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PARTICIPATION REVISITED: A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

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I. Introduction

Expansion of citizen participation and an increased role for civil society in the policy decisions affecting the life of society have become important objectives for donor assistance and international financial institutional (IFI) lending¹, as well as for democratizing societies. There is an increasingly widely held argument that when the beneficiaries or target groups of policy change and reform are involved in some measure in the decisions that affect them, then the chances for successful implementation of those policies or decisions increase significantly.² At the same time, expanded participation and pluralism appear to be necessary conditions to the consolidation of democracy and greater equity. Nonetheless, serious questions can and should be raised regarding the expansion and limits of participation -- what is increased participation for, when is it appropriate, under which circumstances does increased participation enhance or undermine democratic policy processes, how much is enough, how much is too little, how much is too much -- and how are these criteria defined? What are the relevant benefits and costs of increasing/expanding

¹ Over the past several years, several donor agencies have acknowledged the importance of expansion of popular participation as an ingredient for assuring greater success of their activities. Some manifestations of this concern and the search for mechanisms for achieving greater participation are the World Bank's Participation Working Group, the creation of the Modernization of the State and Civil Society Division in the Interamerican Development Bank, the creation of the Participation Forum and the position of Senior Participation Advisor reporting directly to US AID's Administrator, expanded participation through extended Strategic Objective teams as part of USAID's reengineering processes, and in the concept of participatory development in the OECD's Policy Statement on Development Cooperation in the 1990's and communiqués of the 1991 OECD Ministerial Council.

² Bhatnagar, in his introduction to *Participatory Development and the World Bank* (World Bank, 1993) points out that "Rigorous empirical evidence is scant but nonetheless positive about the benefits of participation to development effectiveness".

participation? Are there structural elements which pose major obstacles to the expansion of participation in policy decision-making? And are there certain pre-conditions or requisites that must be fulfilled if efforts at expanding participation are to be fruitful?

The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of increased participation and its limits. The paper accepts the arguments that participation contributes to the successful implementation of policies; however, it questions whether there might be some conditions, circumstances, areas, or policies for which greater participation is not to be recommended or may be inappropriate. There certainly are instances when participation will be highly effective but there will be others when greater participation will be futile or simply fall on deaf ears. This paper examines participation from the point of view of the policy decision-maker and/or implementor, and briefly outlines some practical mechanisms to expand participation and for balancing expanded input with getting decisions made and objectives accomplished.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first examines current concepts of participation, some of the reasons that a manager might consider for expanding it, its links to democracy and issues related to the quality of participation. The second explores the transactional dimension of participation - the benefits derived from participation will involve some cost, both for the aspiring participant as well as the decision-maker. These costs and the ability of the participating groups and policy decision-making structures to meet those costs place practical limits on the capacity and incentives of various actors to participate or for the decision maker to encourage expanded participation. The third section will examine the problem of relative balance between the structures of supply and demand for participation. An axiom that appears to be frequently overlooked is that participation (demand) cannot be effectively expanded without a corresponding increase in the (decision-making capacity) structures and resources to process and satisfy such demand. This section will also examine elements of

society and processes in governance that appear to generate pressure toward greater control and coordination -- factors which may actually work against demands for greater participation. The last section will look at the operational dimension of participation for the manager. It suggests several mechanisms to assist the host country manager in establishing criteria for and developing expanded participation in both policy decision-making and implementation.

II. Current concepts of participation

A. Defining participation:

Although it is not the intent of this paper to develop (yet) another definition of participation it is important to mention some of the more common ways of looking at it -- mainly because we will examine participation within the context of policy decision-making and implementation. Since participation can have different meanings to different people, it is important for the manager to come to grips with what he/she has in mind in using the term.

