

Policy Brief 05 JUL 2022

Civil society participation in urban governance in Africa

Supporting CSOs' political voice for a transformation of citizen-state relations

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Urbanisation offers great potential for Africa's economic and social development: citizens earn twice as much in large cities compared to rural areas, and young urbanites receive on average between 2.5 and 4 years more education than their rural counterparts. At the same time, the rapid rise of the urban population is putting a strain on Africa's cities. While on average, city dwellers have better access to services than their rural counterparts, more than half of all citizens in sub-Saharan African metropolises live in informal settlements without adequate access to basic infrastructure. Citizens have long demanded participation in urban governance that goes beyond elections in order to voice their concerns. Although participatory processes have become increasingly evident in many African countries in some cities and neighbourhoods, they are still far from being institutionalised at scale. This policy brief asks why participatory approaches have not been successful thus far and analyses the challenges regarding a political mobilisation of civil society organisations (CSOs), which often face weak and fragmented state institutions. It argues that participatory processes need to be thoroughly embedded in politics in order to move beyond particularistic gains towards a structural improvement of relations between citizens, CSOs, and local governments.

Academics and policy-makers recognise the merit of participation for its instrumental value, that is, its ability to increase efficiency and responsiveness as well as its empowering value, meaning strengthening social cohesion and democratic citizenship. However, neither bottom-up nor top-down participatory processes have achieved an inclusive mobilisation of citizens.¹ Too often, participation is perceived as a technical process that relies on a supposedly autonomous civil society and is disconnected from other political processes.

Similarly, donor-funded civil society support often relies on a narrow understanding of CSOs in Africa, and therefore instead contributes to maintaining the status quo rather than challenging it. Funding structures and instruments need to change in order to contribute to a more inclusive and broader social mobilisation. At the same time, the strengthening of civil society cannot be addressed in isolation. Local governments need to have the financial, administrative, and technical capacities to engage with citizens and CSOs and provide adequate services.

¹ Horn, Philipp, Mitlin, Diana, Bennett, Jhono, Chitekwe-Biti, Beth and Makau, Jack. 2018. "Towards Citywide Participatory Planning: Emerging Community-Led Practices in Three African Cities." Global Development Institute Working Paper Series. University of Manchester.

This requires tailored national frameworks for decentralisation and the political will to put them into practice. Through such an integrated approach that simultaneously invests in citywide multi-stakeholder processes, participatory urban governance can contribute to transforming wider citizen–state relations.

Infobox 1: Defining participatory urban governance

Participatory urban governance in this context refers to formal and informal processes, mechanisms, and institutions through which citizens and CSOs influence and share control over decisions and resources that affect them.² This includes both bottom-up processes such as petitions, demonstrations, and other CSO-led initiatives, as well as state-led mechanisms such as participatory budgeting processes, public policy councils, consultation hours, issue-based town hall meetings, ward committees, and community development councils.

Scrutinising the role of civil society actors in urban governance in Africa

In light of the decline of democracies worldwide, civil society has recently been presented as the last resort against autocratisation. The Bertelsmann Stiftung finds that, “[t]oday, the greatest impetus toward democratic innovation and renewal is coming far more often from critical civil societies than from governments.”³ At the same time, CSOs have been criticised for lacking political voice. Instead of assuming political functions such as advocacy, acting as watchdogs, or representing the interests of marginalised groups, many organisations are focussing on service delivery and implementing foreign-funded donor projects.⁴ I argue that this perceived lack of political civil society in Africa stems from a) a skewed conceptualisation of CSOs, and the fact that b) the depoliticisation of CSOs is reinforced by the funding instruments and modalities used by Western donors.

Civil society is an elusive concept that is often used in a normative manner, referring to non-state and non-market actors aiming to advance liberal democratic values. Accordingly, civil society in Africa is often misleadingly equated with professional civil society/non-governmental organisations (CSOs/NGOs) that are active in development. Such a simplistic conceptualisation disregards the diversity of civil society actors on the continent and the rich associational life in African cities that is largely informal (i.e. non-registered). Associations provide not only social but also financial support, representing a form of social protection and security. People are usually members of multiple groups in order to cover their needs. Whereas some groups have formalised membership to a certain extent, others are rather loosely connected networks. Common types of groups are savings-based groups, neighbourhood and hometown associations, lineage and kinship groups, as well as youth associations, women’s associations, and mutual self-help groups.

