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Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement

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Summary. — Despite the normative beliefs that underpin the concept of participation, its impact on improved democratic, and developmental outcomes has proven difficult to assess. Using a meta-case study analysis of a sample of 100 cases, we inductively create a typology of four democratic and developmental outcomes, including (a) the construction of citizenship, (b) the strengthening of practices of participation, (c) the strengthening of responsive and accountable states, and (d) the development of inclusive and cohesive societies. We find that citizen participation produces positive effects across these outcome types, though in each category there are also important types of negative outcomes as well.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding what difference citizen participation and engagement make to development and to more accountable and responsive governance has become a key preoccupation in the development field. It has been over a decade since participation moved toward the mainstream in development debates (World Bank, 1994) and as a strategy for achieving good governance and human rights (UN, 2008). Despite this, a large gap still exists between normative positions promoting citizen engagement and the empirical evidence and understanding of what difference citizen engagement makes (or not) to achieving the stated goals. The pressures to bridge this gap are driven not only by the results focus of aid agencies, but also by academic debate and practitioner needs. After several decades of experience in promoting citizen engagement—in development projects and governance processes, through consultations, community associations, and social movements—it is important to ask the question “so what difference does it make?” and to be able to get some authoritative and informative answers.

In order to get insights into the question, this paper uses established methods of meta case study analysis to analyze 100 in depth qualitative case studies across 20 countries produced by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation, and Accountability (henceforth, Citizenship DRC).¹ While these studies focused broadly on meanings and dynamics of citizen engagement, embedded throughout the repertoire of case studies are insights about what outcomes did or did not occur, in a range of sectors and contexts, and through a variety of channels of engagement. Gleaning these insights through an inductive, meta-case study analysis approach, we argue, brings an important and rare cross-country perspective to the thorny debates on what difference engagement makes.

In the next section we present a brief review of what the literature tells us about the state of knowledge on the outcomes of citizen engagement, and some of the challenges posed by researching the impact of participatory programs. In Section 3, we describe further the methodology used, through which

we created a sample of 100 case studies from previously published case studies, and extracted from these over 800 examples of outcomes of citizen engagement. In Section 4, we present our categorization of these outcomes. Taking this inductive approach has given us a map of significant outcomes of citizen engagement in four broad areas: (a) the construction of citizenship; (b) the strengthening of practices of participation; (c) the strengthening of responsive and accountable states; and (d) the development of inclusive and cohesive societies. While we find the contribution of citizen engagement to these outcomes to be largely positive in our sample, we also elaborate a typology of negative outcomes, which show parallel risks of engagement (see Table 1).

After describing our findings related to each of these outcomes, we continue in Section 5 to analyze further how they vary according to contextual factors. Specifically, we look at the type or strategy of citizen engagement which produced the outcome, as well as the nature of the political regime in which it occurred. In Section 6 we summarize these core findings and point to implications for current debates on the contributions of citizen engagement to achieving development goals, as well as to building responsive and democratic states.

2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT TO DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

The assertion that citizen engagement makes a difference to achieving both material and democratic goals has long existed

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Table 1. *Outcomes of citizen engagement*

Positive	Negative
<i>Construction of citizenship</i>	
Increased civic and political knowledge	Reliance on knowledge intermediaries
Greater sense of empowerment and agency ¹	Disempowerment and reduced sense of agency
<i>Practices of citizen participation</i>	
Increased capacities for collective action	New capacities used for “negative” purposes
New forms of participation	Tokenistic or “captured” forms of participation
Deepening of networks and solidarities	Lack of accountability and representation in networks
<i>Responsive and accountable states</i>	
Greater access to state services and resources	Denial of state services and resources
Greater realization of rights	Social, economic, and political reprisals
Enhanced state responsiveness and accountability	Violent or coercive state response
<i>Inclusive and cohesive societies</i>	
Inclusion of new actors and issues in public spaces	Reinforcement of social hierarchies and exclusion
Greater social cohesion across groups	Increased horizontal conflict and violence