Participation may occur at different levels (e.g., community or national level) and with a varying and ascending degree of intensity -- information sharing, consultation, participation in implementation, and participation in decision-making (The World Bank and Participation, 1994). Information may be shared with intended beneficiaries to facilitate action. Although *information sharing* is the lowest intensity form of participation, it can assist in helping people to better understand and perform their tasks. *Consultation* to elicit input from target groups regarding different stages of an activity represents a higher level of intensity than information sharing and can be a source of valuable input at both the design and implementation stages of an activity. *Participation in implementation* involves decisions about how certain activities are to be carried out. Although principal decisions regarding the activity have already been made, participation in implementation decisions can be critical in developing ownership and assuring

success of the activity (Brinkerhoff, 1996). Perhaps the highest degree of participation intensity occurs when there is direct involvement of the intended beneficiaries, both inside and out of government, in the definition of policy decisions.³ While this variant is the highest or most intensive level of participation, it is also the most meaningful and carries both the highest costs and the highest levels of benefits.

The World Bank Participation Group defines participation as "a process by which people gain some measure of influence on development decisions, and not simply involvement in the implementation or benefits of a development activity" (even though these may present opportunities for influence). If these criteria are strictly applied, then much of what passes for "increased participation", even though it may be an important activity, is not genuine participation. Stakeholders should be more than passive recipients of benefits of development activities. Hemby (1995) takes a similar approach, arguing that participation is..."the involvement of beneficiaries or end-users in the criteria setting or decision-making processes which affect them." This paper views participation in policy decision-making in a similar manner -- as some measure of influence on policy decisions or criteria setting for policy decisions at both the formulation and implementation stages by stakeholders affected by those decisions. It includes participation in decisions regarding policy implementation since it is often, if not always, the case that policy outcomes and resulting allocation of benefits are significantly modified in the process of implementation (Crosby, 1996).

B. Why increase participation?

In addition to thinking about what participation means, the manager should give some thought to the objectives that might be achieved through expanded participation. In an attempt to develop a common vocabulary on participation, the

³ This may involve participation up to and including a veto role in decision-making.

World Bank (1993) cites several interrelated objectives for expanded participation. First, there are objectives which are primarily of benefit to the groups newly participating, but which ultimately may increase the likelihood of implementation or sustainability of a new policy, and ultimately relieve the manager of some responsibility. These objectives are empowerment and increasing beneficiary capacity (Frischtak, 1994). Clearly, to the extent that groups feel empowered (to present demands or initiate actions aimed at solving those demands) and can gain capacity for managing resources or new tasks and processes, there is an increased likelihood of successful implementation and sustainability of the intended policy. For example, a considerable amount of activity targeted at developing "advocacy" capacity among newly created community associations or non governmental organizations is aimed directly at benefits of empowerment. (Clark, 1995; Carroll, 1992; Bratton, 1990)

A second group of objectives for expanded participation includes those of direct benefit in assuring or enhancing the successful implementation of a policy or better delivery of services (Picciotto, 1995). These are objectives which seek greater effectiveness, cost sharing, or efficiency. In a resource scarce or resource conscious environment, these are objectives which can reduce the policy implementation manager's burden and enhance a policy's effectiveness especially when involvement by beneficiaries leads to improved design and ownership. Cost-sharing through the contribution of labor or capital by the beneficiaries both increases ownership as well as the incentives for maintenance of a project or its benefits. In an era of diminishing state resources, this is a strong incentive (and objective) for policy decision-making or implementation managers to expand participation. Increasing the participation of beneficiaries can also increase efficiency by providing more timely inputs and greater cooperation so that delays are reduced and smoother flow of services is achieved -- resulting in more efficient use of resources and cost savings (Alesina, 1994)

A third set of objectives seeks to increase support, legitimacy, transparency and responsiveness of a particular policy. When policy making is closed, suspicion may arise regarding the criteria used for deciding who gets what. Opening the process to greater participation helps to develop a sense of "nothing to hide" and bolsters legitimacy. When policy decisions are made in a more "transparent" manner, acceptance can be more readily achieved, even among those that do not stand to benefit or even lose by the decision's results, opposition is lessened, and there is greater likelihood of successful implementation (Hyden, 1992; Young, 1994). Expanding participation helps to assure greater responsiveness to the needs of the proposed beneficiaries. Unfortunately, but frequently, policies planned and developed at the center do not adequately take into account the needs or idiosyncrasies of beneficiaries critical to implementation. A policy may be well formulated in a technical sense but if it fails to respond to the real needs of the intended beneficiaries, then implementation will be difficult at best. Incorporating the participation of target beneficiaries not only helps assure successful implementation, but also greater responsiveness and effectiveness of the policy. Finally, expanding participation can reduce opposition to a particular policy. Simple inclusion of formerly excluded groups or opposing groups may persuade them to support a proposed policy. Even when there is fairly serious opposition, the inclusion of certain demands of those groups may serve to co-opt potentially troublesome elements. In both cases, by increasing participation in the development of the policy, the policy decision-maker will be better able to pre-empt potential opposition during the implementation process.