² Devas, Nick, and Ursula Grant. 2003. “Local Government Decision-Making – Citizen Participation and Local Accountability: Some Evidence from Kenya and Uganda.” *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice* 23 (4): 307–16.

³ BTI. 2022. “Democratic Resilience under Pressure.” <https://bti-project.org/en/press> (accessed 12 April 2022).

⁴ Banks, Nicola, David Hulme, and Michael Edwards. 2015. “NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?” *World Development* 66, C: 707–18.

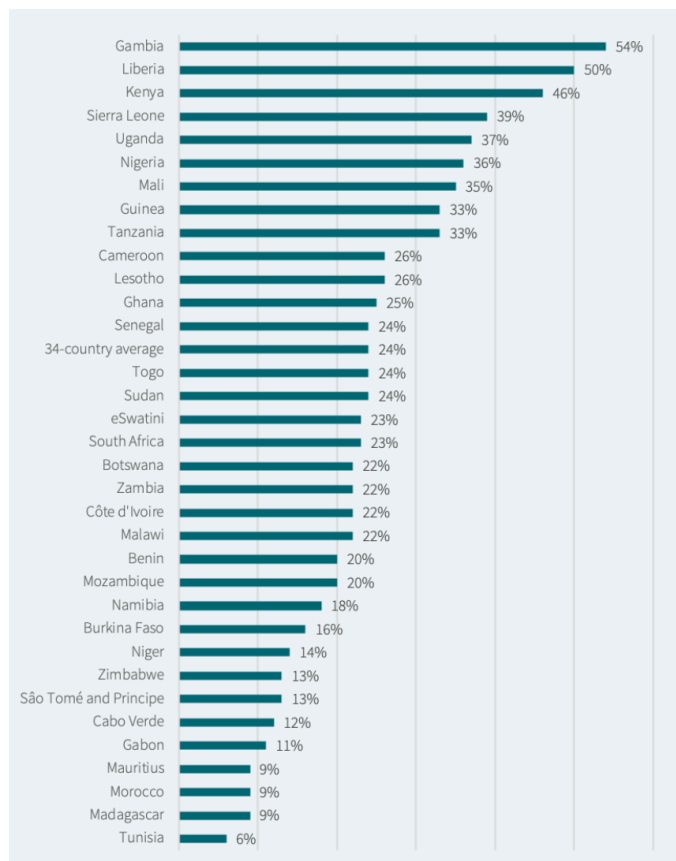


Figure 1: Participation of the general population in voluntary associations or community groups. Source: Own depiction based on Logan, Carolyn, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, and Kangwook Han. 2021. "Who Gets Involved? Insights on Civic Engagement in Africa and Implications for Fostering Volunteerism in Pursuit of Development Goals." p. 6.

Instead of relying on a more normative definition of civil society, here CSOs are defined in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as "all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain".⁵ This includes organisations that do not pursue a political or development-related agenda.

Looking beyond professional CSOs relying on paid staff, we find a significant amount of volunteerism in Africa. Afrobarometer data shows that, on average, 24 per cent of all Africans participate in voluntary associations and community groups in the 34 surveyed countries (2016/2018). However, the variation between countries ranges from 54 per cent in Gambia to only 6 per cent in Tunisia (see Figure 1).⁶⁷

Interestingly, membership in community groups in Africa is on average higher in rural (27 per cent) than in urban areas (20 per cent). This could be explained by the higher levels of transience and heterogeneity in the urban populace, thereby discouraging social organising.⁸ Women and youth participate significantly less in community groups. However, youth are more likely than elder participants to take part in campaign rallies and protests.⁹ While it is little surprise that membership in a voluntary association is positively correlated

⁵ OECD. 2011. *How DAC Members Work with Civil Society Organizations. An Overview 2011*. Paris. OECD Publishing, p. 10.

⁶ Logan, Carolyn, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, and Kangwook Han. 2021. *Who Gets Involved? Insights on Civic Engagement in Africa and Implications for Fostering Volunteerism in Pursuit of Development Goals*.

⁷ In the EU the average is 20 per cent, however, the overall picture is similarly inconsistent: Whereas Nordic countries show very high rates of volunteerism (e.g. Norway 48 per cent), other countries, such as Romania (3 per cent) and Portugal (9 per cent), exhibit much lower rates, see: Eurostat. 2021. "Participation in Formal or Informal Voluntary Activities or Active Citizenship by Sex, Age and Educational Attainment Level" (accessed 26 June 2022).

