Stefania Spapperi
Ludovica Socci
Margherita Mugnai

Piloting a Ward Based Planning scheme in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) as a way to foster public participation in local development plans

Selected, presented and discussed at the international conference “Participatory local welfare, citizenship and third sector organisations. What is at stake?” Pisa, 31st January – 1st February 2013
Abstract

Since South Africa embraced democracy in 1994, public participation became a Constitutional imperative where it is stated that “people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making”. In this transitional context, takes place the experience of Ward Based Planning (WBP) in the framework of NETSAFRICA Programme, a strategic intervention implemented in Buffalo City Metro Municipality to promote community action and better engagement/participation through the promotion of ‘locally-owned’ ward plans linked to the IDP, with a methodological approach that combined different techniques: participatory Learning and Action (PLA), ward assessment surveys, prioritizing challenges and mapping resources and training of municipal officials on participatory budgeting.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of South Africa, of the Italian Foreign Ministry or of the Regional Government of Tuscany.
Introduction

The Netsafrica programme, a decentralized action of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Region of Tuscany, which included the Ward Based Planning initiative, presented in this paper, is part of a general attempt by the South African government to experiment models that can lead to a mainstreamed participatory approach to decision making processes, to empower local communities to actively take part in the planning and implementation of priority development initiatives and to strengthen their capacity for a more effective and community driven service delivery.

Although the spectrum of definitions of public participation is very wide, there is today unanimous consensus over the need for a participatory approach to development not only to ensure ownership and sustainability of results but also to empower communities and bring forward a more inclusive society. After decades of reshaping the development discourse, public participation has taken centre stage in the programmes and works of international organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations and international NGOs. From the seminal works of the 1970s that introduced the notion of participation as not only a mean to reach strategic objectives but an aim in itself, ‘putting the last first’ and pro-poor approaches pioneered by Freire and Robert Chambers in the 1980s, to the World Bank shift from an elitist ‘external expert stance’ in development planning to a new “participatory stance”, public participation is today inextricably linked to development as “a process in which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and the resources which affect them”.

---

1 Cfr. Netsafrica Programme www.netsafrica.org
South Africa democratic system has been highly influenced by this discourse and has embedded public participation in its policy and legislation. Since the advent of a democratic South Africa in 1994, there has been an attempt to address social inequalities caused by apartheid by designing a more inclusive, decentralized and participatory legislative framework.

Despite the fact that these legislative guidelines sought to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of local government affairs, there have been growing concerns over the practical results of applying these guidelines on the ground due to a variety of reasons, inter alia weak development and participatory structures, poor implementation and poor design of public participation institutions, lack of trust of local communities and lack of commitment by municipalities to prioritize public consultation, general lack of capacity amongst stakeholders and local communities, weak information and communication flows and the inability to work closely with community based organizations.⁶

In this general landscape, it is important to note that some interesting attempts are being made on the ground to address these constraints and to put in practice new and structured mechanisms for public participation in local government in South Africa that allow for community engagement and empowerment. This paper presents the Ward Based Planning initiative as one of these experiences. In the first part of the paper the South African legislative framework is introduced, highlighting its key achievements as well as some of its limitations, together with a brief excursus on the evolution of the concept of public participation in the Italian context, where some key institutions and actors have partnered in the initiative and have influenced it. The second part of the paper presents the Ward Based Planning initiative and the main lessons derived from its implementation on the ground, drawing some recommendations for evaluation and replication of similar projects in South Africa.

1. Public participation in South Africa

1.1 The legislative framework

The principles of a participatory approach to representative democracy are outlined in the Constitution of South Africa as applying to the three spheres of government: national, provincial, local. The creation of these spheres sought not only to transfer powers and resources to local authorities, but also to create more opportunities for citizens to actively participate in matters that affect their lives.\(^7\)

Not only the Constitution accords citizens rights to freedom of expression, to form and join any associations and to shape public life through legitimate means, but it explicitly states that the National Assembly, the National Council and the provincial legislature must “facilitate public involvement” in all legislative processes.\(^8\)

However, it is in the sphere of local government that the reference to the involvement of communities in decision making processes takes a stronger and more explicit stance. Among the main objectives of local government is “to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government”.\(^9\)

To support the decentralization effort laid out in the Constitution and to enhance the key elements of transparent governance contained in the Batho Pele Principles\(^10\), the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, and Municipal