It should be noted here that both the second and third sets of objectives provide interesting incentives to the manager to increase participation. The first set of objectives, however, might well meet with a "so what?" response from the manager -- unless it is clear that by greater empowerment of beneficiaries the manager's burden or responsibility might actually be diminished in some measure.

C. Participation and democracy - a few caveats:

While it is certainly true that participation is a necessary component to democratization, it is not true that more participation always leads to democracy. To cite a couple of extreme examples, both fascist and Marxist regimes tend to be highly participative but, of course, not very democratic. In many, if not all Marxist regimes, sector organizations were developed to represent virtually all interests (professionals of various types, women, youth, farmers, labor, business, etc.) Vertically, party and other local organizations, such as “neighborhood defense committees”, were designed to reach down to the block level in urban areas. However, membership was often mandatory and activities described as voluntary were actually obligatory.

In most jurisdictions, these organizations had resources available to them and some limited discretionary authority -- and were hence capable of satisfying limited demands. At the same time, local sector organizations (such as women’s or farmer groups) were often influential in the decision-making process of the local committees. In a similar manner, particular interests could have their influence felt up the line to the national level through the various strata of the sector organization and sector representatives were frequently prominent members of the policy decision-making apparatus. However, participation through sector organizations was both highly structured and monopolistic. And although the individual was free to participate in as many organizations or sectors as he/she saw fit (while there were generally no sanctions for non-participation, often there were substantial rewards for doing so), there were no competing groups to join or which could represent the same interests.

Participation may also be “corporatist”, whereby participation becomes officially sanctioned by the government or some government body as “the representative” of a particular sector -- to the usual exclusion of other competing groups in the same area. In certain cases, membership in such organizations is obligatory -- such as the case among business associations in several

Latin American countries and in the francophone states of West Africa. When a business registers its existence, it is required to join the mandated employers’ association or sub-sector chamber association, and is usually taxed to provide resources for the association. In some countries governmental policy and decision-making bodies have established guaranteed seats for certain sectors. Sector representation (especially of the private sector) may be accorded on regulatory boards and other quasi-governmental decision-making bodies, but these seats are frequently ceded to particular (“official”) organizations. Representative bodies such as legislatures also may have seats reserved for sector organizations. However, representatives are often appointed and not necessarily representative of the whole sector, but perhaps only a particular sub-sector. The Philippines has recently incorporated sector representation into its legislature. Although such arrangements may seem to give participation to broad sectors, if the structures effectively preclude decisions by alternative decision-makers, then such representation becomes monopolistic - and not terribly democratic. Internally, such mechanisms for participation may not be particularly democratic. In the *panchayat raj* or local governments of India, there is a quota system for the participation of women and “scheduled castes”. But because of dominant patronage systems, many if not most of these representatives are hand-picked by the local chief and vote their bidding.

D. Positive versus negative participation:

Participation is regarded primarily as a positive act,⁴ and while easy to emphasize its favorable elements, participation can also be a highly negative force, one which blocks and rejects, rather than positively contributing to the policy decision and implementation process. Negative

⁴ It is interesting to note that in much, if not most, of the literature on participation, there is virtually no reference to “negative” participation, i.e., blocking new policies or impeding implementation. Instead most references are to positive experiences aimed at improving implementation or the like and which tend to cast the losers in a negative way.

participation is, in fact, one of the main methods by which governmental and non-governmental actors classed as “losers” in policy decisions will intervene. Non-governmental organizations may use mechanisms such as protests, strikes, demonstrations, or the like to manifest their disagreement with a chosen policy. Governmental actors (such as the bureaucracy or legislature) who lose resources or are otherwise negatively affected by the new policy have several mechanisms for negative participation at their disposal: they may simply choose to be passive and not act on the new policy directives, they may reject orders from superiors, or they might block implementation of the new policies by refusing to authorize needed resources. As Colburn (1989, p. 29) notes, strategies of non-compliance (including foot dragging, feigned ignorance, false compliance or sabotage) provide a means by which socio-political actors outside the official government apparatus or even within the government (bureaucrats) can “critique” policy without drawing the government’s wrath. (Rothchild and Chazan, 1988; Garvey, 1991)