⁸ Birkinshaw, Matt, Anna Grieser, and Jeff Tan. 2021. "How Does Community-Managed Infrastructure Scale Up from Rural to Urban? An Example of Co-Production in Community Water Projects in Northern Pakistan", *Environment and Urbanization* 33 (2): 496–518.

⁹ Lekalake, Rorisang and Esther Gyimah-Boadi. 2016. "Does Less Engaged Mean Less Empowered? Political Participation Lags among African Youth, Especially Women". Afrobarometer.

with the level of education, it is rather counterintuitive that in 15 out of 34 countries, participation levels are higher for the poorer segments of society.

Similarly, Afrobarometer data shows that a higher national Human Development Index results in a lower likelihood of membership in voluntary associations. These findings suggest that dire living conditions are an important motivator for citizens to engage in community groups. At the same time, participation is higher in countries with a higher Polity IV indicator,¹⁰ suggesting that citizens are more likely to engage if leaders and institutions are more responsive to their demands.

While voluntary organisations have a long tradition in Africa, development-related CSOs strongly grew in numbers with the massive influx of donor funding after the end of the Cold War. CSOs were believed to provide an alternative to weak states and were favoured by donors because of their people-centred approaches, supposedly lower costs, and better access to the grassroots. The structure of donor funding favours professional organisations that have the required level of administrative skills to write grant proposals and comply with reporting and accountability requirements. Civicus observes that

these issues make it particularly difficult for small, informal CSOs or grassroots movements to access the funding and support they need, especially those that are not registered, don't have a bank account or are operating in politically and socially hostile environments.¹¹

Grassroots organisations are mostly not eligible for donor funding and can access this funding, if at all, only through sub-grants. To date, only 7 per cent of Development Assistance Committee members' official development assistance to CSOs goes to organisations in developing countries, whereas the rest goes to international or donor country-based organisations.¹² This means that many of the urban-based CSOs are highly professional organisations contributing to the global development agenda and providing jobs for only highly educated Africans.

However, between those two extremes, there are many different types of organisations, ranging from smaller organisations with a specific thematic focus (e.g. sustainable agriculture, rights for people with disabilities, water and sanitation); research-based centres lobbying the central government; and CSO umbrella organisations to national affiliates of international CSOs that cover many fields and sub-grants to smaller organisations. Many donor projects also rely on creating or working with community-based organisations to access the grassroots. These donor-funded organisations are, for the most part, active in implementing projects and do not aim at representing community interests politically (in some cases these agendas might overlap). Bottom-up community groups, in turn, often assume political functions, but for the most part they fail to make effective political claims. Even though they are the most widespread among ordinary citizens, they often do not have the visibility or social capital to carry out lobby and advocacy work or act as citizen representatives in state-led participatory fora.

Still, there are numerous examples of CSO campaigns and protests in which CSOs joined forces with grassroots groups and other civil society actors, such as trade unions or teacher associations. Such coalitions can successfully enable the mobilisation of the broader public for collective action (see e.g. the role of Slum Dwellers International Kenya in Infobox 2).

¹⁰ The Polity data series measures regime types by means of different indicators. A high score in the Polity IV data series is associated with democratic rule, whereas a low score signifies autocratic rule.

¹¹ CIVICUS. 2019. "Addressing the Resourcing Problem: Strategic Recommendations on Mechanisms to Increase Resources Going to Civil Society Groups in the Global South." Johannesburg: 2.

¹² OECD. 2021. "Aid for Civil Society Organisations. Statistics Based on DAC Members' Reporting to the Creditor Reporting System Database." Paris. OECD Publishing.

Infobox 2: Community mobilisation for slum upgrading in Mukuru (Nairobi, Kenya)¹³

Since the 2010 constitutional reforms, the Kenyan state has voiced a greater commitment to include citizens in urban planning. Despite these reforms, actual planning practices often fail to comply with that legislation. In response to years of advocacy efforts by local residents and support organisations, the informal settlement of Mukuru was declared a Special Planning Area by the Nairobi county government. This involved a two-year participatory planning phase (2017-2019, later extended to 2022) in order to come up with an integrated development plan. The participatory process presents an example of successful community mobilisation and shows the government's commitment to a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder process.

