



VIEWS ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

A gendered analysis on local development

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Abstract

As South Africa moves towards democratic consolidation and deepening of democratic spaces, wide-based participation in decision making and planning at local levels not only becomes desirable but also critical from a deliberative perspective. Various processes and mechanisms implemented by Government seem not to have the desired outcome of facilitating effective participation, as evidenced by the increasing levels of local participation in alternate or preferred spaces. Furthermore, the reality of increasing inequality reflected in macro socio-economic trends and national development indicators, requires disaggregation for understanding local participatory processes and its impact on development. Inclusive planning at a local level thus implicitly implies that expressions and views need to be measured, interpreted, and applied within specific contexts, to address relevance and priority setting within the planning framework. This paper draws on empirical evidence from a nationally representative longitudinal survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council since 2003 on the public's attitudes, beliefs, behavior patterns and values on selected issues, with specific inquiry into participatory issues in the 2009 survey. Findings on attitudes towards planning processes and mechanisms; attention to political news; views on actual participation in government decision making and degree of satisfaction on consultative efforts are gendered in that men and women have different views on these and other social issues, resulting from differing experiences. The impact of these findings on local development is explored thus from a gendered lens, aiming to deepen understanding of the causes of social inequality.

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1. Introduction

The rise of democracy as the desired form of governance across the continents is reported to be the most progressive development of the latter part of the twentieth century (Habib, 2007; Landsberg & McKay, 2004; Heller, 2000, Sen, 1999). As various countries move from democratic transition to democratic consolidation, the process is influenced by an understanding that countries do not have to strive to become fit 'for' democracy, rather to become fit 'through' democracy (Sen, 1999). However, as democracies emerge, nagging questions remain: why certain groups of people are poor and continue to remain poor from generation to generation; why, in some countries, economic growth can co-exist with rising social inequalities. While the 'vote' is important to make a democracy legitimate, the real 'voice' of the citizenship is heard through broader participation on social issues, which often does not occur only through formal political platforms. This paper explores views on public participatory processes at local levels specifically through a gendered lens and investigates factors impeding participatory processes.

2. Distinguishing Development from Social Transformation

Theories of development increased dramatically in the latter half of the 20th century. Equating development with modernism, as defined and achieved by developed countries, created the urgency for other 'developing' and 'under-developed' countries to meet predetermined goals by the new millennium. Development according to this understanding is thus confined to those countries that have not as yet achieved the prescribed western standards. Due to growing evidence of the failure of development theorists and experts to positively influence the process of development for marginalized societies, criticisms against this notion of development has grown. Major criticisms come from as early as the 1970's by Paulo Freire who challenged approaches to development by advocating for the poor to define their own needs through participatory action research. Powerful multi-nationals like the World Bank also started integrating needs analysis and participatory methods into its project designs, while the Human Development Index (HDI) was developed in response to the criticisms. The shift is premised on the understanding that "income and commodities are important only in as much as they contribute to people's capabilities to achieve the lives they want" and that people and their lives should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not only economic growth (Chant, 2003).

Non-expert' locals began to contribute equally to the development discourse by constructing their own social meanings and translating these into knowledge and counter-theories of development, resulting in an increasing understanding of development conceptually different from social transformation (Erasmus, 2005, Castles, 2001, Hughes, 2001). All countries and all types of societies undergo transformation or changes in some

way or other, the experience of which is not necessarily positive. Castles, 2001 argues that social transformation occurs in response to factors such as the economy, war and political upheavals and describes how global processes of change influence local and national communities. The establishment of new social movements at localized levels presents a form of resistance to the globalized world of today. For SA, social transformation is about the transition from exclusion to inclusion in social, political and economical opportunities, structures and power (Erasmus, 2005), but integrating abstract dimensions of *time* (meeting goals within a predetermined time frame vs ongoing and evolving change), *values* and *social relations* in measuring social change, is the primary challenge. This paper initiates discussion using 'development' terms because of its current use to define and understand progress, but the conceptual understanding of social development (complementing economic development) towards transformation guides the analysis.

