PART 2: PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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Citizens’ participation has many functions in developing a strong system of local self-governance, as it is a central way to build awareness of the importance of the local structures and a means of understanding the concerns and desires of the community. Research also shows that development initiatives can be more successful when there is a feeling of ownership in projects through direct involvement in the key decisions that affect people most directly.

Although it can be difficult, complicated, time-consuming and sometimes impossible to promote citizens’ participation in decision making, when consensus-based decisions are made the results are often more legitimate and more widely accepted than decisions made by elected officials acting independently. This is known as the ‘slow–fast’ method of decision making, because consensus-building can be laboriously slow in the initial stages but once there is a broad agreement policy implementation can be fast and more effective.

There are strong reasons for making an effort to encourage citizen participation and collaboration. Fundamentally, participation is essential to the core meaning of democracy and good governance as it improves information flow, accountability and due process, and gives a voice to those most directly affected by public policy. Furthermore, citizens’ feedback allows timely identification of community needs and priorities and the efficient allocation of resources to address them. When resources are scarce, the contributions and involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private businesses and ordinary citizens to particular areas or activities can relieve the pressures on local authorities. Moreover, procedures that encourage ongoing participation between elections and consensus-oriented decision making produce more legitimate decisions because people have been involved in the process. One practical outcome of collaborative processes is the creation of ‘social capital’. Social capital is the trust and confidence that are developed when government and civil society meet together in pursuit of a community’s common good. Without social capital, when trust and confidence are lacking, government efforts can be stymied; in the long run, communities without trust are dysfunctional and in the worst scenarios violence among contending social forces can erupt.

1. Options: Types of Citizen Participation

There are a wide variety of participatory methods and approaches, which are grouped below into four broad categories. The following list is not comprehensive; sometimes processes go by other names, and there are virtually infinite variations on any given type of method. Readers should consult the bibliography at the end of this book for a more detailed assessment of each of these options.

Information gathering and sharing. These types of process flow in two ways: top–down and bottom–up. The top–down approach is generally the information flow from local authorities to the citizens. It can be passive, for example, opening up access to municipal archives or minutes and the records of different departments or the municipality, or it can be the active communication of information to citizens. Active information sharing can be carried out by means of printed products, including press releases, reports, newsletters and bulletins, and in oral and visual mode, for instance, television and radio appearances, speeches and presentations. The bottom–up approach aims to provide channels for citizens and civic groups to give feedback to local government, voice their concerns or request particular information. The forms it takes vary from surveys and public opinion polls to report cards, ombudsman offices, suggestion boxes and others.

Consultation. These types of approach feature structures and events that aim to consult the constituencies affected systematically—together or separately—on matters that affect them. After such systematic consultation, the decision makers (such as elected officials) make decisions that seek to
reconcile different positions. The outcome of consultation can be binding or non-binding for the local authorities. In general, consultation, like information gathering and sharing, involves a learning component, but the element of decision making by those in positions of authority distinguishes this approach from the others. Consultative processes commonly take the form of public meetings, assemblies, hearings and so on.

**Policy formulation and decision making.** In the policy-formulation and decision-making processes, authority over the final definition and resolution of the issue at hand lies with the participants around the table. The policy-formulation process often involves regulatory bodies at the local level (e.g. local councils) and decision making is generally in the domain of an administrative institution and its chief executive (e.g. a municipality and mayor or city manager). In many cases citizens participate in policy-formulation and decision-making processes by means of joint committees, commissions and task forces.

**Joint implementation.** Often citizen participation goes beyond discussions and debates towards the practical implementation of decisions made. The forms it takes vary from volunteering (mostly by ordinary citizens) to resource sharing with civil society organizations and private businesses. This kind of approach results in a greater sense of ownership of the process and its results for all the participants and, equally importantly, often supplies local authorities with much-needed resources—both human and financial—for the implementation of community projects.