The community mobilisation process in Mukuru was organised by the Kenyan federation of slum dwellers, Muungano wa Wanavijiji, in collaboration with the professional support organisation Slum Dwellers International Kenya. It went through a) a savings scheme and b) the residents' associations model (Tujane Tujengane Mtaani). The savings scheme relies on small savings groups with an average of 16 members who meet regularly to collect savings. Savings groups offer space for women and young people to participate. The meetings allow residents to articulate the problems they face, and the funds can be used to finance activities that address these issues. Members can also access short-term loans. This well-practised model provided the backbone for catalysing the residents' association model and mobilised the entire population of Mukuru.

The residents' associations model is a bottom-up process to represent community voices. The smallest unit is the "ten cell" (Nyumba Kumi) made up of 10 households. Each "ten cell" sends a representative to the sub-cluster (baraza), which comprises 10 "ten cells". Barazas, in turn, are organised into segments of 80 sub-clusters. Additionally, the overall process is multi-sectoral and includes multiple stakeholders: It is based on thematic consortia that bring together government representatives, technical experts, academics, as well as civil society representatives. In each of the thematic areas, community consultations are organised in which 80-160 representatives of each segment participate. The thematic consortia mirror departments in the Nairobi County government in order to encourage ownership of local officials.

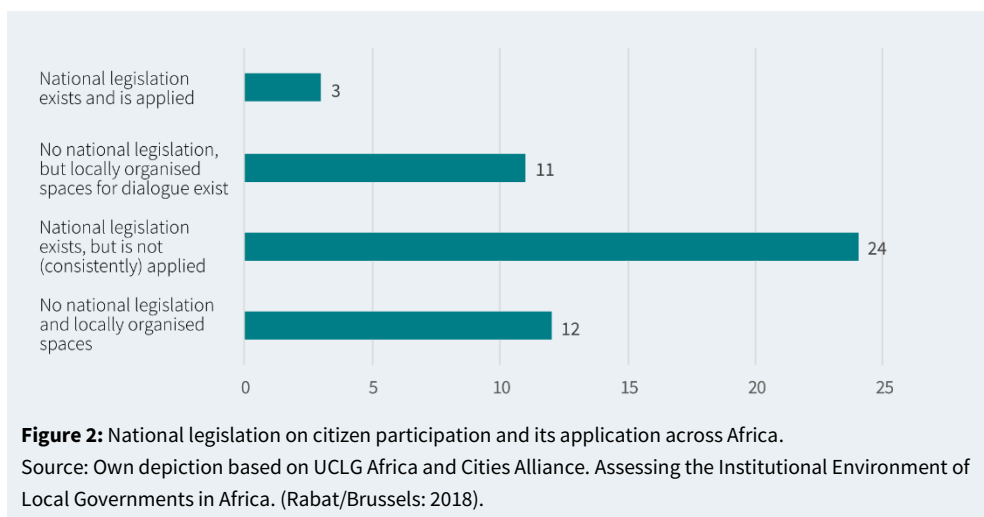
Challenges to participation

The above-mentioned funding landscape for CSOs leads to more professional and formalised groups being more likely to participate in urban governance processes. Thus, associations that represent constituents – and particularly more vulnerable segments of the population – are less represented in urban governance. CSOs are also not necessarily inherently democratic or inclusive; the same divisions that run across societies are also

¹³ Information based on Horn, Philipp. 2021. "Enabling Participatory Planning to Be Scaled in Exclusionary Urban Political Environments: Lessons from the Mukuru Special Planning Area in Nairobi." *Environment and Urbanization* 33 (2): 519–38, and Muungano. 2022. "About the Alliance". Nairobi. (accessed 26 June 2022).

evident in associations. Associations can also be vulnerable to opportunism or co-optation by the authorities, other CSOs, or their own leadership.¹⁴

Apart from the challenges regarding CSOs, the academic literature has identified a number of challenges with regard to participation – challenges that for the most part derive from the political and institutional environment in which local governments operate. An important hindrance to citizen participation is the **lack of a legal framework**, or rather the lack of its application. Although national legislation on citizen participation exists in 27 African countries, it is only consistently applied in three of them: Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania (see Figure 2).



National legislation refers to laws and regulations enshrining forms of citizen participation such as formalised consultation processes, the possibility for citizens to submit petitions, the organisation of citizen-led referendums, the practice of participatory budgeting, and the expression of public opinion through satisfaction surveys.

