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Unpacking ‘Participation’: models, meanings and practices

Andrea Cornwall

Abstract The world over, public institutions appear to be responding to the calls voiced by activists, development practitioners and progressive thinkers for greater public involvement in making the decisions that matter and holding governments to account for following through on their commitments. Yet what exactly ‘participation’ means to these different actors can vary enormously. This article explores some of the meanings and practices associated with participation, in theory and in practice. It suggests that it is vital to pay closer attention to who is participating, in what and for whose benefit. Vagueness about what participation means may have helped the promise of public involvement gain purchase, but it may be time for more of what Cohen and Uphoff term ‘clarity through specificity’ if the call for more participation is to realize its democratizing promise.

Introduction

The widespread adoption of the language of participation across a spectrum of institutions, from radical NGOs to local government bodies to the World Bank, raises questions about what exactly this much-used buzzword has come to mean. An infinitely malleable concept, ‘participation’ can be used to evoke – and to signify – almost anything that involves people. As such, it can easily be reframed to meet almost any demand made of it. So many claims to ‘doing participation’ are now made that the term has become mired in a morass of competing referents. This article unpacks some of the meanings that ‘participation’ has come to carry and explores the diversity of practices that are labelled as ‘participatory’. In doing so, it seeks to bring some of the ‘clarity through specificity’ that [Cohen and Uphoff \(1980\)](#) called for at the end of the 1970s, the decade in which participation first hit the development mainstream, but which has remained elusive.

Typologies of participation

Typologies are a useful starting point for differentiating degrees and kinds of participation. Providing a series of ideal types along which forms of participation may be ranged, most typologies carry with them implicit normative assumptions which place these forms of participation along an axis of 'good' to 'bad'. Many of the typologies and 'ladders' of participation that have been produced focus on the intentionality, and associated approach, of those who initiate participation.

Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation (Figure 1) is one of the best known. Originally developed in the late 1960s, it retains considerable contemporary relevance. 'Citizen control' appears at the top of the ladder, with a category of 'non-participation' at the bottom, in which therapy and manipulation are placed. Arnstein's point of departure is the citizen on the receiving end of projects or programmes. She draws a distinction between 'citizen power', which includes citizen control, delegated power and partnership, and 'tokenism', in which she includes consultation, informing and placation. It is worth noting the part that the activities she associates with 'tokenism' play in the efforts – and indeed the definitions – of development organizations claiming to promote participation. The World Bank, for example, includes both giving information and consultation as forms of participation, and goes on to equate the provision of information with 'empowerment' World Bank (1996). Consultation is widely used, north and south, as a means of legitimating already-taken decisions, providing a thin veneer of participation to lend the process moral authority. Its outcomes are open to being selectively read and used by those with the power to decide. Rarely are there any guarantees that what is said will be responded to or taken into account.

While Arnstein's ladder looks at participation from the perspective of those on the receiving end, Jules Pretty's (1995) typology of participation speaks more to the user of participatory approaches. His typology is equally normative: going from 'bad' forms of participation – the inclusion

Citizen Control Delegated Power Partnership	Citizen Power
Consultation Informing Placation	Tokenism
Therapy Manipulation	Non Participation

Figure 1 Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation.

of token representatives with no real power, which he characterizes as manipulative participation, and passive participation subsequent to decisions that have already been taken – to 'better' forms, such as participation by consultation and for material incentives. 'Functional participation' captures the form of participation that is most often associated with efficiency arguments: people participate to meet project objectives more effectively and to reduce costs, after the main decisions have been made by external agents. This is perhaps the most frequently found type of participation in development (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger, 1996).

Pretty's last two categories evoke some of the professed goals of those who promote and use participatory approaches in community development (Table 1). 'Interactive participation' is described as a 'learning process' through which local groups take control over decisions, thereby gaining a stake in maintaining structures and resources. The last category is of 'self-mobilisation', where people take the initiative independently of external organizations, developing contacts for resources and technical assistance, but retaining control over these resources. Self-mobilization was, and to some extent remains, very much the nirvana of participation in the 1980s and 1990s, before talk of 'participatory governance' – and a very different way of figuring the state into the equation – changed the frame.