---


\(^10\) The Batho Pele (People first) Principles – contained in the White Paper “Transforming Public Service Delivery” of the Department of Public Service and Administration (1997) reinforce the constitutional need for openness and transparency, stating that citizens should know how government structures are run, how resources are spent and who is in charge of particular services. They are comprised of eight principles, the first principle of which is “consultation”, which requires that the government ask what the citizens need and work out with them how best to meet their needs. The principles underlying message is that the development of a service orientated culture requires the active participation of the wider community in order to provide regular feedback from service users and communities to the municipalities, on their needs and the quality of service. (cfr. Draft National Policy Framework for Public Participation, 2007)
Systems Act 32 of 2000 were promulgated, stating that a Municipality “must encourage and create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the Municipality.” Municipalities are thus expected to structure and manage their administration, and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community. Participation at the municipal level should include management systems and performance outcomes; budgets; consultation on service strategies and the definition of all key policies and plans, such as the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs).\footnote{Integrated Development Planning is an approach to planning that involves the entire municipality and its citizens in finding the best solutions to achieve long-term development. It takes into account the existing conditions and problems and resources looking at economic and social development of the entire area. The municipality is responsible for the coordination of the IDP process and the annual council budget should be based on the IDP. The IDP has a lifespan of 5 years while it is reviewed every year and necessary changes can be made. Participation to the formulation of these plans, organized in the form of an IDP forum of key stakeholders and in public meetings - is required at all levels of the municipal government and should include civil society and local communities. Integrated development plans (IDP) are outlined in the The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) as follows: “Each municipal council must, within a prescribed period after the start of its elected term, adopt a single, inclusive and strategic plan for the development of the municipality which (a) links, integrates and co-ordinates plans and takes into account proposals for the development of the municipality; (b) aligns the resources and capacity of the municipality with the implementation of the plan; (c) forms the policy framework and general basis on which annual budgets must be based; ... and (e) is compatible with national and provincial development plans and planning requirements binding on the municipality in terms of legislation”. For an in dept analysis of the IDP formulation process and major constraints cfr. Menini Gibbens (2008), The invisible director: An exploration of the role of power in intergovernmental communication on meaningful municipal integrated development planning, dissertation submitted in fulfilment of part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Town and Regional Planning at the Faculty Engineering, The Built Environment and Information Technology, University of Pretoria.}

The main instrument of public participation at the local level is the ward committee model, a form of institutionalized participation in the affairs of local government. As is stated in the Act, “the objective of a ward committee is to enhance participatory democracy in local government”. The ward committee, chaired by the ward councilor and consisting of up to ten people, has a merely advisory role and may make recommendations on any matter affecting its area. Its primary function is to “create formal unbiased communication channels [...] between the community and the council”.\footnote{To strengthen their role and to further the shift towards Community-Based Planning, the Local Government Amendment Act of 2007 allowed for direct funding from municipalities to ward committees to perform their functions, exercise their powers and undertake development in their wards, and the Community Development Workers (CDWs) of 2003 introduced specific figures identified to support the ward committees from within the local government structure, to ensure information flows on government support and services; encourage initiatives and engagement, and to serve as a link between government offices and}
More recently, two policy framework confirmed the focus on public participation and community development at the national level: the Draft National Policy Framework for Public Participation (2007), which further highlights the central role played by ward committees and the importance of a ward-based planning through community-based planning; the National Community Development Policy Framework (2007) designed to outline the vision, objectives and road map for supporting community development through overarching principles and norms, modalities and mechanisms for implementation and the roles and responsibilities of key role-players.

1.2 The practical application of the legislative framework

Despite the innovativeness and comprehensiveness of much of South Africa’s legislation on public participation, it has been acknowledged that this wide body of legislation has mostly allowed for public participation as consultation rather than formal empowerment. Extensive reviews of the consultation processes implemented throughout the country have highlighted several barriers to the effectiveness of public participation practices in the South African context, some of the most relevant of which are summarized as follows:

---

As stated in a report prepared by the Governance and Administration Sector of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services in The Presidency for the Towards a Fifteen Year Review Synthesis Report “The assessment of these measures to entrench participatory democracy has yielded mixed results. While significant attempts have been made to foster public participation, the effectiveness of some of the participatory mechanisms such as ward committees has been largely limited. The number of ward committees that are functional is relatively modest, while the participation of citizens and their influence in important processes of decision-making such as the development of IDPs and budget allocations is minimal. [...] In short, while the Government has established more institutions and added more avenues to improve interaction between society and state, there remain serious questions about their functionality and about the extent to which they have expanded participatory democracy.” Governance and Administration Background Report For The Fifteen Year Review, (2008) prepared by the Governance and Administration Sector of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services in The Presidency.