Merely because it does not positively contribute to policy dialogue, that is not to say that negative participation is necessarily bad. For losers or opponents of policy who do not have a forum, this may be their only means of participation. And depending on the policy, negative participation may be very good from a democracy perspective. Certainly the civil disobedience movements of Ghandi in India and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the early-mid sixties are eloquent reminders of the important role that can be played by negative participation.

E. Participation and equity:

While increasing participation does bring more players to the table, **legitimate questions can be raised regarding the extent to which increased or expanded participation actually serves the interests of greater pluralism or equity.** It should not be automatically assumed that because there are more participants that the greater collective effort is actually equal to or coterminous with the “public interest” (Steifel

and Marshall, 1994). It should be remembered that the collective effort may actually represent no more than a collection or series of individual or group points of view or interests...most or all of which are not necessarily connected or which actually may be highly conflictive. It should not be automatically assumed that the sum of various individual or group interests adds up to the “public interest”. It may be instead, different or individual interests expressed by a set of individuals or groups. Where individual or group interests fall short of the “public interest” who is advantaged or disadvantaged?

Where there is a relatively high degree of agreement among the different participants in a coalition, that agreement may well represent only the leaders of each member group. In certain cases, the leadership or expressed opinion of a group may actually be unrepresentative of the group’s constituents (Brinkerhoff, 1996). In El Salvador, Foley (1995) and Hemby (1996) have noted that the internal organization of many non governmental organizations tends not to be particularly participative. Similar patterns have been seen in some of the developing countries of Africa as well (Bratton, 1989a). In other settings a relatively small coterie of leaders may take over a group which ostensibly represents broader interests, and then manage the process in such a way that participation by other elements is excluded. In certain cases, and despite their wishes for greater participation, donor organizations will develop preferences for certain groups and limit the access of others. This can sometimes be observed in the development of “steering groups” which act as referents for the donor but usually include only the more outspoken representatives (McColm, et al, 1996).

Though participation is certainly a key ingredient in democratization, it is also not the case that any participation will do. In many respects one ought not to be surprised by the fact that greater participation isn’t always democratic. Groups that are anxious to participate and respond to openings in the policy making process are those that wish to have certain demands satisfied -- but they are mostly

interested in having their own demands satisfied, and not those of others. But that is the nature of politics, and the policy making process is, of course, highly political.

III. Costs and benefits of increased participation? Is more better?

Why would a particular manager or decision maker want to expand participation? Given the normal burdens of management, there ought to be clear incentives to expand participation – it is important that the manager gain something by increasing participation. Since there will likely be many groups demanding his/her attention, the manager should have sound reasons for listening to a particular group. There should be some prospect that the group's participation will favorably alter the chances for successful implementation of the decision under consideration. The common assumption is that expanded participation will improve the quality of the decision to be made and, according to much of the literature, will improve the likelihood that the policy or decision will be implemented successfully and meet its objectives. However, such assumptions are not automatically made either by groups vying for access to the policy decision-makers, or by those making the decisions to actually listen to new participants making demands.

Although it may sometimes seem otherwise, there is **always** some degree of participation in decision-making -- the idea of an entirely solitary decision-maker is patently invalid. The primary problems of participation revolve around how much access there is and who has that access. A decision-maker may actually be satisfied with who is participating, the level of their participation in decisions and the results obtained -- and therefore sees no reason to increase it. Potential (but not mobilized) participants may perceive that the benefit resulting from their participation will be marginal at best or that their participation will be ineffective. Thus, the question of "why participate" is highly relevant. For some, participation *per se* is an "ideal"; in practice, however, it is unlikely.

