understand other viewpoints and to respond respectfully to other views so as to allow the discourse to continue. Liberal citizens must justify their positions rather than state preferences or make threats (Kymlicka 2002:289).

Among the three models, participatory democracy offers the most radical departure from the existing dominant liberal democratic framework. Within the participatory democratic framework, the merits of participation go beyond merely the benefits for policy outcomes. The benefits of participation extend to the advantages for the development of the individual and the society as a whole. Consequently, the focus of participatory democracy is on the other functions of participation, i.e., the educative and integrative outcomes. Participatory democracy also stresses the need for equal participation in decision making and equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions. These issues are discussed in the next section.

Participatory Democracy

Pateman (1970: 20) refers to the strand of democratic theory that emphasizes the integrative and more particularly the educative functions of participation as participatory democracy. Pateman's work builds on the work of classical participatory

theorists - J.S Mill, Rousseau and G.D.H Cole. The theory is based on the premise that individuals and institutions are inextricably linked. The existence of representative institutions at the national level is not sufficient for democracy. There must be maximum participation to gain socialization and social training of the citizenry at other levels to develop the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities necessary for democratic participation at the national level. This occurs through the process of participation itself. The major function of participation in participatory democracy is an educative one. The educative function refers to the psychological development and the learning of democratic skills and procedures. Participation also serves to integrate the society and assists in the acceptance of collective decisions (Pateman 1970: 42-43). There is also an emphasis on equal participation in decision making and equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions.

The justification for a democratic system in the participatory theory of democracy rests primarily on the human results that accrue from the participatory process. One might characterize the participatory model as one where maximum input (participation), is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is 'feedback' from output to input (ibid: 43).

Civil Society Participation and Democracy

One strand of the literature which I call the “good governance school” on civil society/public participation in development is under girded by the liberal democratic view of democracy. This school sees non state actors performing a protective function, i.e. keeping governments in check and by extension enhancing the governance process. Wickham (1998: 11-43) makes a case for NGOs in the integration process to ensure a people centred approach and to ensure that integration remains a developmental tool; NGO participation ensures that the views of the marginalized are represented; causes regional social integration as NGOs forge regional linkages; garner support for regional integration by connecting to the grassroots who are normally alienated from national and more so regional issues. Duncan (1998: 45-57), argues for NGO involvement in CARICOM governance structures for the purpose of “contributing to a system of good governance”. He also advances the view that NGO engagement in the regional integration process contributes to a new system of governance in the region that moves away from a dominance of labour and private sector engagement. Wedderburn (1998:59-70) argues that NGO involvement in the regional integration effort can correct ineffective governance structures and the dangers of political instability, deterioration in the quality of life in the region and hence preserve the democratic process.

One segment in this category of the literature moves beyond the benefits of participation to democracy and good governance. It advocates people participation to ensure that policy outcomes benefit people. Pollard (2007) argues that the success of the Caribbean integration process should be judged on the extent to which it benefits Caribbean people and the impact various processes for example the CSME and CCJ will

have on Caribbean people. He emphasizes that the private sector should play a role in the affairs of the CSME to ensure that they benefit from it.

Another camp is concerned with not only keeping governments in check but also contributing to decision making and influencing policy. One view holds that participation is democratic when individuals have equal opportunity to impact decisions that affect them (Warren 2002: 693). Simpson (2006) critiques the participation of indigenous nations in global governance and states that though indigenous peoples have been engaged in various global governance processes, in most instances they have not led to their empowerment because for the most part it has not resulted in influence of decision making. Some of the factors that hinder this process include lack of capacity; the participation of self selected groups which are undemocratic and unrepresentative; grassroots organizations do not have access to global governance forums; disillusionment with the ability to affect the process.

Selected Cases of Civil Society Participation in Policy Making In the Caribbean

Historically, CARICOM has had a minimalist approach to governance which provided limited opportunity for non state actor participation,¹ however there has been some

¹ CARICOM's efforts towards good governance were restricted by the following factors: during the Cold War, issues of human rights and democracy were the concerns of states and not that of the international

improvement since 1992.² Since then, there have been various initiatives towards including civil society in the governance of the region. These initiatives³ have taken place within three broad measures: the Charter of Civil Society, approved by CARICOM heads in 1998; the ACCP which comprises of government and opposition members of parliament and regional NGOs; and the Consensus of Chuagaramas of 1999 which include the portfolios of governance and justice (Grant 2003: 293 - 295).

community; CARICOM states were able to pursue independent modes of governance in the context of ideological pluralism espoused by the OAS Resolution of 1979; The focus on the maintenance of sovereign power and downplaying supra national governance, community institutions and arrangements (Grant 2003: 293).