1. Still limited decentralization to local government levels and particularly a lack of belief in the potential of communities to drive their own development, with a perpetuation of top-down and expert driven approach that does not allow for integrating community planning in long term strategic development plans.

2. Differences in the social composition of wards, which were deliberately designed to cross Apartheid boundaries, therefore including in the same ward rich and poor areas, where high inequalities exist between needs and aspiration, together with a lack of a shared sense of community, values and aspirations across ethnic, cultural and class divisions.

3. An extremely poor coverage and quality of services for the poorer areas, which is believed not only to prevent South Africans from enjoying a decent standard of living but also to hamper their active participation in participatory processes.

4. Inadequate learning from the experiences of and good practices from other less developed countries where public participation and empowerment interventions have been deepened both at policy and programmatic levels.

5. Lack of sustainability of results, originating from the low capacities to prioritize needs, mobilize and manage resources, whether internal or external, and lack of regularity in the allocation of resources and in the implementation of participatory methods to manage them.

6. Weak integration between different levels of government and low level of trust between local governments and communities, resulting in discontinuous planning of participatory methods of involvement and in the fol-
low up, monitoring and evaluation of the results.

In practice, civic participation in South Africa takes place mainly through ward committees, which in most cases are constrained by the newness of their election, by imbalances in the compositions of wards and by the disparities in the knowledge and understanding that ward committee members share of their role and responsibilities.  

Other mechanisms for enhancing community participation revolve around public meetings, hearings and consultative sessions, of which the most known is the *izimbizo* (public gathering) conducted by the President and provincial and municipal governments to consult around various government initiatives. These public hearings, serve the aim of informing the community of council decisions, community rights and duties, municipal affairs and that of allowing the community to inform councillors and officials of their issues. *Izimbizo* are felt by most as a mere consultation exercise that “begins with the meeting and ends with the meeting” and do not lead to significant involvement in the shaping of key policies and plans.

Participation in the formulation of IDPs is also considered problematic, since the main instrument of integrated involvement – the IDP representatives forum – addresses large strategic issues and struggles to include specific needs of local communities, as well as to be accessible to citizens and civil society organizations, often resulting in public meetings where a “shopping list” of needs is presented to local municipalities, confronting them with the difficulties of ensuring proper follow up and of managing unrealistic expectations.

An exception worth noting is the interest arisen by the South American model of *Orçamento Partecipativo* (Participatory Budgeting), which since its birth in

---


16 On IDPs cfr. footnote 11.

South America in the 1990s has been applied widely around the globe and has been recognized by the World Bank as an important tool for inclusive and accountable governance.\textsuperscript{18} As scholarly articles and reviews of some experiences in South Africa show\textsuperscript{19}, adapting the Participatory Budgeting model to the local context could in fact prove to be extremely helpful in allowing municipal authorities to comply to the requirements of involving communities in the municipal budgeting process and in the formulation of IDPs, while at the same time rebuilding trust between communities and the public sector and ensuring an active engagement of communities in the planning and effective allocation of resources.\textsuperscript{20} It is still early to assess whether the existing potential for participatory budgeting in South Africa will lead to its introduction as an ordinary tool of government, since “the space for participatory budgeting to be implemented by municipalities in South Africa exists. Whether this space is used will depend as much on the willingness of municipalities to transfer power over budgeting to citizens, as on citizens themselves creating and extending the spaces for participation.”\textsuperscript{21}

As the following sections of the paper will show, the challenges highlighted above were part of the issues that the WBP initiative was called to address throughout its implementation. It is also relevant to note that the initiative developed much of the experience sharing phase with Italian partners on participatory budgeting in particular\textsuperscript{22}, and more generally on the assessment of key pre-conditions that need to be addressed for pilots and models to become a

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{21}Terry Smith (2004), The potential for participatory budgeting in South Africa: A case study of the “People’s Budget” in eThekwini Municipality; Yves Sintomer, Carsten Herzberg, Giovanni Allegretti (2010), Learning from the South: Participatory Budgeting Worldwide - an Invitation to Global Cooperation, Dialog Global, Number 25, 2010, InWEnt gGmbH – Capacity Building International, Germany

\textsuperscript{22}Margherita Mugnai (2012) Participatory Budgeting. Involving stakeholders and local communities in public decision making processes Buffalo City Municipality, Netsafrica training report, unpublished.
\end{flushleft}
structured and sustainable system of local governance, leading to a more effective service delivery and a stronger civil society.