3. Influencing the practice of Public Participation

The intrinsic value of democracy establishes a formal vertical relationship between citizens and obliges the state to create platforms from which needs are expressed. Heller (2000), states that for democracies to deepen, its practices need to also influence citizens horizontally, strengthening healthy public relations between citizens and enhancing public engagement. This deepening practice of democracy gives citizens the opportunity to engage in social dialogue, respect individual rights and opinions and take into account the welfare concerns of the general population in order to constructively influence the planning process and policy development. Either way, whether strengthening vertical or horizontal participatory processes, the emphasis is on building social relations through effective structures.

Responding to public views and involving citizens in decision making has been widely accepted as a critical feature of a functioning democracy. The South African Constitution makes explicit reference to facilitating public participation in the policy process through the three spheres of Government, especially at local government. National policy is guided by four reasons why participation needs to be promoted¹ and participation of local communities in policy management is legislated as a condition for planning. Currently, there are many innovative methods of facilitating public participation in practice ranging from citizen juries, deliberative opinion polls to informal roundtables and public meetings. These are well documented, based on experiential knowledge and serve to increase choices in techniques and approaches, but the majority of efforts have not been successful in fully

¹ (1)it being a legal requirement; (2)the development of plans relevant to local needs and conditions; (3)promotion of community action and responsibility for services; (4)and the empowerment of communities Dept of Provincial and Local Government, 2005)

engaging with communities. Designing and implementing effective public participation processes in practice needs to move beyond meeting immediate objectives and short term project goals, towards comprehensive programme development and guided by a sound conceptual understanding.

Webler & Tuler (2002) provide a review of theoretical approaches to understanding public participation and outline six broader theories in the stream of conceptual thoughts on public participation literature all of which shape its practice: (i) management theory; (ii) collaborative learning; (iii) decision analysis; (iv) procedural justice; (v) theories of democracy and (vi) evaluation theory. Of these, they expanded on the theory of procedural justice by developing and advocating for a specific theory of fairness and competence based on a communicative approach. Fairness in attending to and initiating discourse by affected and interested members of the public as well as participating in dialogue and decision making depends on access to information and appropriate interpretations within the boundaries of commonly understood rules and procedures (competence). These assertions are synonymous with deliberative processes outlined by Abelson et al (2003) where spaces are created for deliberation in the form of careful and serious weighing of reasons for or against the proposition. Based on deliberative democratic theory, the authors argue that “collective problem-solving discussion is viewed as the critical element of deliberation” (Webler & Tuler, 2002). Managers and leaders who promote, advocate for and facilitate public participation, need to be conscientised towards deliberative processes, but the public and Civil Society Organizations who represent the interests of communities, equally require insights into the influence of deliberative processes on effective participation and engagement.

This understanding of the purpose and practice of public participation, while acknowledging its challenges, affirms the reasons for pursuing its effective application, less as a managerial function for compliancy, but more for its primary value in facilitating and strengthening bottom-up approaches towards building a participatory democracy. Despite legislation guiding participation, various processes and mechanisms implemented by the SA government seem not to have had the desired outcome of facilitating effective participation, as evidenced by the increasing levels of local participation in alternate or popular spaces (Chenwi & Tissington, 2010). Citizens are challenged to identify individual needs but to also regain collective capacity to influence planning and policy processes constructively, based on a value system that promotes and protects the broader public good. Inclusive planning at a local level thus implicitly implies that expressions and views need to be measured, interpreted and understood within specific contexts to address relevance and priority setting within the planning framework.

4. Engendering local participation

Facilitating participatory methods based on democratic principles is a challenging task at a local level. Communities in the making as a result of urbanization may be seeking new identities, innovative methods of self expression and have differing coping strategies when dealing with new social risks. While such communities may be better skilled at effectively communicating in a deliberative way, responding to divergent needs could stall the process. Homogenous communities that share the same historical and cultural contexts are also not without challenges, as traditional forms of decision making takes precedence. Understanding how the public presently view their social lives from different contexts and what attitudes they have towards participation, helps us understand what the drivers for participation are. Women have largely been excluded from decision making at a local level, and have relied on their collective capacity to influence planning and priority setting (Hassim, 2004).