*Figure 3: Types and Level of Direct Citizen Participation*
2. Menu: Examples of Proactive Forms of Citizen Participation

The four main types of direct citizen involvement comprise a great number of distinct and varied forms of participation, from radio talks to community hearings and from public opinion surveys to citizen juries. Some of these are clearly identifiable with a distinct type of participation; others spill across several types or can change from one type to another in the process, for example, a public hearing can start as an information process and move on to become consultation at a later stage. Below are some examples of citizen involvement that will put this typology of participation into a practical context.

2.1. Information Gathering and Sharing

Public opinion surveys and preference polling. Surveys and opinion polls seek to determine the range of community views on a set of issues or opinions. Sampling involves selecting a representative subset of the population, devising a questionnaire, carrying out the survey through interviews, and analysing the results. Preference polling is a similar method, which relies on identifying different views and assessing, among other things, the intensity of the preferences.

Public hearings and community forums. A traditional form of civic engagement in some established democracies, public hearings are a way formally to inform the groups affected, either by selection or by open invitation, on potentially contentious issues. Usually participants can give testimony or question public officials on the matter at hand in an open, transparent process of question and answer. Sometimes the hearing can move on from being a simple information process to interactive consultation and positive engagement.

2.2. Consultation

Issue-specific ad hoc consultations and issue forums. These methods involve structured dialogues on specific problems before the community on an ad hoc or occasional basis in which key participants are systematically consulted on policy options. Issue forums can be held singly or in a series; they may involve the same set of participants or participation may vary. The purpose of the consultation is to learn more about the sources of problems, to engage interested parties on potential policies and to develop recommendations. These methods are consultative since the forum is not empowered to make authoritative decisions; rather, the recommendations are forwarded to elected officials who ultimately choose the policies that will be adopted.

Citizen monitoring programmes. Citizen monitoring programmes allow individuals to be directly consulted on the efficacy of a particular policy or programme and involve them in making recommendations for improvement. For example, a common option under this rubric is a standing citizen panel that evaluates the impact of a programme on the community and regularly reports to the authorities its view of the programme's success in meeting the declared goals.

Participatory appraisals and beneficiary assessments. These consultative mechanisms seek to systematically consult a target population (such as the unemployed, young people or women) in the development and implementation of projects and programmes designed to address their specific concerns. These methods allow the objects of local policy making to be directly involved in the activities designed for their benefits.

Community visioning and planning processes. These methods involve collaborative approaches to strategic planning for a community and to the policies, programmes and resources that will be required for a community to reach its goals. A common tool in this method is the development of a vision statement to frame goals and set priorities. Participants are often asked to evaluate questions such as ‘What kind of quality of life do we want in our community in 10, 20 or 30 years, what are the values that lie behind that vision, and what are the steps that will be necessary to achieve this vision?’ The process can often be transformed into or contribute to policy formulation types of participation.
Community budgeting. This method involves more than just engaging community representatives in the financial calculations because community budgets do more than just reconcile revenue with expenditures. Budgets set priorities and help clarify, define and even quantify a community’s priorities. Community budgeting methods involve consultations on both the fiduciary details of a municipality’s life and the priorities that budget allocations reflect. Although budgets are often seen as technical documents that are best handled by officials and administrators, public involvement in the budgeting process is increasingly seen as a critical way to help a community understand the possibilities and constraints of local governance. By highlighting how scarce or finite resources are allocated, it can help citizens and civic groups to understand better how the competing values of the community may be more effectively balanced.

Standing citizen advisory councils. This method involves the establishment of a representative panel of citizens with knowledge of or interest in a particular issue to provide advice and recommendations to the local authority. The advantage of standing panels over ad hoc mechanisms is that over time citizens can acquire a great deal of collective memory, expertise and awareness of the issue. Although citizen advisory councils are usually more permanent bodies, participation in them usually changes over time; that is, they can be designed to be fairly dynamic and fluid over time as individual participation changes.