² In 1992, CARICOM formalized their consultation mechanisms by establishing a bureau of Heads which rotated among the members. This was a signal that CARICOM leaders were depending less on personality to secure national cooperation. This resulted from the changes that came with the end of the Cold War and a reconfiguration of the concept of the promotion of sovereignty through inclusiveness (ibid, 294)

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Integration

Traditionally, non state actors have been involved in the integration process, but it was limited to the trade union movement. Trade unions were converted to political parties, which then became the force propelling Caribbean colonies to independence. In the colonial era, they were the only non state actors that made a noticeable contribution to the integration movement (Wickham 1998: 35). The movement from the Federation to the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) saw little opportunity for non state actors because of the focus on private sector trade. However, as CARICOM replaced the CARIFTA, bringing with it the inclusion of functional cooperation, an opportunity was created for the participation of NGOs. In reality however, there has not been meaningful participation because the integration movement in the English Caribbean has been centred on the CARICOM Secretariat which does not promote the inclusion of diverse interest groups. Additionally, the focus on trade has contributed to the isolation of NGOs that deal with other issues of development (ibid: 35).

Within the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), there seem to have been some strides towards facilitating NGO involvement. This interest in working with NGOs is illustrated by the association with the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) (ibid: 36).

Conflict Resolution

The assistance of civil society has been sought for resolving conflict in the political arena. Civil society was brought in to resolve a conflict in St. Vincent and the

Grenadines surrounding the introduction of a Bill to give gratuity to senators in 1998. An Accord was signed which provided for the government, opposition parties and civil society organisations to be involved in the implementation of the Agreement. Two mechanisms were established, one of them being the National and Consultative Council which consisted of civil society actors including the National Youth Council (NYC) and NGOs. Civil society actors were also brought in to resolve a political conflict emanating out of the 1997 Guyanese general elections. CARICOM mediators consulted with a wide cross section of the Guyanese society but civil society were not high contracting parties to the Accord. There was also no place for civil society in dialogue between the two political parties involved. The formal role of civil society was limited to participation in the proposed constitutional reform (Grant 2003: 296-299).

Social and Economic Development – The Social Partnership Arrangement

The Social Partnership is an arrangement where the government, private sector employers and representatives of workers work together with the aim of attaining improved economic growth for their country. According to Osei (2004):

(t)hese partnerships were sought not only for the facilitation of better economic and social resources in disparate projects in the countries involved, but also for the effective management of growth and stability in the national economy (ibid: 41).

The social partnership arrangement has been tried with greater success in Barbados and than in Jamaica (ibid: 34; Brown 2002:45).

Poverty Reduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) funded Urban Project for Children and Mothers (UPCM) was tried in various economically deprived communities in Jamaica through the use of self help (Meighoo, Cooks and Girvan 1997: 87). The National Commission on Self help in Trinidad and Tobago is another example of an initiative where community groups collaborated with government actors and the private sector in working in the area of poverty reduction (Sobers 1998: 375).

Trade Policy

Many Caribbean countries have attempted to include citizen participation in trade policy. Among these participatory structures are the Jamaica Trade and Adjustment Team (JTAT) in Jamaica and the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) in Trinidad and Tobago. In the JTAT, information sharing is cited as being central to the dialogue to keep people informed about developments in foreign trade. Deepening of the consultative process is aimed at moving beyond mere dialogue and exchanging views, to information gathering and analytical assessment (Hylton 2001). In Trinidad and Tobago, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) comprises of officials from various Government Ministries, the private sector, NGOs, labour and other civil society groups which approve positions which feeds into the regional process (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Trade and Industry).