At the household and community level, the welfare of families is the building block of social development. Due to their productive and reproductive roles, and as targeted recipients of social upliftment programmes, women require the capacity to actively engage with the political nature of the issues affecting their lives in the planning and decision making process. The extent to which men and women access information of a political nature, utilize and engage with participatory processes and whether there are any differences in their views and experience of participatory concepts and processes are therefore important for local development.

5. Methodology

Secondary data analysis is utilized using both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand views on local participation through a gendered lens. Quantitative data is used to demonstrate levels of social inequality in three ways, through the GINI coefficient which is the difference in national income equality; the Gender Gap Index (GGI) which measures and interpret capabilities in disaggregated ways and which draws attention to inequities between men and women. However, this approach is dependent on accurate data and information reflecting time use and work intensity, two areas critical in defining women's productive and reproductive work, but still remains uncaptured in global indices. The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) is a longitudinal, nationally representative, cross-sectional study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council annually since 2003. SASAS is a tool for monitoring evolving social, economic and political values among South Africans by measuring attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns of diverse populations. A synthesis of qualitative data is used from narratives and lived experiences shared by women to assist in the understanding of factors impacting on local development.

6. Social inequality in South Africa

The real GDP per capita increased in SA by 7.8% from 2005 to 2009, and while it is reported that the median poverty line fell from 45% in 2005 to 39% in 2008, there was an increase in income inequality, as demonstrated in figure 1. The Gini coefficient rose from 0,66 to 0.679 in 2007 and recently stands at 0.72. South Africa is one of two countries in the world with a Gini coefficient of greater than 0.60.