A. Costs and benefits:

If a policy decision-maker is to increase the level of participation in decision making on a given issue, then he/she must be mindful that the additional participation will actually provide some benefit either in the quality of the decision made or in more effective implementation. It is therefore reasonable for the decision-maker to ask exactly what the petitioner or group can offer or bring to the decision. Can the group provide new and important support, and will that support or input actually improve the decision? Does the group could offer new insights or information on the issue. Is it likely that the group's support will attract other groups? Will not paying attention to the group's demands cause the policy to fail or create problems in other quarters? Can the group offer some tools or resources that will assist in implementation?⁵ If none of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then it is unlikely that greater participation will be sought.

Increasing participation carries costs and even possibly risks as well as benefits for the policy decision-maker. Some concessions resulting in alteration/modification of the policy under consideration may be necessary. Benefits deriving from the implemented policy may become more diluted (and therefore of less interest to the beneficiaries), and may cause problems with other groups supporting the policy. Adding new participants complicates the decisional process itself, in that more groups will need to be satisfied before the decision can go forward. Interests of the new participants must be satisfied along with those of existing participants.

Once the door to participation is opened to one group, or if another proves effective in its efforts to participate, then others may be tempted to try to gain access as well (Whitely, 1994). When this happens, problems may be created for the policy decision-maker to cope with and respond to the demands of new entrants. The capacity of

⁵ Most of these questions are incorporated into a Participation Assessment Checklist developed in Section IV.

the decision-maker to cope with and respond to demands is limited by the time, skills and resources available. To the extent that these are scarce (as they generally are in developing countries), fewer demands can be processed. When limits are approached or exceeded, overload occurs; and although the decision-maker might look for ways to increase resources, he/she might just as easily shut down access, or look for mechanisms to restrict access and limit participation. Under one-party regimes and some authoritarian systems, groups affiliated with the party or some part of the government are frequently the only available mechanisms for participation.⁶ If there are not enough resources available to process and satisfy reasonable demands, the government may simply choose to ignore some groups. However, should the number of groups rise to unmanageable proportions, or if demands turn strident or threatening, or if the chosen means of expression by the petitioning group are unacceptable to decision-makers or important sectors of society, then the government not only may close the door or begin to repress participation.⁷

Under certain circumstances, the manager may actually be pressured to open the door to greater participation, even though her/his best instincts argue against it. In the last few years the World Bank, USAID, the Interamerican Development Bank, and international NGOs have become increasingly insistent on the need for wider participation in the implementation of the projects or policy change programs they finance. Not infrequently, these mandates place a relatively heavy cost on decision-makers and

⁶ In the literature, these are generally referred to as “corporatist” mechanisms, and roughly signify a quasi-official or at the very least, a government sanctioned mechanism for participation.

⁷ A recent demonstration at the EPA where Greenpeace expressed its opposition to the use of dioxins by papermills by rappelling two of its members halfway down the face of EPA’s headquarters office in Washington to display a huge banner, is an example of unacceptable means of expression or participation. The rappellers were arrested, and worse (for Greenpeace), the effort did not get media coverage.

implementors pressured to adopt measures for greater participation in circumstances where there is little capability to process the additional input of new participants. The results of forced participation schemes can be disappointing.

When policy is changing, the forces of negative participation may be considerably stronger than the positive forces. Losers, especially recent ones, very frequently have more support, resources, and capability for participation than the newly “benefited” positive participants. In such circumstances, it may take considerable extra effort to “empower” or bring the “positive” participants up to a level where they can compete adequately with the negative participants -- a factor which needs to be taken into account by strategies aimed at increasing heretofore marginalized groups. In that sense, the costs of increasing participation may actually be higher than anticipated (Participatory Development and the World bank, 1992).

B. The transactional dimension of participation:

The benefits derived from increased participation for the demanding or petitioning groups and the decision-making agency will always have a cost (Picciotto, 1994). For the demanding group, the costs will be in the form of time, effort, and/or other scarce resources, or in extreme circumstances, the costs of repression. For the decision-making agency costs may be derived from time expended or in opportunity cost, from the loss of exclusive control or dominance in the agency’s particular area of competence, or from the ire of other participants if the allocation of resources or benefits shifts as a result of the added participation of another group. Protests by negatively affected stakeholder groups, in turn, may cause the decision-maker problems with higher authorities and other important stakeholders. There may be a further cost incurred by having opened the door to participation in the first place. Again, if one petitioning group gets through the door to the decision-maker to present demands or has its input welcomed, other groups will likely be encouraged to try, giving rise to management

problems. Finally, there are risks of raising expectations and not being able to deliver whether for lack of resources, administrative capacity, or political reasons.

