

# Participatory Governance Reform: A Good Strategy for Increasing Government Responsiveness and Improving Public Services?

JOHANNA SPEER\*

*Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Bonn, Germany*

**Summary.** — Participatory governance mechanisms have been widely promoted in developing countries. They are claimed to bring about several public policy benefits, including increased accountability, higher government responsiveness, and better public services. This literature review shows that the evidence on these claims is positive, but limited. Moreover, it indicates that enabling and motivating citizens and public officials to make participatory governance arrangements work as effective accountability mechanisms is a challenging enterprise in most developing countries. Hence, more comparative cross-case research based on medium and large samples is needed for judging whether participatory governance arrangements can increase government responsiveness and service quality.  
© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Key words* — participatory governance, accountability, government responsiveness, public services, literature review

## 1. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

*“[O]pening up of the core activities of the state to societal participation is one of the most effective ways to improve accountability and governance.”*

(Ackerman, 2004, p. 448)

*“I believe that in the light of the available evidence it is important to temper present-day excessive optimism about the short-run prospects of participatory development.”*

(Platteau, 2009, p. 27)

In the last 20 years, the promotion of citizen participation in developing countries has increasingly included the adoption of various participatory governance mechanisms, such as participatory planning and participatory monitoring and evaluation. Participatory governance mechanisms are defined as institutional arrangements that aim to “(...) facilitate the participation of ordinary citizens in the public policy process” (Andersson & van Laerhoven, 2007, p. 1090). They involve citizens in decision-making over the distribution of public funds between communities and the design of public policies, as well as in monitoring and evaluating government spending. Thus, they differ from community-based development schemes in which community members participate in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of a particular development project within their community. Nowadays, participatory governance arrangements are implemented in a large number of developing countries and they are firmly anchored in the reform advice strategies of most donors and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The most frequently cited reasons for promoting the implementation of participatory governance mechanisms in developing countries are that it improves public service delivery, that it empowers citizens and that it deepens democracy. More specifically, participatory governance is stated to increase local government responsiveness and accountability. Thus, it is claimed to improve the efficiency and sustainability of public service delivery, as well as the match between public services and beneficiaries' preferences (Ackerman, 2004; Shah, 2007; World Bank, 2003). Involving citizens in decision-making over public policy is argued to consolidate young democracies by breaking up patterns of particularistic policy-making and

empowering citizens, as well as by promoting public deliberation and citizenship (Avritzer, 2002; Schönleitner, 2004).

In the hope to realize these benefits a large number of laws on participatory governance have been passed by developing country governments and many civil society initiatives for increasing participation in public decision-making have sprung up all over the developing world. Reformers have experimented with various forms of participatory governance including public hearings (India, Philippines), vigilance committees (Bolivia, Philippines), participatory budgeting (Brazil, Peru), and forums for participatory planning and decision-making over public service provision (Bolivia, Mali, Uganda, Mexico) (Ackerman, 2004; Blair, 2000; Commins, 2007).

This article reviews the scientific evidence on the conditions for and the impact of participatory governance on public policy outcomes to evaluate the widely held claims about the extrinsic benefits of participatory governance in the development community. It focuses on the impact of participatory governance on government accountability and responsiveness. Hence, it assesses the potential of participatory governance mechanisms to improve the efficiency, equity, and sustainability of public service provision. The review does not include the evidence on the intrinsic benefits of participatory governance, increased empowerment, and deeper democracy. However, to assess the feasibility of replicating successful participatory governance experiences in other developing country contexts, the review does scrutinize the empirical evidence on the conditions for effective participatory governance.

\* The work on this paper was carried out as part of the research project “Making Rural Services Work for the Poor-The Role of Rural Institutions and Their Governance for Agriculture-Led Development” at Humboldt University Berlin. Funding of this project by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development is gratefully acknowledged. A large share of the reviewed literature was accessed and analyzed during my stay as a visiting scholar at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, Indiana University, which was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). For fruitful discussions and valuable comments on this paper I would like to thank Prof. Xavier Basurto, Dr. Markus Hanisch, Dr. Daniel Heuermann, and three anonymous reviewers. Final revision accepted: May 25, 2012.

All in all, the findings of the literature on the public policy benefits of participatory governance mechanisms are mixed. Though there are several positive findings, so far there is not enough evidence to support the claim that participatory governance causes improvements in government performance, service quality, and well-being. Moreover, the reviewed studies on the implementation of participatory governance show that cases of successful participatory governance were characterized by the presence of a high capacity and motivation among public officials and citizens. Both conditions are not easy to find in many developing country contexts. The review therefore indicates that more research is needed before the scientific community can endorse the implementation of participatory governance as a panacea for improving public service provision.

The next section provides a short overview of the background, the focus, and the normative perspective of the main strands of research on participatory governance and their links to the literature on decentralization and community development. Section 3 summarizes the main findings on the impact of and the conditions for successful participatory governance. Then, Section 4 discusses open questions and remaining challenges for research on participatory governance. The final section concludes and outlines areas for future research.