Both Arnstein's and Pretty's typologies describe a spectrum defined by a shift from control by authorities to control by the people or citizens. Yet, the end-points are rather different. Citizen control goes much further than self-mobilization. For, as Pretty notes, 'self-initiated mobilisation may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power'. Indeed, local self-mobilization may be actively promoted by the state and international agencies as part of efficiency goals that are entirely consistent with a neo-liberal approach to development. What Pretty's typology helps make clear is that the motivations of those who adopt and practise participatory approaches is an important factor – if by no means the only one – in shaping interventions. And what Arnstein's reminds us is that participation is ultimately about power and control.

A further typology, put forward by Sarah [White \(1996\)](#), offers some insights into the different interests at stake in various forms of participation (Table 2). Used less as a ladder and more as a way of working out how people make use of participation, it can be a useful tool to identify conflicting ideas about why or how participation is being used at any particular stage in a process.

As noted earlier, typologies such as these can be read as implicitly normative, suggesting a progression towards more 'genuine' forms of participation. When these forms of participation are contextualized, however, they become more ambiguous. Participation through information sharing, for example, might limit more active engagement, although it could be argued that trans-

Table 1 Pretty's typology of participation

Type	Characteristics of each type
Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with 'people's' representatives on official boards, but who are un-elected and have no power.
Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information-gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example, labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labour; but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this 'called' participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision-making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be co-opted to serve external goals.
Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
Self-mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilization can spread if government and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

Adapted from Jules Pretty (1995).

parency over certain kinds of information opens up the possibility of collective action in monitoring the consistency of rhetoric with practice. But keeping a flow of information going is in itself important, rather than being simply a 'lesser' form of participation. Transformative participation may fail to match with citizens' expectations of the obligations that the state has to them. When 'empowerment' boils down to 'do-it-yourself',

Table 2 A typology of interests

Form	What 'participation' means to the implementing agency	What 'participation' means for those on the receiving end	What 'participation' is for
Nominal	Legitimation – to show they are doing something	Inclusion – to retain some access to potential benefits	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency – to limit funders' input, draw on community contributions and make projects more cost-effective	Cost – of time spent on project-related labour and other activities	As a means to achieving cost-effectiveness and local facilities
Representative	Sustainability – to avoid creating dependency	Leverage – to influence the shape the project takes and its management	To give people a voice in determining their own development
Transformative	Empowerment – to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Both as a means and an end, a continuing dynamic

Adapted from [White, 1996, pp. 7–9.](#)

and where the state abnegates its responsibilities, then resistance rather than enthusiastic enrolment might well be the result of efforts to engage citizens.

What people are participating in conditions how their participation might be evaluated. Delegated power over choosing the colour of paint for a clinic's waiting room in the name of 'patient involvement' – in the absence of any involvement in decisions on what the clinic actually does – may count for little in transforming power relations. And, at the other end of the scale, even the most nominal forms of participation can give citizens a foot in the door if there has been no constructive engagement with them before. Much depends on the context and on those within it. Different purposes, equally, demand different forms of engagement by different kinds of participants. A process that sought only the engagement of a small group of articulate elite community members is something very different to one in which community members delegate power to such a group to engage with the authorities, remaining content to receive information and be consulted on key issues.

Participation in practice

In practice, all of the forms and meanings of participation identified in the kind of typologies referred to here may be found in a single project or

process, at different stages. The distinctions that typologies present as clear and unambiguous emerge as rather more indistinct. Indeed, the blurring of boundaries is in itself a product of the engagement of a variety of different actors in participatory processes, each of whom might have a rather different perception of what 'participation' means. As a result, matters are more complex than would seem to be the case from the often-used distinction between participation as a means, often equated with 'instrumental' participation, and participation as an end in itself, what has come to be regarded as 'transformative' participation. This is because the intentionality of those who initiate community participation or use participatory methodologies to facilitate community development is only part of the story.