Figure 1 **Gini Coefficient**

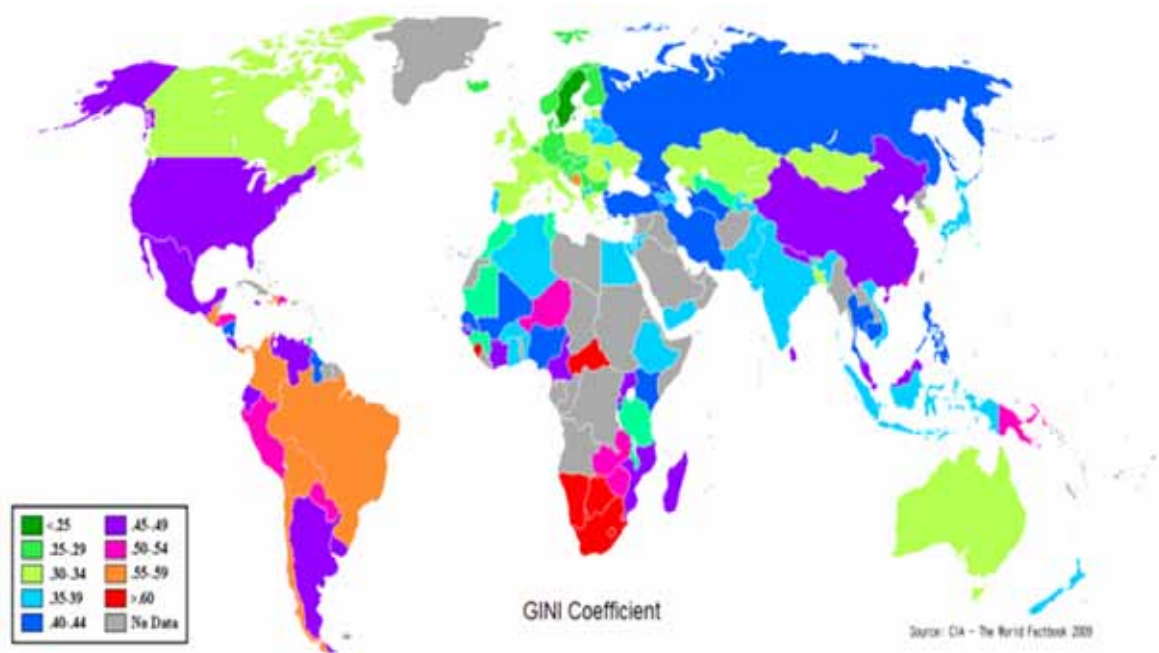


Table 1 demonstrates the impact of gender on the rising levels of social inequality in SA, using the Gender Gap Index from 2006-2008. What is evident is that despite effective political representation by women in Parliament, the GGI continued to increase from 2006-2008. Life expectancy, educational attainment and economic participation are variables that contribute towards this measurement. It is known in the development discourse that HIV as the major burden of disease in SA affects more women than men (Shisana et al, 2005), and that despite near parity of educational enrolment between males and females, women are not able to translate educational opportunities into economic participation. The obvious weakness of income inequality between men and women is disconcerting and probably the major contributory factor to social inequality in SA. In addition to the differences, earned income show decreasing trends for women. A gendered analysis of economic participation demonstrates that lower wages and the precarious nature of informal employment, makes

it difficult for poor households, especially women to make regular payments for services or contributions for social development (Dayal, 2010). This paper investigates the primary social dimensions (attitudes, perceptions and satisfaction levels) to enhance our understanding.

Table 1 **Gender Gap Index (GGI) for South Africa 2006-2008**

	2006 (115 countries)		2007 (128 countries)		2008 (130 countries)	
Total population	47,400,000		46,890,000		47,590,000	
GDP (PPP) per capita	12,160		9,884		8,807	
Gender Gap Index - GGI	18		20		22	
Score (0.00= inequality ; 1.00 = equality)	0.712		0.719		0.723	
Economic Participation and Opportunity	79		85		93	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Labour force participation (%)	46	79	49	82	49	82
Estimated earned income(PPP US\$)	6,505	14,326	7,014	15,521	6,927	15,446
Educational Attainment	42		52		45	
Literacy rate %	81	84	81	84	87	89
Enrolment in primary education	89	88	87	87	88	88
Enrolment in secondary education	65	58	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	66	59
Enrolment in tertiary education	17	14	17	14	17	14
Health and survival	59		65		67	
Life expectancy (years)	45.3	43.3	45	43	45	43
Political empowerment	8		10		9	
Women in parliament (%)	33	67	33	67	33	67
Women in ministerial positions (%)	41	59	41	59	45	55

Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2006-8 (country profiles)

7. Local views on participation – a gendered analysis

Source of political information

Table 2 shows the results for newspaper, television, radio and internet. The majority of both men and women access the newspapers and radio to a lesser extent, especially the internet for gaining political news and information. According to the categorization, many never watch television for political news (34.0%), but combining those who watch every day (27.2 %) and 3-4 days a week (11.9%), makes the results lean towards television being the major source of political news. Given their reproductive responsibilities of caring for families and attending to household duties, women spend their time on these activities as priority. In contrast there is a considerable size of the population who do not access any type of media, including television,

for political information. Whether employed full time or part time, formally or informally, poor people, majority of who are women, have little time to access or engage with activities other than those required for economic survival. Personal life conditions and day-to-day coping strategies have a higher priority as explained by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. There are few studies to demonstrate time use analysis, as this impact negatively on women's access to and engagement with political information. If a considerable size of men and women never access a range of media coverage for political news and information, their capacity to participate in deliberative processes is undermined. Furthermore, the question is what is their source of political information? There are now many other sources of influence in political education or shaping of views. Community self-help groups (e.g. burial societies, food gardens etc) and other social networks may be a major source of influence for women, while men, due to their better employment status may be accessing information in their work environment.