1.3 Sharing experiences among programme partners: the Italian effort to strengthen local government capacity

As the result of a cooperation effort between South Africa and Italy, an important component of the WBP initiative was that of sharing experiences and best practices of public participation among programme partners. In this respect, the Italian context – in which since the 1970s experimentations and policies of different kind have been encouraged to counteract the failures of the traditional party system of representative democracy to adequately involve communities and stakeholders in public decision-making – has played a significant role in shaping the initiative and in bringing forward the reflection on sustainability and on adaptation and replicability of international models of public participation.

In Italy, in the 1970s, a substantial shift towards decentralization and strengthening of local government capacities to create permanent arenas of public debate closer to the communities and to guarantee more effective service delivery, brought to the transfer of several powers to local governments and to the establishment of elected local councils and committees. Recently, after the dismantlement of the decentralized system and partly following an acknowledgement of some if its limitations – also linked to its replicating at the local level the failures of the representative democracy model\(^{23}\) - the definition of public participation has been widened and articulated drawing from other models and practices.\(^{24}\)

\(^{23}\) Luigi Bobbio, Gianfranco Pomatto (2007), Modelli di coinvolgimento dei cittadini nelle scelte pubbliche, paper produced for the Provincia Autonoma di Trento, in the framework of a research on the quality of democracy coordinated by Sergio Fabbrini.

\(^{24}\) The most recent example of this is a national level debate developed over the course of the past year – motivated also by the recrudescence of intense protests and violent episodes in Val di Susa for the construction of a new train tunnel through the Alps – that lead to the introduction of a public consultation mechanism over key decisions linked to large scale infrastructure development in a draft national legislation on infrastructure development, approved the 30\(^{th}\) October 2012. As stated in the press release following the approval of the draft legislation “Per promuovere un più alto livello di partecipazione delle popolazioni e dei territori rispetto alla realizzazione di opere strategiche, viene introdotta in Italia la procedura
More specifically, two experiences can be cited that bear relevance to the South African context: the ratification of the Tuscan Regional Law 69/2007 for the promotion of participation in decision making processes, which was influenced by the French model of the débat public and which has lead to the funding and implementation of hundreds of participatory processes in the Region; and the creation of new arenas of debate around the municipal budget, adapted from the South American participatory budgeting experience. As such, they were presented to the South African programme partners and discussed prior the development of the proposal and during the experience sharing phase, to evaluate which aspects could be of relevance to the South African context and in particular how they could be adapted to meet the needs of an increase in participation and transparency in the formulation of IDPs and Municipal budget and plans.

Common to both these experiences, is a definition of public participation as a structured process, rather than a body or permanent multi-issue arenas for debate, whose aim is to involve all relevant stakeholders affected by critical issues – thus attempting to prevent social and political conflict and to allow for a direct and structured intervention of civil society in public decision making, in order to positively influence decision makers in the drafting of policies and plans. Essential to this definition of participation is that institutions and local governments play an active role as agents, promoters, and recipients.

This kind of regulated and structured participation has been criticized for a
variety of reasons and share some of the constraints highlighted above in the description of the South African context, including that of being consultative, government driven rather than community driven and often ineffective in creating social capital and community empowerment.\textsuperscript{28} However, it is under this new umbrella that experimentations and pilots of different kinds have taken place on the ground in the last couple of decades, to strengthen the capacity of public officials to manage complex decisions and to reach a more efficient allocation of resources and as such represent a practical attempt to bridge the gap between representative democracy and participatory democracy, thus institutionalizing more respondent and effective mechanisms of involvement of civil society in the practices of local governments.\textsuperscript{29}

2. The Ward Based Planning Initiative

2.1 The project framework

The Ward Based Planning experience has been developed and implemented in the framework of the NETSAFRICA Programme. NETSAFRICA is a Support Programme for “Decentralisation and Local Development policies in South Africa” funded by the Italian Foreign Ministry and by the Regional Government of Tuscany. It comprises of a network of Italian and South African local governments which began its work in 2008 and is concluding its core activities in 2012. The Programme seeks to consolidate the role of South African local institutions in broadening democratic participation in local governance; and in the formulation of policies and implementation of initiatives to reduce poverty and ensure access to basic services. The Support Programme is a pilot that is implemented in Eastern Cape and Gauteng Provinces and within two municipalities within each of these provinces.