Participatory interventions may result in effects that were never envisaged at the outset. The most instrumental variants of participation can provide the spark, in some contexts, that can lead to popular engagement around particular issues or to changes in attitude among workers or officials. In rural Kenya, a team using a simple Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise to explore issues of child nutrition was stunned when the villagers were so incensed by what their discussions suggested that they decided to mobilize to block the road when their Member of Parliament next came to visit to demand accountability from him (Sellers, pers. comm.). The PRA exercise did not *cause* this sudden exercise of citizenship, but it certainly helped trigger it.

The very public nature of some forms of consultation can serve as a space for the airing of grievances that may become more difficult for those in power within and beyond the community to ignore. In suburban London, it took an initially innocuous participatory well-being assessment to bring out in the open disgruntlement with the provision of primary care services that had been consistently buried under the carpet for years. Faced with a mountain of cards, diagrams and other visual paraphernalia generated by weeks of participatory enquiry in the community by a team that included health and social services workers, the authorities could do nothing but concede that there was a problem and, at last, begin to address it (Cornwall, 1998).

Equally, the most transformational intentions can meet a dead end when 'intended beneficiaries' choose not to take part, or where powerful interest groups or gatekeepers within the community turn well-meaning efforts on the part of community development workers to their own ends. Sometimes, too, the sense of fatigue that can accompany having had project after NGO after local government agency trying to enlist people in community development activities can scupper the best-intentioned initiative. Some communities have experienced so many such attempts to 'participate' them that they have become tired and cynical. 'You can't eat participation,

can you?', one disgruntled would-be community representative, who was expected to mobilize his fellow community members without receiving any of the handsome salaries that his NGO counterparts were paid, once said to me and asked, 'what is in it for us?'

While opening spaces for dialogue through invitation is necessary, it is by no means sufficient to ensure effective participation. Much depends on how people take up and make use of what is on offer, as well as on supportive processes that can help build capacity, nurture voice and enable people to empower themselves. Here the contrast and the relationship between spaces that are created through invitations to participate and those that people create for themselves (Cornwall 2000) becomes especially important. 'Invited spaces' and opportunities to participate that are made available by community development workers – whether in response to statutory obligations or their own initiative – are often structured and owned by those who provide them, no matter how participatory they may seek to be. Transferring that ownership to those who come to fill them is far from easy; sometimes, such spaces are regarded, in a very instrumental way by participants, as means to gain access to benefits or to improve their own access to services. And this is entirely understandable – after all, most of the time, it is poorer people who are required to participate in these ways, while middle-class people can either opt out of state services, enjoy better provision because of where they live or pick up the phone to complain if they are not satisfied, rather than spending hours in meetings.

Spaces that people create for themselves, whether networks of neighbours or people who work together, women's groups or larger and more complex social movements, have an entirely different character from most invited spaces. For a start, they are often marked less by the considerable differences of status and power that can be found in the kinds of committees, councils and fora that have been created the world over for community involvement. Most commonly, they consist of people who come together because they have something in common, rather than because they represent different stakeholders or different points of view. These kinds of spaces can be essential for groups with little power or voice in society, as sites in which they can gain confidence and skills, develop their arguments and gain from the solidarity and support that being part of a group can offer.

Who participates?

While typologies like these differentiate kinds of *participation*, they do not tell us much about the different kinds of *participants* who take part in community development projects. The question of who participates – as well as who is excluded and who exclude themselves – is a crucial one.

In a context where calls for 'the empowerment of the poor' now play a central part in mainstream development rhetoric, Robert Chambers' observations from 1974 offer a timeless caution:

All too often participation proclaimed on the platform becomes appropriation and privilege when translated into action in the field. This should scarcely be surprising, except to those who, for ideological reasons or because they are simple-minded, or more commonly from a combination of these causes, reify 'the people' and 'participation' and push them beyond the reach of empirical analysis. (1985[1974], p. 109)

Participation as praxis is, after all, rarely a seamless process; rather, it constitutes a terrain of contestation, in which relations of power between different actors, each with their own 'projects', shape and reshape the boundaries of action. While a frame might be set by outsiders, much then depends on *who* participates and where *their* agency and interests take things – as Cecile Jackson's (1997) closely observed account of how an Indian natural resources project was turned around by front-line project workers to address the issues of gender violence that mattered to women so insightfully shows.