Table 2 **Type of media for political information**

	Everyday %	3-4 days %	1-2 days %	<1-2 days %	Never %	Can't choose %
Reading the newspaper (n=3292)	13.2	10.0	13.1	14.1	48.6 <i>m=39.1 f=60.9</i>	1.0
Watching political news on TV (n=3291)	27.2 <i>m=56.83 f=43.2</i>	11.9 <i>m=51.9 f=48.1</i>	11.8	14.6	34.0 <i>m=39.7 f=60.3</i>	0.5
Listening to political news on radio (n=3288)	17.9	11.2	12.7	16.7	40.5 <i>m=41.0 f=59.0</i>	1.0
Using internet to obtain political info (n=3291)	2.4	2.2	3.0	5.3	85.3 <i>m=46.5 f=53.5</i>	1.8

Quality of state-citizen relationship

Majority participants (41.1%), both men and women reported that the level of consultation between government and the people has stagnated in the last 5 years (2004-2009), compared with those who felt it improved (32.4%) or got worse (20.3). Other variables within the SASAS study have found that the levels of trust in national and religious institutions have improved. However majority agree that mechanisms for communities to take part in local planning which have a more direct impact on social development, is not enough. Efforts by local government in providing spaces for participation are not perceived as effective platforms, especially for women. Implementation of Integrated Development Planning (IDP) as a planning tool used by the local sphere of government is intended to facilitate effective participatory processes in the development of these plans, but this appears not to be effectively implemented if at all, as the view is reported.

“Izimbizo’s” are more widely accepted as a mode of participation (60% agreed, refer to table 3). Even though both men and women support “izimbizo’s” and have high levels of interest in being part of government’s decision making processes (58.5%), a comparative study of Southern African countries by UNRISD on decentralization using a gendered lens, found that traditional participatory methods are not able to advance gender equity at the local level because of ‘... *the entrenchment of local relationships and power structures, particularly the power of traditional authorities...*’ (Beall, 2005). Narratives and case studies of local contextual factors impacting on participation by women, highlight the continued demobilization of women and their effective engagement in planning and sustainable development (Bennett, 2001; Chant, 2003; Hassim, 2004; Shisana, 2005; Sadan, 2006). Participation of women has been reduced to mobilizing and organizing around practical needs of health, housing, electricity and other survival issues in a disintegrated approach. Continuous representation on provided structures is difficult. Where representation is made by women, capacity to participate with knowledge of the issue and the politics behind it make them unable to influence the decision making process effectively.

Table 3 **Participatory processes and mechanisms**

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Not enough effective mechanisms for communities to take part in local planning (n=3286)	17.9	41.9	17.0	11.7	4.2	7.3
		<i>m=49.9 f=50.1</i>				
Izimbizo's work well as a form of local public participation (n=3288)	18.5	46.4	13.9	10.1	2.9	8.2
		<i>m=46.5 f=53.5</i>				

Role of government

Participants, mostly women rated it very important for politicians to take into account views of citizens before decision making (54.3%). However, even though it is understood and accepted by both political and local community development structures to consult the community in planning and decision making, effective engagement is not pursued with the same intensity in differing contexts and often not guided by a principled approach to participatory methods. Table 4 shows that almost two thirds of female respondents view government’s role as the provider of social services and job creation, a view and expectation predominantly amongst African and Coloured women, demonstrating that these two groups depend on state intervention to promote their social development.

Table 4 **Role of Government in social and economic development**

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know %
It is governments responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one (n=3291)	32.0	37.0	7.3	17.5	5.8	0.4
	m=45.1 f=54.9					
Government should spend more money to create jobs even if it has to increase taxes (n=3284)	27.9	40.6	9.8	14.2	5.9	1.6
	m=47.3 f=52.7					
Government should spend more money on social grants for the poor even if it leads to higher taxes (n=3290)	25.9	39.1	8.1	20.0	5.9	1.1
	m=45.4 f=54.6					
Government should provide more chances for poor children to go to university even if it has to increase taxes (n=3289)	36.3	38.9	9.7	9.3	4.4	1.3
	m=43.8 f=56.2					
Government has to play a leading role in the economy so that it is better able to meet the needs of the majority (n=3291)	37.9	51.5	5.8	2.2	0.8	1.9
	m=47.7 f=52.3					

Satisfaction with consultative processes

There are more dissatisfied people (36.1%) with the state of consultation between government and the people of SA as seen in table 5. However, interestingly there are almost as many who are satisfied, if those who are “very satisfied are combined with those who reported as “satisfied. This demonstrates polarity amongst general members of the public, in their experience of local participatory processes and levels of consultation which could result in challenges to find consensus on priority setting and the way forward. Distinct dissatisfaction is however felt with the extent to which government is seen to create opportunities for participation in decisions that affect their lives.