in development studies. Reviewing donor logic on the link between voice and accountability and development goals, for instance, Rocha Menocal and Sharma outline the core assumption that “increasing citizens’ voice will make public institutions more responsive to citizens’ needs and demands and therefore more accountable for their actions” (2008, p. ix). This combination of voice and accountability will in turn contribute directly to “(a) changes in terms of broader development outcomes, including meta-goals such as poverty reduction, human development, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) more generally; and (b) changes at a more intermediate level involving changes in policy, practice, behaviors, and power relations” (2008, p. 33). While the authors go on to critique these assumptions, and to show how local realities are often far more complex, they argue that this overall theory of change on the contribution of citizen engagement to development outcomes continues to guide donor interventions.

Somewhat similar assumptions are also made about how citizen engagement can contribute directly to governance, rights, and democratic outcomes. The UN Report *People Matter: Civic Engagement in Public Governance* argues that “engagement is regarded as an important governance norm that can strengthen the decision-making arrangements of the state and produce outcomes that favor the poor and the disadvantaged. In this light, engagement emerges as conducive, if not critical, to attaining the MDGs” (2008, p. 23). The report goes on to outline over a dozen areas in which UN resolutions and declarations have promoted the importance of civic engagement and participatory processes for achieving both “rights” and “development management”. Numerous other studies also outline a range of democratic governance outcomes that may be expected from the process of civic engagement (e.g., Coelho & Favareto, 2008; Fung, 2003a; Manor, 2004; Robinson, 2004).

However, while the list of claims for what *might* occur is long, the number of studies which present systematic evidence of what outcomes *do* occur is relatively few. Where they do exist, they provide a contradictory view. For instance, despite the fact that the World Bank has now spent over US\$7 billion on community-based and -driven development projects, Mansuri and Rao argue that “not a single study establishes a causal relationship between any outcome and participatory elements of a community-based development project” (2004, p. 1). In their evaluation of over 90 donor programs, Rocha Menocal and Sharma find that given various limitations in

their sample and the data available, “it is not surprising that all country case studies have been unable to establish a direct causal link between citizen voice and accountability interventions and broader development outcomes” (2008, p. 34), though they can see contributions to some of the intermediate outcomes which were identified. In their review for USAID, Brinkerhoff and Azfar argue that “the multiple meanings of empowerment and the relative lack of systematic studies across a range of cases limit our ability to make precise conclusive statements regarding the relationship between community empowerment, decentralization and outcomes relating to democratic deepening and service delivery effectiveness” (2006, p. 29).

Debates within development about the contribution of citizen engagement reflect, in part, similar arguments within democratic theory. On the one hand, this is a conceptual debate, reflecting historic divisions between “democratic elitists” or “realists”, who seek to limit citizen participation to choice of political elites, and those who hold a participatory view, arguing for a more expansive role of citizens engagement throughout the decision-making process.² Revisiting these debates in her 2011 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, Carole Pateman, author of the important book *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), argues that “in the 1960s defenders of a participatory conception of democracy, which had a politically active citizenry at its center, took up the cudgels against the proponents of a ‘realistic’ democracy theory” (2012, p. 7). Jane Mansbridge later wrote that this participatory movement declined in subsequent decades in part because of a measurement failure: “empirical political scientists could not demonstrate any positive effects on individual character of democratic participation” (1999, p. 292). She wrote further, “the subtle changes in character that come about, slowly, from active participation in democratic decisions cannot easily be measured with the blunt instruments of social science (1999, p. 291).” Others have also pointed to this failure of empirical social sciences studies to measure participation. Referring to Dahl’s (1971) conceptualization of democracy as consisting “of two attributes—contestation or competition and participation or inclusion”—Munck and Verkuilen (2002) argue that many contemporary indices of democracy omit the participation variable. This “failure to include participation in its varied facets is a problem even for the study of democracy in recent times” (2008, p. 11).

In an attempt to find more definitive results, some have argued in the development literature for what they call a “gold

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