The Programme develops into two complementary and synergic phases:

\textsuperscript{28} Paul Ginsborg (2006), La democrazia che non c’è, Torino, Einaudi.

\textsuperscript{29} Antonio Floridia (2008), Democrazia Deliberativa e Processi Decisionali: La Legge Della Regione Toscana Sulla Partecipazione, Stato & Mercato n. 1/2008
Phase 1 – sharing knowledge among Programme partners: this entailed the undertaking of working sessions among Programme partners as well as with community based organisations and local stakeholders so that joint recommendations and proposals could be submitted for the execution of Phase 2. The purpose of these sessions was to assess and prioritise local needs and define specific areas for Programme intervention as well as to identify potential partners in Italy on the basis of the expertise required.

Phase 2 - consolidation of partnerships and the launch of the work on the ground: this phase started with the formalization of partnerships setup around specific areas of intervention and focused on the provision of different kinds of technical assistance, including sharing of expertise and knowhow from the selected Italian partners, matched to the needs of each South African local partner. As a result, five Priority Initiatives were identified and further implemented at the local level using a Local Initiatives Development Fund of 2,000,000 Euros.

During Phase 2 Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality defined in cooperation with Region of Tuscany, Arezzo Municipality and CoGTA a pilot initiative on the issue of public participation with the aim to implement this approach in two wards of the municipality, namely Ward No. 15 urban and No. 40 rural, with a different composition in their constituency.30

30 In Ward 15 the composition of the community is very diverse: Cambridge and Vincent have two very different needs therefore it was not possible to find common ground to respond to common necessities. Among the various plans that were going to be put in place, the priority was given to the cleaning campaign in Cambridge. This was a good exercise that brought the community together. It strengthened their sense of being one community and that of volunteering for a common benefit. In Ward 40, the community was very receptive towards the WBP process. This was mainly due to the fact that Ward 40 is located in a uniformly rural area where the community faces common challenges in their daily lives. Furthermore, the community referred to their ward councilor who is currently a charismatic personality, actively involved and proactive. WBP sought to promote advanced Government grant access methodology for project development. Two proposals were developed and submitted to relevant development agencies in the Expanded Public Works Programme and another in implementation of a leadership higher education and training certificate in development practice.
The WBP approach promotes community action and better engagement/participation in the formulation of municipal development plans. This approach has the goal of promoting 'locally-owned' ward plans. It aims to link plans to the IDP. Its goal is to enhance public participation in the IDP, and at the same time meet the wishes of people and Government for greater democracy at local level. Key ingredients for the success of this approach therefore are an active and empowered citizenry who take co-ownership (along with local Government) in implementing and managing their own development, who are claiming their rights and carrying out their responsibilities as citizens.

Regarding the involvement of the Italian partner (Region of Tuscany and Municipality of Arezzo), it was aimed at building the capacity of Municipal Officials to understand and support WBP through knowledge sharing and exposure to public participation policies in Italy, with a field visit in Tuscany and training activities, such as the Tuscan Regional Law 69/2007 and its funded projects at municipal level.

2.2 Ward Based Planning methodology and planning process

The methodology main aim is that of allowing the Municipality to change its stance, from consultative to participatory. Therefore, the approach foresees the involvement of community members in all the stages of the decision making process and in the design of the approach particular attention was paid to provide local stakeholders and community members with time, resources and skills to participate properly in the planning process.

Stage 1 Preparation
Preparation involves a pre-planning meeting and a community launch meeting. This preplanning meeting is held preferably two weeks prior to the main planning week, initially with political leadership and opinion leaders such as teachers, clinic staff, religious leaders, youth leaders, leaders of unemployed groups, trade union, women's groups etc. The aim is to mobilise the leaders of different sections of the community. During the pre planning stage there is gathering of information about existing projects and programmes and about
projects that the municipality intends to implement in the area. The pre-planning is followed by a community launch meeting.