Farrington and Bebbington (1993) propose a simple axis to assess forms of participation according to depth and breadth. A 'deep' participatory process engages participants in all stages of a given activity, from identification to decision-making. Such a process can remain 'narrow', however, if it only involves a handful of people, or particular interest groups. Equally, a 'wide' range of people might be involved, but if they are only informed or consulted their participation would remain 'shallow'. This usefully highlights the intersections between inclusion/exclusion and degrees of involvement. As such, it can be an instrument through which to explore claims to participation that turn out to have involved only elite, older, richer members of the 'community', and those from which other groups, such as women and children, might have been excluded.

It is not uncommon to read in reports, or hear in policy statements, that there has been, or should be, 'full participation' and 'participation by all stakeholders'. There is a certain normative attachment to this that departs from what might, in reality, be called for in particular circumstances. A 'deep' and 'wide' participatory process might be the ideal, in abstract, but in practice it can prove either virtually impossible to achieve or so cumbersome and time-consuming that everyone begins to lose interest. In this regard, it makes more sense to think in terms of *optimum* participation: getting the balance between depth and inclusion right for the purpose at hand.

Truism as it is, it is often far from obvious that most participatory processes do not *and literally cannot* involve 'everyone'. In practice, explicit or

implicit choices are usually made as to who might take part. These may be inherent in the choice of methodology: they emerge most clearly in distinctions between approaches that place greater degrees of emphasis on the participation of representatives – those who speak about and for a particular interest group – and those that seek more directly democratic forms of participation. In practice, these boundaries tend to be blurred. In most participatory consultation and planning work, pragmatism often dictates that the voices of some are to be taken to represent others, be they 'the poor' or 'the [undifferentiated] community'. This brings with it a host of further questions about representation and voice.

As has become evident in recent years, although the term itself evokes a warm ring of inclusion, 'participatory' processes can serve to deepen the exclusion of particular groups unless explicit efforts are made to include them (see, for example, Guijt and Kaul [Shah, 1998](#)). One frequently used mechanism for inclusion is the identification of predetermined categories of 'stakeholders' whose views are taken to represent others of their kind. Sometimes this happens by default: those who participate are those who come to public meetings, where they may be divided up according to sex and, sometimes, age. Analysis proceeds on the basis that these distinctions are culturally relevant and that those who fall within these groups can be taken as representative – speaking for, as well as about, others. Clearly there is a need for pragmatism. But the use of categories such as these raises a number of questions about the basis on which legitimacy is accorded to such *defacto* representatives, both with regard to those they come to represent and also in the eyes of outsiders.

All too often, the use of categories to distinguish between different segments of 'the community' leads outside agencies to treat these categories as unproblematic and bounded units. Those who are put into these categories – 'the poor', 'women' – may not see themselves in these terms at all. They may identify with the interests of their kin, their partners, their patrons, those with whom they worship and so on. Their lives are not so easily partitioned up into neat little boxes. They may not have any particular sense of themselves as the kinds of subjects that development agencies represent them as. Take, for example, 'the poor and marginalised', a much-evoked category. Cohen and Uphoff contend that 'to talk about "the participation of the rural poor" is to compound one complex and ambiguous term with another, even more complicated and amorphous' (1980, p. 222). They argue:

If they [the rural poor] are considered in such an aggregated mass, it is very difficult to assess their participation in any respect, since they are a large and heterogeneous group. Their being considered as a group is not,

indeed, something they would themselves be likely to suggest. There are significant differences in occupation, location, land tenure status, sex, caste, religion or tribe which are related in different ways to their poverty. (1980, p. 222)

Lumped together in a group, the particularities of the interests of 'the poor' become submerged.

Isolating particular interest groups within these broader categories offers operational advantages, as they can then be focused on as 'target groups', to enhance their confidence, capabilities and access to benefits. Yet, it is also important to recognize that these groups do not exist in social isolation. Treating them as discrete social groups can undermine economically and socially significant relationships that exist between the poor and the better-off or between women and men. Without a dynamic understanding of people's social networks and the institutions and dimensions of difference that matter in the pursuit of their livelihoods, naïve efforts to bring about inclusive development may simply make things worse.