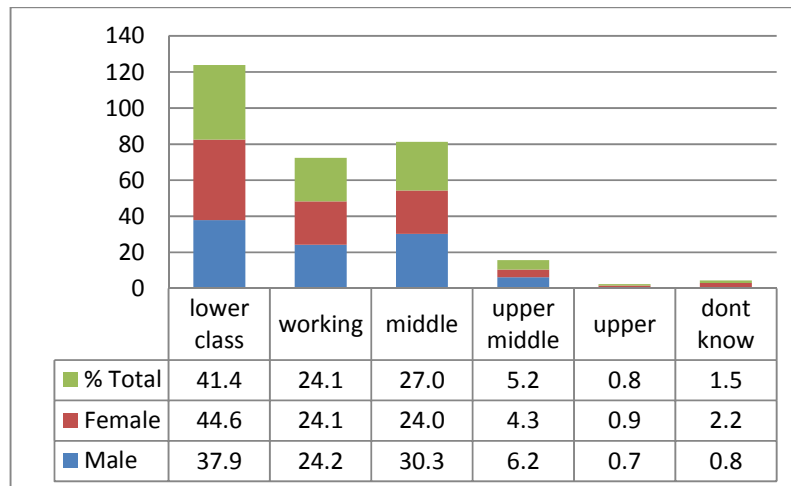
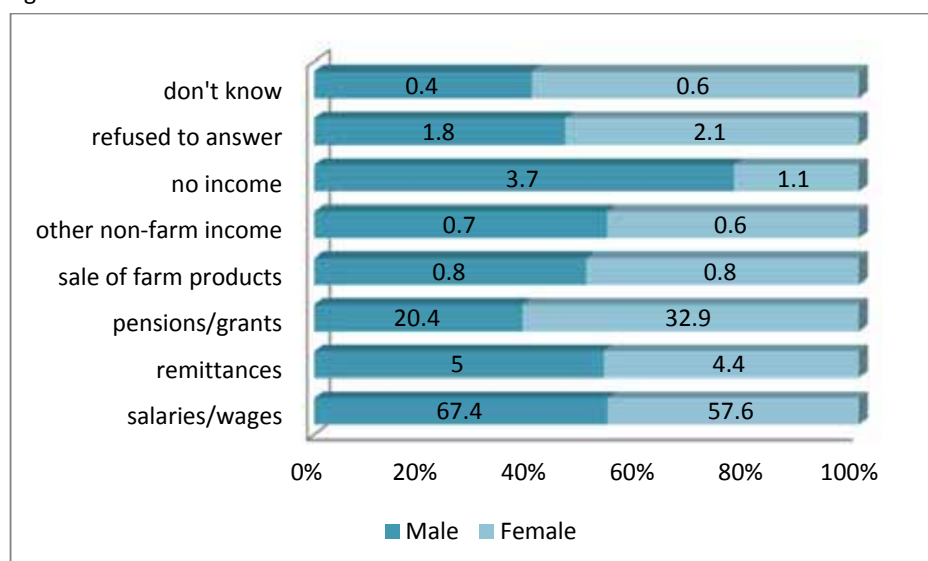
Table 5 **Satisfaction with consultative process**

	Very Satisfied %	Satisfied %	Neither %	Dissatisfied %	Very Dissatisfied %	Don't Know %
How satisfied are you:						
With the state of consultation between government and the people of SA at present (n=3276)	6.7	30.7	23.5	-	36.1	3.1
	m=42.7 f=57.3					
With the extent to which government makes it possible for you to take part in decisions that affect your life? (n=3291)	6.1	28.7	21.8	27.7	13.1	2.6
	m=41.0 f=59.0		m=42.5 f=57.5			