2.3. Collaborative Decision Making and Policy Formulation

Citizen juries. This is a well-known option of dialogue by a select group of citizens (usually broadly representative) for a specified time period, such as four to five days, during which they receive evidence, question experts and discuss possible policy responses. Often a background document is prepared for the jury that sets out the basic policy options, and the jury is asked to make a choice among them. After investigation and decision making, a report is prepared that outlines the decision, describes areas of consensus and disagreement, and provides the overall findings of the jury investigation.

Problem-solving workshops. In problem-solving workshops, the participants engage in a creative and consensus-oriented search for the solution to a problem. The aim is to provide an initial period of open dialogue to help define the problem, identify obstacles to its resolution and frame the set of solutions. After a period of open discussion, a moderator or facilitator prepares a summary document outlining the consensus-oriented findings and recommendations. This summary document becomes the basis for discussion for the next two or three days and is revised until there is agreement on all matters or until irresolvable differences are identified. The summary document that emerges at the end of the workshop becomes the decision reached by participants on how a community problem can be effectively addressed.

Joint task forces. This method is often used when it is expected that a subset of community groups, leaders and citizens will be able to brainstorm on specific issues in order to develop policy responses. With a specified time frame, task forces are broadly representative panels that systematically consult with and engage affected populations, analyse problems, devise options and make recommendations. Task forces may also be formed at the implementation phase, where collaborative efforts are needed to ensure the success of a policy or programme.

2.4. Joint Implementation

Often municipalities find themselves in a situation of scarce resources and a vast number of community problems to be addressed. Ordinary citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs) and private businesses can be of great assistance in taking part of the burden of multiple challenges by contributing their resources, both human and financial, to improve the lives of their communities. Examples of such joint actions range from volunteering to clean a city park to environmental monitoring and in-kind contributions to homeless shelters.
3. Designing Citizen Participation: Agenda and Participant Selection

Participatory policy making is not a single approach or a single method or technique. There are a wide variety of approaches and techniques that may serve different purposes or have widely varying forms, costs, structures and effects; these approaches may be used singly or in combination. Which method will work best and when it should be used depends very much on the context. For example, in a particular local context there may be a traditional culture of decision making with long-standing patterns of policy formation, leadership and social relations that will decide how feasible a particular approach or method is. Thus, designing an appropriate approach to citizen participation involves taking into account the structures on the ground and the discretion and the sensitivities of the community.

3.1. Agenda Setting

Choosing among different types of citizen participation approaches is often a matter of agenda setting. Agenda setting determines not just the issues to be discussed but also the overall purpose of the activity and its ultimate aims. In deciding among types of participatory approach and method, there are a number of pre-activity questions that must be answered which in turn will help set the agenda. In many instances, local authorities will decide the agenda and solicit participation. On the other hand, there are clear benefits to involving civil society at the very earliest stages of planning for collaborative approaches, as NGOs can often play a vital role in developing capacity, thinking through issues and facilitating post-dialogue steps such as follow-up, evaluation and implementation.

Some of the questions to think about in deciding what type of citizen participation process to use and how to set it up include the following.

- What are the objectives? For what purpose is the participatory initiative being launched?
- What should the process look like? Who should initiate it, who should be involved, and what types of response are expected or desired?
- How can we define the problem we are seeking to address? Who has the expertise, and on what aspects?
- How can we ensure that citizens affected by a particular issue participate throughout the process from the very beginning?
- What should the agenda be?
- Where should the discussions be held and what type of room arrangement is most conducive to a successful meeting?
- How should we invite participants or announce the aims, structure and goals of the process?
- How can we expect the deliberations to unfold? What methods can we use to facilitate the discussions?
- How can we move from dialogue to consensus-building, especially in bringing the initiative to closure?
- How can we ensure that decisions are implemented and the results are carefully evaluated? How should the results of the process be used?
- In what ways can we communicate to others how things went, what decisions were made, and next steps?
- Who will sponsor the process and who will provide the resources for it? What types of training and other pre-initiative preparatory work will need to be done before the initiative can be launched?
How can the key participants in the process be involved at the very earliest stages in the planning and project formulation process?