From involvement to influence

Being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice. Voice needs to be nurtured. People need to feel able to express themselves without fear of reprisals or the expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously. And this, of course, cannot be guaranteed no matter how well-meaning the instigators of the process may be. While those who initiate participatory processes at the community level may create space for people to speak up and out, they have no control whatsoever over what may happen as a consequence. Mukasa (2000), for example, reports the indignance of older men as women involved in a PRA process began to challenge them; she also reports beatings and other forms of abuse that came in the wake of efforts to empower women and enable them to exercise voice.

Translating voice into influence requires more than simply effective ways of capturing what people want to say; it involves efforts 'from above' and 'from below' (Gaventa and Robinson, 1998). From within the authorities, responsiveness is contingent on wider institutional changes and the political will to convert professed commitment to participation into tangible action. And 'from below', strategies are needed to build and support collectivities that can continue to exert pressure for change (Houtzager and Pattenden, 1999). Both of these processes take investment, time and persistence: they cannot be achieved by waving a magic participation wand, convening a participatory workshop or applying a few PRA tools and hey presto, there is empowerment!

While much emphasis has been placed on developing processes of inclusion that ensure that particular groups are not left out of the process, less attention has been directed to *self-exclusion*. The assumption tends to be that getting the mechanisms and methodologies right will bring 'full participation'. There may be lots of reasons for non-participation. One might simply be that people cannot take part. It is not uncommon to find that little thought goes into the timing and duration of participatory activities, which count out people who work, people who have small children to put to bed or feed, people who are unable to justify spending hours outside the household. These people are more often than not women, but they may also be men, especially in communities where men's work takes them outside the community, and the return home at night is to eat and sleep. Another reason for non-participation is because the spaces in which meetings and other participatory events take place are culturally associated with groups to which they do not belong or activities with which they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Rachel Hinton (1995) gives the example of the use of empty school rooms for participatory workshops – a pragmatic enough choice, but the associations that this particular space has in people's minds can be powerful enough to prevent them from wanting to enter it.

Self-exclusion can be associated with a lack of confidence, with the experience of being silenced by more powerful voices or fear of reprisals. It can be because people feel that they have nothing to contribute, that their knowledge and ideas are more likely to be laughed at than taken seriously. But it can also be because people do not feel that there is any point in participating. Participatory initiatives tend to be premised on the idea that everyone would want to participate if only they could. The active choice *not* to participate is barely recognized. Yet where people have little sense of belonging to a community, they may have little inclination to spend time on 'community' affairs. For some, the opportunity costs of taking part simply do not outweigh the benefits of so doing; these costs are rarely taken into account.

While exclusion may result from a failure to make spaces for the participation of less vocal groups, self-exclusion can be the result of people's previous experiences. It is commonplace enough for external agencies to conduct a 'participatory' assessment of needs and priorities, then to plump for those corresponding with their own agenda. This sends a strong signal to people that their priorities do not count, unless there is transparency at the outset about what an agency can and cannot do. It is even more common for rhetoric about involving people in decision-making to boil down to engaging them in marginal choices when the real decisions are clearly being made elsewhere – participation in Poverty Reduction

Strategies being one such example. In recent years, 'participation fatigue' has come to account for more and more active self-exclusion. If people have been consulted umpteen times and seen nothing happen as a result, self-exclusion may be a pragmatic choice to avoid wasting time once again.

Participation in what?

Related to the question of who participates is *what* they participate in, and, as a corollary, who participates in *which* activities and at which stages in the process. Going back to the typologies of participation outlined earlier, it becomes evident that different kinds of participation imply significantly different levels of engagement. Information can be made available to everyone, although whether it actually reaches people is another matter. But involving everyone in planning would be a logistical nightmare. Monitoring takes time and might only involve a dedicated few; implementation might involve only particular kinds of 'beneficiary'; consultation exercises can only ever reach a small proportion of the population and might aim for representation rather than coverage.