**Stage 2 Gathering information (situational analysis)**
This second stage – normally a two day workshop - uses PLA tools with different social groups, CSOs and service providers, in order to analyse community livelihoods, assets, vulnerabilities, preferred outcomes and livelihood strategies; conduct an institutional analysis; map community resources and issues and understand historical trends.

**Stage 3 Analysing planning information and report back**
After the analysis of the information gathered from all social groups using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework – the community is involved to examine the outcomes and to enrich the picture and conduct their own analysis. The community then prioritises five preferred outcomes through voting. Soon after this the community produces a vision statement based on the prioritised outcomes. The community also selects 5 persons per outcome to be involved in the planning for the community.

**Stage 4 Reconciliation**
This step is undertaken to merge all the information from all the different exercises and to relate them to the prioritized outcomes. This is done to fully understand how best to address the prioritized outcomes and make sure that all the relevant information collected is taken into account.

**Stage 5 Planning**
The first step in planning is undertaken by a small group chosen by the community during a two day workshop following a community meeting, and may involve service providers, NGOs, relevant CBOs and other key stakeholders. Usually this stage includes community leaders who will oversee implementation of the plan. The mini-strategic plans developed include objectives, strategies, projects and activities.
The mini-strategic plans also draws up action plans that the community will implement. In addition large projects are identified and proposals developed which are then submitted to local government to be part of the municipal plan.

**Stage 6 Implementation**

Once the planning phase is completed the key stages include appraisal, implementation and monitoring.

**2.3 Key elements and outcomes of the Ward Based Planning initiative**

The experience of WBP has met several challenges during its implementation due also to time constraint and the complex context of intervention. Nevertheless several key elements contributing to WBP have been identified:

a) Securing trust and commitment from communities by building consensus around a comprehensive methodology. In order to overcome the wide-spread skepticism at ward level about local government reliability in service delivery, this project adopted a step-by-step systematic planning approach which entailed calling all key stakeholders and sectors together (NGOs, CBOs, Faith Based Organisations as well as Government departments/municipal officials). Arrangements were made to discuss and jointly agree on a methodology and practice to address service delivery problems and deepen participatory governance at ward level. This approach contributed towards a feeling of agency amongst ward members that this initiative could achieve results and improve their lives if all role players worked together as equal partners.

b) Promoting a new way of thinking, from dependency to self-action. One of the central practices of WBP is to instill a culture of community action, self-reliance and the development of more realistic plans at ward level to facilitate development. The planning process therefore starts with the central question: “What can you as a community do to address this
[community need]” before asking “what the Municipality and other actors should do”. To promote active citizenship Netsfafrica priority initiative invested on the mobilization of the population through the training of facilitators and communication campaigns, through advertisements and brochures, to encourage people to be key person of the process.

c) Considering ward representivity and inclusivity in the WBP process. It would have been logistically impossible for all community members to attend the training workshops for Ward Based Planning and therefore communities allocated representatives to attend this training. In order to elect representatives, public meetings were held in the wards to explain the purpose of the training. In ward 40, representatives from all 13 villages were elected to participate in the WBP process. On completion of the training, these representatives were tasked to give feedback to the rest of the ward so that the knowledge gained from the training could be disseminated more broadly and so that ward members were aware of the value and purpose of the training.

d) Ensuring sustainability to the process. In order to promote sustainability of this practice and approach, the ward members were first trained on various methods and tools that they could use. They then conducted the envisaged surveys and workshops themselves. Community Development Workers were trained on how to undertake community satisfaction surveys because of their background and experience in working with local communities. Training included questionnaire development skills and administration. One of the ‘hard-skills’ that was covered through training was also how to develop a business plan so that ward members could be able to present to the municipality and to other potential funders a funding model to be able to implement projects in their wards for ward development. However another skill that ward members felt they needed to learn was ward based budgeting. This would teach community members how to prioritise needs based on budget limitations and would
“encourage communities to take ownership and consolidate trust between themselves and the municipality”. (Community Member Ward 40).

e) Encouraging the formulation of realistic plans. The training focused on ward outcomes rather than problems in wards and this orientation resulted in realistic plans being formulated. Training objectives were comprehensive and included the following aspects:

- Participatory tools for community engagement in planning for Local Development.
- Understanding key legislation such as the Municipal Systems Act which outlines the methods.
- The development of real plans for wards that can be used to enrich the IDP plans developed by the municipality.
- Developing an actual implementation strategy for WBP in participants’ own communities.
- Training local leaders and emerging ‘champions’ who will carry forward Ward Based Planning principles.