### 3.2. Participant Selection

One of the enduring issues in citizen participation processes is that of selecting participants. Who should be included, who (if anyone) should be excluded, and who should decide on participation? Should participants be chosen or should open invitations be issued? How structured should participation be? Should participants be representatives of organizations, prominent individuals or ordinary citizens? How many participants should be involved? Selecting participants is not just a practical matter of policy or politics but a critical aspect of what is known as 'democratic justice', which is related to the notion of inclusion. At least one purpose of making participation as broadly inclusive as possible is building and strengthening social ties among individuals, organizations and institutions around solutions to issues of common interest.

### 4. The Roles of Local Authorities and Citizens in the Participatory Process

What role, if any, should the local authority be given in such a process? Should the official be an advocate for defining a problem and promoting a solution, a mediator among different civil society groups, a listener and ultimately an arbitrator, or a facilitator? Indeed, local authorities may end up playing various roles at different stages of the process or even simultaneously. In any event, each of these tasks will require more of local authorities in terms of their own skills as social mediators. They must be able to build coalitions and listen carefully to different points of view, be open to persuasion, and be able to negotiate and mediate between contending social forces. They must be able to forge a consensus and to decide when complete consensus is impossible or undesirable. NGO staff and citizens, too, should possess these skills if consensus policy making is not to prevent them from being manipulated by more powerful state officials or by other interest groups.

### 4.1. The Roles of Local Authorities

The following are some of the roles that local authorities can play in collaborative decision-making processes.

**Convener.** Public officials convene the participatory initiative and ultimately decide on the structure, the participants, the nature of participation, the agenda, the outcome and implementation. The convening power of the municipal authority suggests that it in some way has the legitimacy and capacity to gather all the parties around the table and facilitate their participation.

**Mediator.** A mediator acts as a third-party facilitator in bringing together disparate individuals or groups in a dispute. Mediation implies that the official may seek to manipulate the situation to bring the parties to agreement, for example, through financial incentives or sanctions, but that ultimately the parties themselves must reach agreement on how to solve the problem.

**Catalyst.** The authorities may serve to catalyse a consultative process and work with civic groups to facilitate and launch a participatory initiative that will ultimately be run by others (such as a neighbourhood association).

**Funder.** In some instances, local governments may prefer to allow other groups to conceptualize and implement a participatory process but do not want to be directly involved. They may instead provide financial resources to an NGO or CSO, such as a church, to design and manage the initiative.

**Technical assistance provider.** Similarly, when technical issues such as zoning or sanitation are involved, local officials may serve in participatory forums primarily as the providers of technical assistance.

**Capacity-builder.** Local authorities may help empower certain groups to participate by helping them build capacity. This may involve training, education, financial support or informal advice.
4.2. The Role of the Citizen

The other parties shaping the process—citizens and civil society organizations—have equally important roles to play, including the following.

**Initiator.** Being primary consumers and stakeholders, citizens occupy a unique position in being able to identify and articulate current and forthcoming challenges and needs in their communities. Citizens’ involvement could be limited just to bringing their concerns to the local authorities (as in the ‘information’ bottom–up approach), or it can take the more advanced and proactive forms of consultation, joint decision making and implementation.

**Debater/discussant.** By providing their opinions on specific issues and discussing different options to address community problems, citizens assist local authorities in clarifying the situation and generating possible solutions.

**Contributor.** At the decision-making and policy-formulation stages, citizens act as contributors to the process, defining a range of possible policies or decisions, and developing an approach for their implementation.

**Implementer.** Being an integral part of implementation gives citizens a strong sense of ownership of the process and ensures that its outcomes meet the demands of the community.

**Evaluator.** Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is gradually replacing the conventional approach of having agencies and external actors evaluate projects and activities. Citizens, civil society and other local stakeholders define the indicators of success or failure, collect and process data, and share findings and recommendations.