Distinctions need to be made about how and on what basis different people engage in order to make sense of what 'participation' actually involves in community development initiatives. To speak of 'involving people in decision-making' implies that all and any decisions are up for grabs. Yet, it is important to be clear about exactly *which* decisions the public have the opportunity to participate in, and indeed *which* members of the public participate in different kinds of decision-making fora. On closer inspection, claims to have 'involved the public' may boil down to having a few conversations with a couple of community leaders or calling people to a public meeting, which only the most active members of a community attend. Equally, a participatory process approach might advocate for the public to be involved 'at all stages in the process'. But greater clarity is needed to discern what is contained within the process, and what is beyond its bounds.

It is evident that even the most 'participatory' of participatory policy interventions involves at best a process of consultation that seeks to draw together information gathered from the public to present to policy-makers. The framing of these consultations places certain possibilities beyond the scope of deliberation. Entering spaces for participation means making strategic choices about whether and how to engage. With the proliferation of 'invited participation' – the creation of opportunities and fora for participation – has come an increasing illegitimacy of older forms of participation, including the use of popular protest to express dissent and present demands. With this has come a diminished space for people to set their

own agendas, rather than to try to be accommodated within those of the powerful.

Power to the people? Reclaiming participation

Participation... cannot merely be proclaimed or wished upon rural people in the Third World; it must begin by recognising the powerful, multi-dimensional and, in many instances, anti-participatory forces which dominate the lives of rural people. Centuries of domination and subservience will not disappear overnight just because we have 'discovered' the concept of participation. (Oakley, 1995, p. 4)

Participation has a long and chequered history. It is, as Oakley rightly points out, vital to situate efforts to engage communities in context. The histories of community engagement with external agencies – whether the state, religious authorities or NGOs – in different places are complex and diverse; understanding these dynamics calls for an approach that regards participation as an inherently political process rather than a technique. Looking back at the uses to which participation has been put, whether by colonial administrators seeking to secure quiescence through community development or powerful financial institutions seeking to attain legitimacy by gathering 'voices' that confirm their preferred policy directives, it is evident that participation is in itself no panacea.

As I suggest in this article, 'clarity through specificity' – spelling out what exactly people are being enjoined to participate in, for what purpose, who is involved and who is absent – is a step towards dispelling some of the 'clouds of cosmetic rhetoric' (Cernea, 1991) that began to gather overhead when participation hit the mainstream in the 1980s and that have barely been dispelled since. Doing this would help make clear what exactly is at stake when 'participation' is being advocated, to create clearer distinctions between forms of participating that are different in kind – digging a bund or building a clinic, taking part in a village health committee, forming a self-help group, doing a mapping exercise or mobilizing to protest the privatization of basic services. It would also help provide a way of distinguishing feel-good talk of 'participation' that has little substance to it in practice, from forms of genuine delegated control that enable people to exercise a meaningful part in making the decisions that affect their lives.

While most of this article has dealt with 'invited participation' (Cornwall, 2000) – that is, participation that is orchestrated by an external agency of some kind, be it state or non-governmental – it is important not to neglect the many examples that can be found of where people have participated in movements that have enabled them to secure rights, resources and

recognition. These forms of autonomous participation are as much part of 'development' as invited participation, and need to be considered part of what 'participation' means in practice. In recent years, there has been a growing delegitimation of forms of popular participation that were once crucial to struggles for equality and justice. There has been an expansion of the 'participatory sphere' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2006) in many countries, with the growth of both institutionalized mechanisms for consultation like user groups, forums and councils and more transitory consultation events and processes. The use of more traditional forms of exercising voice such as demonstrations, strikes and petitions has become less acceptable than seeking a seat at the consultation table.

The popularity of invited participation may have created many more seats at many more tables, but along with all the other costs that those who fill those seats have to pay, this may have further costs to democratic vitality. The challenge for community development is to be able to both enable those who take up these seats to exercise voice and influence, and help provide whatever support is needed – material, moral and political – to popular mobilization that seeks to influence policy through advocacy rather than negotiation. The state has a role to play in this, especially in respect of marginalized groups (Young, 2000). Taking up that role accountably and supportively, without taking over and tutoring 'the people' to speak to power in 'acceptable' ways (Barnes, 2006), is one of the challenges that efforts to stimulate community development through participation needs to address.

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