On the other side, the stakeholder attempting to increase its participation may have to give up information that it has worked hard for and developed at no mean cost; it may have to invest additional resources for transportation to the capital to talk to those who will make the appropriate decisions on the matter in interest; the group's representatives may risk status and authority should they fail to achieve a favorable decision; and the group may run the risk of negative repercussions from competing groups. If the group's leaders decide to make concessions in order to achieve some satisfaction or gain influence, they may risk friction with those in the group opposed to such concessions. While success may breed encouragement to try again with other issues, failure may cause the group to give up entirely and leave it to others to try another approach. And, examples of failure may be just as likely to have a negative effect on other groups' efforts at participation -- in the face of failure by one group, others may adopt a defeatist, "you can't fight city hall", mentality.

Before decisions are made by the policy decision-maker to admit greater participation or by the stakeholder group to seek more participation, costs and benefits ought to be thought out. While it is generally assumed that greater participation does provide greater likelihood of more effective implementation,⁸

⁸ While there is relatively little systematic and empirical evidence to confirm this assertion (Cernea (1988) did show substantial correlation between project success and grassroots organization participation in a study of 25 World Bank-financed projects), there is, considerable anecdotal evidence regarding the salutary effects of participation on implementation. Most seem to agree that increasing participation is more costly at the outset but that these costs will be offset by an enhanced probability of sustained success. In a 1987 study of infrastructure projects (clinics and roads) Van Wicklin and Finstersbush likewise suggest the importance of participation but moreso during

those benefits may be perceived as marginal once lined up against the costs that will be incurred for both parties (those well-experienced in the advocacy of greater participation generally acknowledge that participation costs more, period.) Likewise, stakeholder groups need to assure that their efforts will not be perceived as frivolous or worse, as detracting from the process⁹ -- rather that they produce benefits for the group and improved implementation for the policy decision-maker.

C. Effectiveness:

It seems impractical to discuss participation without mentioning effectiveness as an incentive. If a group has no impact on decisions, it would seem difficult to argue that its participation has been effective; i.e., if the outcomes would have been the same had the group not attempted to participate, then its participation cannot be considered to be effective.¹⁰ While it should not be expected that a group will always be partially or fully effective in its attempts to influence decisions or the criteria for decisions, some periodic degree of success is necessary to validate value of the effort. Perceived effectiveness certainly will be a large determinant in a group's decision to

implementation and maintenance than in the planning phase of a project.

⁹ There may be rather heavy costs involved if an organization's demands or participation is perceived as frivolous, especially if there is significant competition for the ear of the decision-maker or if there are few points of access for meaningful participation by a group. At the same time, unless the group is sufficiently important (in which case it probably already has a participative role), the burden of demonstrating the need for participation or a role in the decisional process, rests with the group. It is also up to the group to show that its demands are valid and not trivial or frivolous.

¹⁰ While it is difficult to ascertain this ahead of time, some key questions will get at this sort of information -- could the group get access to the decision-maker(s); did the group's input seem to alter thinking of the decision-maker(s)? If the answers are negative and each attempt by the group has similar results, it will likely give up trying.

continue efforts at increasing its role or participation or not.¹¹ (Diamond, 1990) It should also be noted that this principle applies equally for individual participation in groups as to broader group participation in society or its decisional processes. If individuals do not feel that their input is being heard, if it is not effective, they will not likely continue to participate.¹²

It bears repeating that effectiveness or the lack thereof can have a demonstration effect. If one group succeeds, other groups may be motivated to try their hand at participation and try to influence decisional outcomes. But the demonstration effect works equally well with failure as it might with success. If a group fails in its efforts at participation, others may become discouraged and disinclined to risk their own resources in a possibly futile effort.