Finally, both local authorities and citizens play an important role as partners. They seek to partner with each other and with civil society groups to launch and manage a process. Partnership involves division of labour, combining resources, mutual support and shared obligations.

5. Referendums and Citizen Initiatives

One practice that embodies both the representative and the participatory forms of participation is the use of referendums. Although the process of administering and conducting a referendum is technically close to electoral democracy, its essence is more relevant to forms of direct citizen participation. Referendums are associated with citizen initiatives because the laws of many communities and countries allow for a group of citizens that has sufficient support to put a referendum question before the people to be directly decided at the ballot box. In a referendum, a public issue that cannot or should not be decided without direct reference to the will of the people is put to the electorate in terms of a question. Voters are most often asked to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on the referendum question, and in most cases 50 per cent or more of votes will decide the outcome (although some require ‘super-majorities’, for example, two-thirds or 67 per cent of the voters).

Key issues in using referendums to settle community public policy questions include:

- the appropriateness of letting the issues be decided directly by the people;
- whether the people are sufficiently interested in the question being put to them;
- the means by which the referendum is called or placed on the ballot;
- the phrasing of the question;
- the intensity of opinion on the issue and the consequences of a ‘yes or no’ outcome;
- the decision rule (amount of votes needed to pass or fail); and
- educating the public on the importance of the issue.
Some of their proponents regard referendums as a key element of local democracy and argue that they allow citizens to have a direct voice on important policy matters—that referendums can help decisively resolve particularly contentious issues which political representatives have been unable to resolve in the normal political process, for example, at city council meetings. If democracy is seen to be synonymous with or equal to majority rule, then there is no better mechanism for determining the will of the majority than a basic referendum where more than 50 per cent support a measure and it is adopted.

Others argue against referendums precisely because they believe that the will of the majority can be an objectionable way to run a democratic city. Majority rule can work against the democratic principles of equality and tolerance if the will of the many overrides the important rights of the few. When minorities are vulnerable and their preferences are strongly held, majority rule can become majority tyranny, and the referendum becomes a tool for domination by the many at the expense of the few. Another question is whether the public has enough information on certain policy issues—which can be rather technical—and whether the people can always make the best choice for the community given the often inflexible nature of a ‘yes or no’ choice on a complex issue.

With the advent of information technology applications such as Internet voting, some people believe that it would be a good thing to have citizens vote on each issue before the community; that Internet voting offers the possibility of a new form of direct democracy—government by the people without a strong role for elected, representative officials. Detractors argue that elected representatives should decide on behalf of the community and that it would be impractical to have citizens voting online on a regular basis and unlikely to succeed.

5.1. Direct Citizen Voting on the Issues: the Promises and Perils of Referendums

Promises

· They can resolve public disputes definitively; a decision based on the results of a referendum is universally seen as legitimate.
· They offer a clear and easily understandable mechanism for citizen participation and direct decision making.
· Citizen initiatives can put questions up for the vote.
· They provide a clear and unambiguous determination of the popular will and demonstrate the precise level of support or opposition among voters.
· They provide opportunities for public education on important issues.

Perils

· Referendums lend themselves to ‘minimum winning coalitions’ or bare majority rule. On contentious issues, this can lead to ‘winner takes all’ politics, which can induce community conflict rather than resolve it.
· Referendums can undermine the authority and legitimacy of the representative institutions which are charged with responsibility for decision making.
· Questions can be written in such a way as to mislead or obfuscate the issues, rather than clarifying them.
· Sometimes the referendum can become a vote on the legitimacy of the incumbent government instead of the merits of the particular issue at hand.
· Some issues require deliberation and compromise rather than clear ‘yes or no’ answers.
· Some issues require specialized knowledge and information that the public may not be able to digest easily and decide upon, particularly if the issue is highly technical or emotionally charged.
· Sometimes what may be in the individual interests of a bare majority of voters is not really in
the broader interest of the community as a whole, for instance, tax cuts which then undermine
funding for education and schools.