## 2. BACKGROUND, PARTITIONING, AND DELIMITATION OF THE LITERATURE

Arguments for and against citizen participation have been discussed in development theory and policy for many years and, as Hickey and Mohan (2004a) state, “[f]ar from being defeated, the eighty-year history of participation within development thinking shows little sign of abating.” (pp. 20–21). Various forms of participation have been tried out in development cooperation projects and developing country governance structures.<sup>1</sup> For most of the time, development policy practice and theory have concentrated on the participation of beneficiaries to incorporate local knowledge into the planning, implementation, and monitoring of development projects. But, since the early 1990s academics and donor agencies have increasingly stressed that citizens should also participate in public policy processes to make government institutions more accountable, legitimate, and responsive (Gaventa, 2004). Thus, participatory governance mechanisms became part of the development policy agenda about 20 years ago.

The promotion of participatory governance has been motivated by failures in centrally provided public services and shortcomings in conventional systems of government accountability, as well as by an increased emphasis on “getting governance structures and institutions right” to make the state more effective (Goetz & Gaventa, 2001; Prichett & Woolcock, 2004; World Bank, 1997). Moreover, the so-called “third wave of democratization” and widespread decentralization reforms in developing countries increased the demand for mechanisms that improve accountability relationships between local governments and citizens (Bräutigam, 2004). Setting up participatory governance arrangements therefore became a highly popular reform strategy for strengthening vertical accountability and, thus, an integral part of the good governance agenda.

The popularity of participatory governance reforms has brought on a large body of empirical literature from disciplines, such as political science, development economics, and sociology. For evaluating the results of this literature it is important to note that participatory governance is not a neutral development technique and, consequently, all research on this topic is based on a normative perspective (Goldfrank, 2007a). Though

it is rarely made explicit or discussed by authors the normative assumptions on the purpose of participatory governance determine the focus of a study and thus the scope of its findings. Therefore, I decided to take the underlying normative perspective of the studies I evaluate explicitly into account in this review. What is more, I divide the reviewed literature into four strands based on the four normative perspectives that studies on participatory governance usually adopt.

The four strands I propose to use for partitioning the literature are: (1) the democratic decentralization strand, (2) the deliberative democracy strand, (3) the empowerment strand, and (4) the self-governance strand. In the following I briefly outline the key characteristics of each of these strands.<sup>2</sup>

To begin with, scholars from the democratic decentralization strand of the literature argue that participatory governance is crucial for increasing the accountability and responsiveness of local governments (Blair, 2000; Crook & Manor, 1998; Harriss, Stokke, & Törnquist, 2004; Manor, 1999). Much of the research in this strand of the literature emerged from political economy studies on the implementation of decentralization in Africa and Asia. Authors from the democratic decentralization strand tend to take a liberal stance on participatory governance according to which participatory governance is seen as one of several so-called “second generation” reforms for improving the institutional set-up of a developing country. According to this view participatory governance is expected to remedy problems of elite capture and clientelistic policymaking at the local level that have been observed in decentralized developing country governments (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000; Crook, 2003; Ruttan, 1997). Thus, participatory governance is predicted to increase the legitimacy of a government and to prevent social exclusion from public services. This perspective on participatory governance is also adopted in parts of the broader development policy literature on good governance of public services governance (Ackerman, 2004; Prichett & Woolcock, 2004; World Bank, 2003).

In a second strand of the literature participatory governance is primarily perceived as a means to realize a deliberative democracy. Scholars from this strand of the literature tend to take a radical democratic view on participatory governance. They expect that participatory governance makes a political system more democratic by strengthening deliberative forms of decision-making. The deliberation and contestation of ideas that takes place in participatory governance bodies is also predicted to lead to better policy outcomes and to make state decisions more transparent and equitable (Bishop & Davis, 2002; Bucek & Smith, 2000; Weeks, 2000). Deliberative democracy scholars draw mostly on experiences with participatory budgeting in Brazil, but they have also examined cases in Asia and Africa (Abers, 1998; Avritzer, 2002, 2009; Baiocchi, 2001; Baiocchi, Heller, & Silva, 2011; Heller, 2001; Schönleitner, 2004; Wampler, 2007, 2008b).

In a third strand of the literature authors take the view that the ultimate goal of participatory governance reforms is empowerment. This perspective is inspired, on the one hand, by the theoretical discourse on the role of power in societal order and political institutions (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Gaventa, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Lukes, 1974) and, on the other hand, by Sen’s (1999) capability approach. From the late 1990s onward researchers at development cooperation think tanks, such as the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex and the World Bank, have investigated the potential of participatory governance mechanisms to increase human capabilities and to empower the poor to overcome existing societal and political power structures (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2006; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Narayan-Parker, 2000; Nelson

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/991867>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/991867>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)