The data suggests that those states which are more democratic and receive overall better scores in the United Cities and Local Government's index for assessing the institutional environment of local governments in Africa also fare better in implementing participatory processes. In the majority of fragile states, urban governance is likely to be dominated by powerful and often violent non-state actors, leaving little room for citizen input.¹⁵ But even if participation is enshrined in the constitution, as it is in Kenya and Angola, this does not necessarily mean that participatory processes are implemented or lead to an actual power shift. Legal frameworks can thus be important enablers of participation, but they are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Furthermore, research from Ghana illustrates how participation is often used by the authorities in a tokenistic manner: Consultation fora on market redevelopment were solely used for information purposes. The decision-making, technical planning, and implementation were executed without consultation.¹⁶

Tokenism can also mean including only a selected group of participants (elite capture) that is in line with the authority's agenda, contributing towards the exacerbation of existing inequalities. Participation is used in such a manner so as to legitimise political positions, and it thereby contributes to a depoliticisation of governance processes. This results in

¹⁴ Lindell, Ilda. 2008. "The Multiple Sites of Urban Governance: Insights from an African City", *Urban Studies* 45 (9): 1879–901.

¹⁵ Büscher, Karen. 2012. "Urban Governance Beyond the State: Practices of Informal Urban Regulation in the City of Goma, Eastern DR Congo." *Urban Forum* 23: 483–99.

¹⁶ Abedi Asante, Lewis. 2020. "Urban Governance in Ghana: The Participation of Traders in the Redevelopment of Kotokuraba Market in Cape Coast." *African Geographical Review* 39 (4): 361–78.

decisions largely representing the interests of the wealthy and powerful, whereas CSOs expect participation to lead to shared decision-making by all parties.

The example of South Africa shows that the degree of instrumentalisation of the participatory processes by different stakeholders can vary within one country, and even within the same city. A case study of Cape Town's street traders describes how state-led participatory processes can be used as a form of control.¹⁷ Another study shows that sub-councils in Cape Town are institutions "through which residents in poor areas develop a sense of citizenship that, at times, challenges, or at least broadens, the institutional delimitation of local communities and legitimate leadership".¹⁸

Even if participation is representative and includes all segments of citizens in decision-making, **equal access does not always translate into equal voice**. Low-income citizens' input is often not taken seriously, and poor people might not be able to articulate their needs as efficiently as needed. The Kenyan case study (Infobox 2) describes how, over an extended period of time, slum dwellers gained confidence to speak up and managed to be taken seriously by the authorities.

Although wealthier citizens have the monetary and social capital to organise and represent their interests, the mere existence of vibrant associational life does not translate into politically effective associations. Research on informal enterprise associations from Nigeria illustrates that, despite efficient organisational structures, the clusters were not able to hold public officials to account. They did not have the political leverage that comes with connections to powerful actors and the control over strategic resources.¹⁹

Another challenge to participation is the **lack of autonomy of local governments**. Even though political decentralisation has impressively progressed in most African countries, fiscal decentralisation lags behind, hampering local governments' abilities to meet citizens' needs. Sub-national governments in Africa receive the second-lowest revenue sums (as a share of total public revenues and of GDP) worldwide.²⁰ Financial transfers from the national to the sub-national level are often inadequate, leading to a situation in which local governments have to deal with unpredictable amounts when drafting their own annual budgets. In addition, many local governments, in particular in francophone Africa, do not have the mandate to impose and collect taxes, duties, and fees, constraining their autonomy in financial management.³⁰ At the same time, competencies and responsibilities are often not clearly set apart between national and local levels.

This situation is exacerbated in **contexts in which political authority is vertically divided** between an opposition party at the city level and the ruling party at the central level, such as in Cape Town and Dakar (until 2018).²¹ Such a situation creates little incentive for the central level to cooperate in sectors that are based on a shared mandate. This can hamper effective decision-making and service provision at the local level due to a lack or delay of resource transfers or a lack of approvals. There are also efforts to curb oppositional influence by reversing decentralisation: For instance, in Namibia and Botswana additional

¹⁷ Morange, Marianne. 2015. "Participation, Neoliberal Control and the Voice of Street Traders in Cape Town – a Foucauldian Perspective on 'Invited Spaces'", in *Popular Politics in South African Cities-Unpacking Community Participation*, ed. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou. Cape Town. Human Sciences Research Council Press: 171–196.

¹⁸ Buire, Chloé. 2011. "Bringing Government Closer to the People? The Daily Experience of Sub-Councils in Cape Town." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46 (5): 467.