6. Principles of Successful Citizen Participation Initiatives

Although there is no single recipe for success in implementing a citizens’ participation approach, the
following principles have been seen to yield success in many instances.

The range of participants should include all the relevant parties. Efforts should involve the
entire range of community interests and bring all concerned constituencies together in the same
forum for interactive dialogue and consensus-based decision making. As far as possible, traditional
power brokers and the traditionally disadvantaged should relate to each other on equal terms.

Common interests should be identified. Participatory processes should seek to bridge differences
and find solutions based on the common interest of all parts of the community in mutually beneficial
coexistence. All participants should take responsibility for the process and its outcomes.

Citizens should be involved in the early stages and throughout the process. As citizens be-
come a part of participatory practices from the very beginning, they gain a stronger sense of ownership,
as well as a commitment to contribute to and sustain the process in the long run.

The problem must be clearly defined. The process should focus on the issue at hand, in particular
defining problems, sketching out the broadest possible array of options, developing strategies and
finding solutions that can be jointly implemented.

External accountability and internal flexibility are exercised. Participatory processes must be
externally accountable and transparent, yet within them there should be flexibility in the dialogue—
participants should be able speak freely—and in the process and methods of decision making.

The process is institutionalized. To ensure long-term sustainability, the leaders of and participants in
the process should ensure the integration of its components into (a) existing governance structures
(which will often require legislative provisions to be made), and (b) routine local governance procedures.

Sufficient financial and human resources must be available. Collaborative policy making and
implementation processes often run aground when there is a shortage of qualified personnel with
negotiation, mediation and consensus-building skills or of financial resources.

7. Barriers to Citizen Participation

While collaborative approaches offer considerable promise in solving social problems and building com-
munity capital, their introduction and implementation are often hindered by both obvious and hidden
obstacles. A World Bank study, Participation in Practice: The Experience of the World Bank and Other Stakeholders,
identified the following barriers to enhanced participation in planning for development projects:

· lack of government commitment to adopting a participatory approach;
· unwillingness on the part of project officials to give up control over project activities and
directions;
· lack of incentives and skills among project staff to encourage them to adopt a participatory
approach;
· limited capacity of local-level organizations and insufficient investment in community capacity-
building;
· participation starting too late; and
· mistrust between government and local-level stakeholders.
The reality in many societies is that the average citizen may be cynical about politics or apathetic or unwilling to participate. It is for this reason that the World Bank has stressed the difference between ‘citizen’ participation as popular participation and the need to include key ‘stakeholders’ in policy decisions. Stakeholders are those people whose interests are specifically affected, and these special interests should be represented and satisfied in public decision making.

Some policy practitioners are sceptical about participatory policy making, arguing that the choices are limited and citizen input often has, in the long run, little impact on policy outcomes. Those involved in participatory practices could be dissatisfied when processes drag out too long, powerful interests prevail, macro-level constraints (i.e. national or international influences) drive policy, or policy makers do not act upon citizen input. Much of the concern with direct participation, however, indicates that practitioners need better skills and knowledge about when, how and why to launch participatory practices.

In some cases participatory policy making may not even be feasible. The more sensitive the issue, such as determining official language policy, the less probable complete consensus is. Mechanisms for engaging citizens and building broad consensus on community affairs involve the balancing of many interests and the search for a compromise. Some of the issues to consider include the following:

**Is equal participation attainable?** Equal participation is a tenet of liberal democracy, yet the reality is that some participants will be more vocal or powerful, or both, or may have access to information that others do not have.

**Realities of networks.** A collaborative process may be taken over by ‘network operators’ or powerful ‘stakeholders’. Citizens’ groups may be unable to cope with or counter the pervasive influence of some individuals, factions or organizations, such as powerful local businesses or a representative of a national ministry.

**Election mandates.** Office-holders may have been elected after a campaign that sharpened differences and clearly delineated an official’s position on issues. Once elected, however, the official needs to represent the entire community. When do local office-holders have an interest in promoting consensus-based solutions to local problems? When do consensus outcomes override alternative policies that are popular in elections?