Creating a broad awareness about the Priority Initiative. To broaden the reach of Ward Based Planning in a more structured way, the trainees of PLA were trained on how to involve their own communities in WBP in order to influence social attitudes and behavior in respect to community action and involvement in ward based planning. In so doing community awareness of ward based planning was broadened. Lessons learnt and key preconditions for replicability

Based on the actual implementation of Ward Based Planning in the two wards in the Municipality of Buffalo City it is possible to identify some lessons learnt and key pre-conditions that need to be considered not only to allow a balanced evaluation of the process outcomes but also to ensure successful replication of the initiative.

- Political commitment from the municipality to see the ward-planning programme through in all its aspects and active participation of the mu-
nicipal departments to drive the process have to be guaranteed. The WBP objective is to improve municipal-level plans but also to provide a platform for community empowerment. This approach is a stepping stone for strengthening local governance and community action and therefore requires commitment and agency from the municipality to enable citizens to move from being merely passive consumers of services to active citizens able to participate in meeting their development priorities. In order to do allow this, the roles and responsibility of the involved Departments should be clearly stated and understood for them to actively engage with this process.

- Attention should be paid to the composition of ward constituencies in adapting the planning, training, facilitation and implementation timeframe. In the identification phase of the initiative, as it was a pilot initiative, the municipality had chosen two representative wards, one in the rural area with a homogeneous composition and one in the urban area characterized by residential areas and agglomerations rather informal. In the ward in the rural area homogeneity in the composition of the community and similar needs have made it easier to execute the methodology of the WBP and the activation of the community, while in the urban area - characterized by a high disparity in income of residents - was particularly difficult activation and motivation of the less well-off who felt that they could meet the needs of the district liaising directly with the municipality without having to get involved in the community process. So as a lesson learnt from the practice in case of non-homogeneous constituencies timing required for mobilization, identification, execution of projects can be different and also the training and facilitation must contain elements of mediation and conflict resolution to allow the identification of contact points between the different members of the community.

- Defining roles and building motivation of key actors is essential in all stages of the process. In the process of WBP there were some key players who had a very important role in both the mobilization of communities
and in ensuring the sustainability of the process. In the identification of the initiative is key element to identify this figures and their capacity to play and active role. In BCMM practice of WBP, the figure of the ward councillors was considered essential to ensure community involvement. However, in this case, the motivation of the councillors of two wards was different as well as their commitment and this gave different results in the levels of community mobilization in the resolution of the problems that have occurred. Other key players are charismatic actors at community level which, if properly capacitated and followed, can help identify the needs and priorities of the community as well as to represent their needs in the local forum. Finally, the municipal officials who play an important role not only in assisting communities and monitoring of results but also in raising the political level municipal to allocate adequate resources for the WBP in the IDP and in decisions concerning the replicability of the model.

- Capacity building and strengthening of ward committees is to be guaranteed. Due to the recent holding of Local Government Elections, the re-de-marcaion of wards and the subsequent election of the Ward Councillor and Ward Committees, the Ward Based Planning process was implemented in wards with newly appointed Ward Committees who experienced low levels of understanding of their expected role and responsibilities. If ward committee members are to play a central role in linking local communities with municipal authorities, their role and responsibility in the process should be clear and shared, also through specific training regarding community and citizen-led development, municipal systems and structures, role clarification and leadership development.

- An appropriate time frame for action needs to be identified. A compressed time frame was a significant challenge in the implementation of WBP. Adequate time should be allotted not only to complete activities but also to allow for follow-up, in order to integrate the process into the broader municipal policy framework and to set up a firm caretaker sup-
port for the implementation of the ward based plans. A balance needs to be struck between an emphasis on outcomes, and the time required to allow the process to unfold, so that it can take root, but still be completed within the IDP project cycle.

- Administrative support by local government to participatory processes should be ensured and the local municipality should provide funds for communities to implement some of the prioritized projects, even if the rest of the ward based plans will feed into the IDP process. At the same time, particularly in the case of more complex and articulated projects, it is also pertinent to generate resources from external sources, also by setting up effective partnerships.