¹⁹ Meagher, Kate. 2011. "Informal Economies and Urban Governance in Nigeria: Popular Empowerment or Political Exclusion?" *African Studies Review* 54 (2): 47–72.

²⁰ Mbassi, Jean Pierre Elong. 2022. "Which National and Local Policies Can Enable Local Governments to Play a Greater Role in the Socio-Economic Development of Africa?" In *Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2022: The Power of Africa's Cities*, ed. OECD, UN ECA, and AfDB. Paris. OECD Publishing: 182–88.

²¹ Resnick, Danielle. 2021. "The Politics of Urban Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Regional & Federal Studies* 31 (1): 139–61.

governors and councillors were appointed at the national level, complementing the number of elected representatives at the sub-national level. In Kampala, the city council has been replaced altogether by the Kampala Capital City Authority, which is answerable to the central government. This leads to an unsettled situation in the accountability relationship between citizens and the state. This is also true in contexts in which local governments are not directly elected: For instance, in Rwanda, district mayors are not elected by the populace but indirectly by councillors, and in Kenya municipalities are managed by boards appointed by the county government.²²

Recommendations and conclusions

Participatory urban governance is still far from realising its full potential. The challenge lies in the mutually constituting nature of the state and civil society: Strengthening one without the other is likely going to exacerbate existing inequalities instead of tackling them. Empowered local governments can perpetuate undemocratic and clientelist rule if they are not challenged by civil society. In a similar manner, a strong civil society that meets a clientelist state is not going to achieve more inclusivity. In an ideal world, if citizens find that their voices are being heard, they would be willing to commit more, which can result in a virtuous circle that strengthens accountability and democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, the reality is often more complex than that. Participation can also lead to disappointment and discouragement. A recent study on Accra found that middle class Ghanaians are more prone to withdraw from politics and opt for private services instead of challenging the government.²³

Implementing participatory urban governance is not a walk in the park: Encounters between the state and its citizens are power-laden and fraught with competing interests. While European countries are still struggling to add forms of participatory democracy to local governance, Africa is faced with the “concurrent emergence of both representative and participatory forms of democracy”²⁴. This poses challenges for local governments that are still in the process of consolidating. Thus, the path to achieving more equal and inclusive urban governance is for sure not linear. As with any relationship, the accountability relationship between citizens and local governments is not one-way and needs to be consistently strengthened and reevaluated. The sobering results of participatory projects in development should serve as a warning that what is needed is not another workshop or toolbox.²⁵ Embracing the political nature of participatory processes means embedding them in politics in at least three ways: through institutionalisation, turning participatory processes into recurrent and permanent institutions; by placing them in a productive relation to the other institutions of the democratic system, including civil society, turning them into an integral part of the policy and planning cycle; and by anchoring participation in such a way that is taken for granted and difficult to bypass.²⁶ The following recommendations provide more details on how this can be achieved.

²² Resnick, Danielle. 2014. “Urban Governance and Service Delivery in African Cities: The Role of Politics and Policies.” *Development Policy Review* 32 (s1): s3-s17.

²³ Nathan, Noah L. 2019. *Electoral Politics and Africa’s Urban Transition: Class and Ethnicity in Ghana*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

²⁴ Bénit-Gbaffou, Claire. 2015. “Politicising and Politicking Community Participation in Urban Governance”, in *Popular Politics in South African Cities-Unpacking Community Participation*, ed. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou. Cape Town. Human Sciences Research Council Press: 2.

²⁵ Cooke, Bill, and Uma Kothari. 2001. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London. Zed Books.

²⁶ Bussu, Sonia, Adrian Bua, Rikki Dean, and Graham Smith. 2022. “Embedding Participatory Governance.” *Critical Policy Studies*: 1–13.

1. Strengthen existing groups to mobilise the broader public and build alliances

Citizens' willingness to participate should be harnessed by funding interventions that target already existing forms of organising that are well-rooted in communities. By only funding professional organisations, donors are indirectly supporting the status quo. Although citizens' voluntary action does not need to be – and should not be – remunerated, donors can support structures that help groups to unite, mobilise, and develop political voice in order to be able to make effective claims on local governments. Donors should invest in umbrella organisations, federations, or network structures that unite actors who have similar stances on urban development issues. Umbrella organisations, in turn, need to develop the capacities to build strong alliances with powerful actors such as professional CSOs, trade unions, and the private sector that can engage through formal channels and build bridges beyond their specific neighbourhood or sector.