8. Contextualizing participation

The previous section provided the primary results of the survey, but participation at local levels occurs within a context of interacting variables. Social and economic conditions impacting on participation need to be included in the analysis if variables like class and educational status is an explanatory factor. The national sample is representative of 47.4 % males and 52.6 % females. The educational status reported conforms with official statistics, where 94.8 % of the population received formal education until matric (79.5%) and higher education (15.3%). While spatial differences may become distinct with sub-categorization, high levels of education demonstrate the potential by citizens to actively participate and engage in participatory processes, if the right conditions and opportunities are presented. There is near gender parity for primary and secondary education, but this study conforms with others where more males complete higher education than females.

Self perceived categories of class is presented in figure 2, demonstrating that majority of both males and females regard themselves as belonging to the lower and working class. This is related to the Living Standards Measure (LSM), which influences the responses reported on earlier. More people from the high and medium LSM access the newspaper and television, while those from the lower LSM, mostly women, do not adequately access the media for political information. Interestingly, the close figures between those who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied with the state of consultation between government and the people, and the extent to which government provides opportunities for participation comes from the middle and high LSM category. This defines further the nature of the polarization of views and attitudes by the public. Those belonging to the lower class have more certainty in their views, while needs and wants are more divergent amongst the middle and upper middle classes, resulting in fluctuating satisfaction levels. In addition figure 3 shows the main source of income being salaries or wages for both males and females, although the majority of women are reported to be informally employed. Women depend more on pensions and grants as a 'regular' source of income which is an important precondition for effective participation in policy development and service delivery. The programmatic response of targeting women to reduce inequality appears to have had little impact on changing negative perceptions at a local level. In addition, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction dichotomy arising out of these findings creates the sense that social policies, programmes and state intervention may have the unexpected resultant effect of polarized communities.

Figure 2 **Self-perceived class category**Figure 3 **Main source of income**

9. 'Embedded' nature of Public Participation processes

Evidence presented in this study on public participatory processes has value only in as much as it is understood within the contextual realities of communities within which individuals constantly engage. Many interacting factors explain the complexities of public participatory processes at the local levels and help to deepen our understanding of what motivates different members of the public and why, what informs their decisions and what drives their behaviour. However values and attitudes change with time because they are continually shaped by exposure, experiences, new insights and lived realities of individuals

and communities, requiring the measurement of public views at regular intervals. Webler & Tuler (2002) describe this as the 'embeddedness' of the public participation process where *"...each process is both shaped by previous processes and a shaper of later processes"*. Where policies, programmes and social intervention strategies impact differently on men and women, the analysis demonstrates that it is critical for women to be able to participate in consultative platforms from a position of deliberation. Given the space for social dialogue, opportunity for constructive engagement, informed decision making and inclusivity by all those affected, the effective application of public participation have the potential power to steer societies towards sustainable growth and social transformation.

10. Concluding notes

This paper presents evidence of public views and attitudes on participatory mechanisms and processes from a nationally representative sample, using a gendered lens. Aggregated national data can hide the inequities that exist between different social groupings. The analysis has demonstrated that the views on public participation at local levels is gendered, in that men and women have different views on public participation resulting from differing experiences. The understanding of social development, based on contemporary development theories has limited the measurement of progress and change to individuals rather than societies with the exclusion of the dimension of inter-dependence. Although measurement of individual social conditions (life expectancy; educational achievement; economic status; health status) have been recorded nationally and captured in global indices, these cannot be interpreted as changes within society. Theories conceptualizing social transformation have argued that positive changes in individual life conditions cannot sustain or deepen a democracy, reach gender equity or redress inequality, as conferred in this study. Improvement in individual life conditions need to be complemented with changes in social organization and redesigning of social structures to accelerate a shift towards social transformation.

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