**Perils for civil society.** If a participatory process puts the onus of implementation of a decision or programme on an NGO, and the resources for that are then not forthcoming, the NGO may be held responsible even though the outcome was beyond its control.

**Fragmentation in the political community.** In some instances, the social structure of a community is so fragmented that finding legitimate spokespersons for a group or interest is very difficult. For example, a public official seeking to initiate a problem-solving workshop might have difficulty deciding which particular individual or group validly represents a specific interest. The choices can be frustratingly difficult, and the choice of a person who is not closely tied to the interest they purportedly represent can undermine the legitimacy of the entire consensus-building exercise.

**Inability to develop complete or even near-complete consensus.** One risk of a collaborative process is that it may highlight to a community that there are indeed irreconcilable views on some problems; this realization may sharpen differences and encourage those who are not inclined to seek a solution through dialogue to harden their positions even further.

**Design flaws.** Participatory processes can run aground because they are not properly designed or carried out. The absence of a clear strategy of how and why to engage citizens and civil society on a policy problem or an inability to mediate among social groups because of poor skills, training or information can lead to participatory exercises turning into ineffective ‘talking shops’ that are inefficient in their attempts to devise new options and solutions.

**Limits of the local context.** Sometimes communities can convene, share information, consult and make decisions on a local policy problem only to learn that the power to resolve the problem does
not lie within the sphere of local governance. The reality of many national and regional contexts is that some local problems (e.g. financing for major transport improvements) are often addressed at other tiers of governance, and local communities are relatively powerless in addressing them.

8. Evaluating Citizen Participation

Evaluating collaborative decision making is a challenging task. One of the most common problems is determining whether the exhaustive efforts required to engage citizens and forge collaborative approaches really make much difference in terms of policy development, implementation and, most importantly, the attainment of goals. The practical aspects of a collaborative approach can be measured: participants came, they discussed, they recommended and they departed. But whether recommendations are carried out and situations in a given community change significantly cannot be so easily determined. Although a number of rigorous methods for evaluation can be introduced into the collaborative policy-making process, measuring the performance of local governance over the long term is a more difficult, demanding, and ultimately subjective task.

One of the main purposes of evaluation is ensuring accountability. Accountability is central to good governance. Approaches to accountability reflect differing conceptualizations of local governance. Accountability is exercised through the ballot box as citizens have the opportunity to vote out elected officials who are not performing well and to elect new authorities that can serve the community more effectively. Accountability is also about preventing and punishing corruption, or the use of community resources or political power for individual private gain. Thus, one of the most important tests of a collaborative process is whether the process itself has been open, fair and transparent. When this overarching criterion of evaluation is met, the likelihood that the deliberative effort was worthwhile is quite high.

Important evaluation questions that are usually posed by those who have sponsored, organized or convened the dialogue include:

· Was the issue under consideration a suitable subject for collaborative policy making?
· Was the process of the dialogue carefully and professionally managed?
· What were the nature and quality of participation?
· What will be the effect of the deliberative process on those who are expected to benefit most from the policy, programme or project?
· How effective will the collaborative process be in influencing the authoritative policy decisions that are made?
· Were public policies changed or improved as a result of the process and the recommendations given?

External evaluators can also be asked to conduct evaluations of citizen participation efforts. For example, a neutral specialist on the community, on collaborative decision making or on the policy options under consideration can be invited to observe and prepare an independent report that is provided to sponsors or circulated to all parties. Similarly, a subgroup of participants might be asked to perform this task. Officials from national ministries or national-level civil society organizations might be asked to observe and report.

Ultimately, collaborative decision making must be evaluated according to a long-term assessment of whether the community is reaching its goals. Assessing whether goals have been attained over the long term requires a more thorough process of monitoring, measuring, tracking and re-evaluating, and an ability to take into account unforeseen events. The outcomes of policy—the performance of those involved in governance in delivering the services they provide—are some of the most difficult aspects to measure.