Thus, donors need to diversify their funding to include a broader range of organisations. This shift is only possible if donors alter their legal, administrative, and funding requirements. Donors should also invest more into adaptive management in order to enable groups to react to unforeseeable political opportunities. Professional organisations can play a supporting role by acting as intermediaries connecting grassroots groups to state authorities. Professional advocacy organisations active in the field of good governance can also be important actors in pushing governments to reform urban governance. Academics can play a complementary role in supporting the gathering of data in communities to back up their claims. Due to their privileged stance, they can lend legitimacy to community voices. Donors could thus support collaborative projects between academics and communities to collect data, reinforcing the demands of associations.

In order for it to be an inclusive process, specifically those hard to reach or particularly vulnerable communities have to be included. This can be done through savings-based mobilisation or through other forms of organising, such as residents' associations. Funding and support strategies need to be based on an in-depth analysis of the specific civil society context. Donors should make sure that the diversification of their funding also supports marginalised groups within communities, such as women, youth, LGBTQI*, and people with disabilities. As community-building processes take time, organisations need long-term commitments to core funding. At the same time, short-term and ad hoc funding instruments can be used to support social movements and campaigns that are less institutionalised but often highly effective in using of political windows of opportunity.

Flexibility is required even more in conflict-affected or fragile contexts. Research has shown that citizens do not shy away from voicing their concerns in contexts of limited or closed civic spaces. However, gains are less likely to be sustained, and citizens' interactions with authorities mostly happen outside of formal channels. In such contexts, support should be tailored to local tactics and issues that matter most to people.²⁷ Additionally, there needs to be a simultaneous investment into the protection of civic freedoms and human rights. Western donors and policy-makers have an important role in advocating against the closing of civic space and in contributing towards the creation of enabling conditions for civil society engagement.²⁸

²⁷ Anderson, Colin, John Gaventa, Jenny Edwards, Anuradha Joshi, Niranjana Nampoothiri, and Emilie Wilson. 2022. *Against the Odds: Action for Empowerment and Accountability in Challenging Contexts*. East Sussex. Institute of Development Studies.

²⁸ For further important recommendations on civil society assistance, see OECD. 2022. *DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-Operation and Humanitarian Assistance*.

2. Support national and local governments to put participation on the agenda and enhance local governments' responsibilities, powers, and capacities

Donors and Western policy-makers can use their political voice in national and international fora to highlight the importance of participatory governance (beyond elections) and press for legislative frameworks enshrining the right to participation. Here, the focus should lie on the 12 countries that neither have any legislation in place to enable citizen participation, nor offer spaces for participation (see Figure 2). In order for participation to become institutionalised, these local governments need to have the financial, administrative, and technical capacities to engage with citizens and provide adequate services.

Overall, national governments should devolve statutory powers to local governments, clarify competencies, and increase their financial support to local governments. By earmarking a fixed share of the state budget or the national tax base for transfers to local governments, predictability and fiscal stability can be increased at the local level. In addition, transparent procedures for channelling the funds must be established. Such reforms are highly political and require a genuine willingness to share power. Just like participatory processes, decentralisation processes can also be captured by powerful actors and do not automatically lead to more accountability. Donors and policy-makers can support and incentivise these reform processes, for instance, through conditionalities. Still, local governments also need to augment their own-source revenues. This can be done through taxation as well as by accessing loans and financial markets. In francophone countries in particular, a reform of the statutory powers granted to local governments to collect revenues through taxation is needed.

3. Invest in citywide, multi-stakeholder processes

Complex urban problems cannot be addressed by individual stakeholders. Although citizens can set the agenda and point to problems, solutions must be found jointly with technical experts and the authorities. Participation needs to go beyond individual neighbourhoods to become more effective – to that end, local governments should create spaces for multi-stakeholder participation. Efforts at the neighbourhood level are good starting points, but they can also lead to fragmentation and co-optation. Those countries that are more advanced in their participatory agendas, such as Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, should invest in scaling participatory processes to the city level to make citizens' engagement more strategic and less particularistic. Multi-stakeholder fora should not only include the perspectives of different neighbourhoods but should also be organised in a cross-sectoral manner and involve all levels of government responsible for decision-making. These fora can be both instances of collaboration and confrontation, and they should maintain the participating groups' autonomy.

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