- Local Stakeholders and local facilitators need to champion the process in order to guarantee sustainability and community mobilization and the Municipality should seek partnerships with nonprofit organizations in their area and assess their interest and commitment abilities. The role of NGOs/CBOs in the WBP could be that of generating awareness, facilitating and implementing relevant activities and generating local resources to support such efforts.

- The community needs to be ready to enhance a motivated response. One of the challenges experienced during the ward based planning process was lack of development skills within both communities, where the will to act was overridden by a lack of understanding and knowledge of development trajectories and processes. If the WBP approach is expected to be a movement away from the unrealistic expectations created by the Integrated Development Planning Process that tended to produce ‘shopping-lists’ of needs, empowering the relevant actors through skills development and effective training in the areas of participatory governance and budgeting is key to success. This includes training of community members on how to prioritize needs based on budget limitations and encourage communities to take ownership and
Conclusions

In the space of just two decades, South Africa has come a long way from the apartheid huge service-delivery backlogs and inequalities. The stress on public participation, transparency and civil society involvement present in its legislative framework is a testament to the resilience of its people and to the will to challenge the country’s dark past and move into a new democratic era.

However, the challenges to meet the rights enshrined in its Constitution and legislative framework and to fulfill the promise of an open, effective and inclusive government are still huge and disparities, social inequalities and inefficiencies remain present at all levels of government.

Much of the work ahead relies on a good working relationship within and between the three spheres of government as well as on Ward Committees to create a link between local government and communities. For that reason, the need for better inter-governmental interaction and of putting in place effective mechanisms of public participation and community empowerment has become increasingly important for South Africa to realize the level of human and social development that it seeks.

Despite the fact that the many measures to entrench participatory democracy have yielded mixed results over the past, experiences on the ground such as the Ward based Planning Initiative, show that a different way of involving communities and making them active agents in their own development is possible.

As the illustration of the WBP initiative shows, an effective approach has a num-
ber of key preconditions, but most importantly requires for public participation to be structured throughout the planning and to happen at all levels and during all phases of the project cycle and not be limited to consultation and public hearings. Only by mainstreaming a participatory approach and by giving communities the skills and resources they need to take active part in the definition and implementation of key development priorities, it will be possible to reach a more effective alignment of national, provincial and municipal interests with the communities’ needs.

This paper provides insights on the way development projects that aim to fight poverty and improve basic services through a structured model of participatory development can be implemented within the context of South African municipalities and demonstrate also the complexity of putting in practice the principles of public participation stated in the advanced South Africa legislation. It is hoped that these key elements will be a useful tool for other municipalities and Government Departments as well as development practitioners implementing similar development projects in the future.

Acknowledgments

We’d like to acknowledge the funding of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Region of Tuscany. The authors thank NETSAFRICA experts for the information provided and for their valuable comments.

References

AA.VV. Public Participation and Local Governance, Research Report prepared by The Centre for Public Participation (CPP) in association with Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), 2007.

AA.VV. (2008), Governance and Administration Background Report For The Fifteen Year Review, prepared by the Governance and Administration Sector of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services in The Presidency.

Luigi Bobbio e Gianfranco Pomatto, (2007), Modelli di coinvolgimento dei cittadini nelle scelte pubbliche, paper produced for Provincia Autonoma di Trento, in the framework of a research on the quality of democracy coordinated by Sergio Fabbrini.

Robert Chambers (1983), Rural Development: Putting the Last First, Longmans.


Menini Gibbens (2008), The invisible director: An exploration of the role of power in intergovernmental communication on meaningful municipal integrated development planning, dissertation submitted in fulfilment of part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Town and Regional Planning at the Faculty of Engineering, The Built Environment and Information Technology, University of Pretoria.

Paul Ginsborg, P. (2006), La democrazia che non c'è, Torino, Einaudi.


Robin Richards (2012), Learning from Practice: the experience of the NETSA-FRICA Programme to enhance Local Development in South Africa, Netsafrica, South Africa.


Yves Sintomer, Carsten Herzberg, Giovanni Allegretti (2010), Learning from the South: Participatory Budgeting Worldwide - an Invitation to Global Cooperation, Dialog Global, Number 25, 2010, InWEnt gGmbH – Capacity Building International, Germany