Participation in the Caribbean Region – A Critique

The premise upon which participatory structures are developed in the region is that of the liberal/representative democratic framework in which participation primarily serves a protective function. This protective function includes ensuring that decision makers are kept in check and that there are good policy outcomes. This is essentially an attempt to promote good governance where the participation is for instrumental or functional reasons. This perspective sees participation as a means to an end (Long 2001: 5). Participation in this sense is the means by which initiatives can be more effectively implemented (Clayton, Oakley and Pratt 1997: 3). This view of participation is hardly concerned with the transformation of the citizen and his/her social and psychological development. The problem with this approach is that when participants are not developed, they cannot genuinely contribute to good policy outcomes.

Participation at this level takes place at the lower levels of the participation continuum, in which participation is very superficial with an emphasis on providing information with little opportunity for feed back, two way communications and influencing the policy under consideration as illustrated in Table 1 below.

The other view of participation which is largely absent in the Caribbean is the transformationalist perspective, which sees participation as an end in itself and a means of empowering people to take charge of their development (Long 2001: 5). This refers to the educative function of participation which means equipping people with the skills,

knowledge and the experience to take greater responsibility for their advancement (Clayton, Oakley and Pratt 1997: 3). This view promotes the notion that increasing people's capacity to improve their socio-economic situation is the true essence of development.

Table 1 – Levels of Participation

(i) Manipulation: This stage is characterised by indoctrination (to accept a particular policy position).	(ii) Information: At this stage stakeholders are simply informed of their rights, responsibilities and options. This is an important first step towards meaningful participation. The difficulty is that at this stage the focus is a one-way communication without a channel for feedback or the power for negotiation.
(iii) Consultation: At this stage, there is two-way communication where stakeholders give suggestions but there is no guarantee that the suggestions will be used at all or for the purpose it was intended. The most common approaches to consultations are chaired meetings where stakeholders are not involved in the setting of the agendas, public hearings, and surveys.	(iv) Consensus-Building: At this level, stakeholders negotiate and arrive at decisions tolerable to the entire group. However, very often vulnerable individuals and groups do not voice their concerns or they passively acquiesce.
(v) Decision-Making: Decisions are made collectively. At this stage, negotiations reflect the different degrees of leverage exercised by various groups.	(vi) Risk Sharing: This level builds on the previous one where not only is the decision shared but, the risk as well. Accountability is important at this stage as those with the greatest leverage may face the least risk.
(vii) Partnership: Stakeholders interact as equal partners (in terms of respect) working towards a common goal. This degree builds on the proceeding levels.	(viii) Self-Management: This represents the highest level of the participatory process, where the stakeholders interact in learning processes and the needs of all those concerned are realised.

Source: UNCDF 1996, quoted in Clayton, Oakley and Pratt 1997: 3-4.

Conclusion

The deficiencies of the current framework indicate the need for a new approach informed by the principles of a participatory theory of democracy. In the participatory framework, consideration is given to the other benefits of participation, i.e., the educative and integrative functions. This should be coupled with an emphasis on equal participation in decision making and equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions. These ideals are incompatible with the existing model of capitalist development which is dominated by private capital, pointing to the need for a reconfiguration of governance mechanisms in the region. This framework must necessarily have the following elements:

- A re - conceptualization of the role citizens in decision making which moves them to the centre of the framework.
- A bottom up approach to decision making where the mandate for making decisions comes from the people.
- Explicit provisions for people empowerment through genuine capacity building to include an understanding of the development needs of the citizens of the country.
- Equity in the provision of resources for capacity building
- Equal representation in decision making

The benefits of this model are many.

- As the educative effect of participation takes root, through the participatory process, attitudes change and people become more inclined to take decisions on the basis of the common good rather than on their selfish ambitions.
- It ensures that there is a synchronization of the objectives of the government and that of the people. When the mandate comes from a well informed populace, the government and the people are able to work in harmony and the tensions that arise when the government takes decisions are minimized.
- It increases opportunities for civil society to form transborder strategic alliances for the mutual benefit of ordinary citizens of countries concerned. This can be attained as the government and the people will be speaking with one voice, for example in trade negotiations fora.
- It prevents powerful interests from dominating government decisions. Instead, decisions are made on the needs of the majority and by consensus.
- When people are empowered it provides the government with a pool of expertise that is necessary to input in decision making.

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