D. How much participation is enough, and how does one know?

This question has much to do with the reasons for expanded participation in the first place. Should more groups be let into the process and under what circumstances? And if the door is opened then how many groups ought to be let in, for how long, and to what degree? If more groups or interests are allowed to participate, how can one be sure that the “proper” interests are represented or if there is a sufficient balance so that some measure of the “public interest” is actually represented?¹³

¹¹ It should be noted that the perception of success will need to be validated at some point or another -- if not the group will have no incentive to continue. This applies particularly to cases where a stakeholder group has been made to feel that it has influence where it in fact has not (see P.T. Barnum on fooling people).

¹² see Thomas Dichter, “Demystifying Popular Participation: Institutional Mechanisms for Popular Participation” in World Bank (1993) for a broader discussion of the importance of individual incentives for participation.

¹³ Many of these questions can be found in the Participation Assessment Checklist in Section IV.

For the decision-maker, these questions are difficult to answer, even in the abstract; but when applied to real situations, they become even more difficult. Perhaps some minimum criteria can be applied:

- Will expanded participation enhance the acceptance and implementation of the policy?
- Is there some likelihood that the demands resulting from expanded participation can be satisfied?
- Will concessions to the demands from expanded participation seriously jeopardize the objectives of the policy under consideration?

If the answers to the first two questions are yes and to the third, no, participation can or should be expanded. If the answers are no to the first or second and yes to the last, then caution should be applied.¹⁴

One must guard against having too many participants. This can sometimes occur when participation becomes an end in itself or where objectives other than effective policy implementation are at stake. For instance, it is not at all uncommon that a decision-maker will get enough support on a policy to win the day in Congress or another arena but only discover later that too many promises had been made (whether unintentionally or cynically) to too many groups and too many expectations raised. Indeed, politicians often have self-serving objectives beyond the implementation of a given policy to increase participation -- broader participation by stakeholders may also provide the decision-maker with a larger base of support, perhaps leading to a wider degree of responsibility, authority or

¹⁴ Answering these questions with precision and certainty ahead of time is clearly difficult. However, strategic thinking, the systematic use of available analytic tools, and the development of scenarios can assist the manager in developing much better ideas regarding the implications of expanded participation. Some of these tools will be discussed in the last section of the paper.

advantage on other decisions, or increased political power. As elections near, politicians frequently invite larger participation, but once the election passes, access begins to close up.

When participation is expanded, the coalition supporting the policy is expanded, again with the expectation that the expanded coalition will enhance the implementation of the policy. However, with this comes expanded costs and demands -- additional partners will have demands and will condition support on the basis of concessions made on those demands. Thus, for the decision-maker it is important to assess whether expanded participation actually can be afforded -- the cost of satisfying the new partner's demands must be offset by improved implementation prospects and future support on other related initiatives.

IV. Supply and Demand: increasing participation as a practical problem

Even if the manager considers it desirable to do so, expanding participation may be much easier said than done. A simple order to increase participation will not likely be met with automatic compliance. Although a group may be interested in participating, and is given encouragement to do so, it may not have the capability or capacity to actually do so in a serious or effective manner (Foley and Edwards, 1995; Dahl, 199_). At the same time, there must be an accommodating environment for expanded participation, institutional mechanisms capable of receiving and processing demands from the new participants, and resources and capacity available to respond in some reasonable measure to those demands.

Donors are sometimes mystified when there is not greater participation, even when the means for increasing it exist. Sometimes, when opportunities for participation are provided, no one will show up. In El Salvador, for instance, the rules of the National Legislative Assembly provide the possibility for interested stakeholder groups to participate in hearings and provide their input on important legislative bills, but for the most part these groups do not take advantage of the opportunity. (Crosby, et al. 1997) In part this

is owed to ignorance of channels of access and in part to a lack capacity on the part of groups to take part and contribute to the discussions or hearings. Some also may be owed to a lack of interest in the issue as such, but some of the lack of interest may also be due to an expectation of poor or no response by the legislators to their input... an attitude of if no one is going to pay attention then why bother? In an examination of eleven cases worldwide, Bates and Krueger (1993) also note the low degree of participation and intervention of interest groups in the initiation of policy reform processes... perhaps a reflection of just such an expectation. However, it should be noted that such expectations are often built from experience and a tradition of non-participation over a long period of time. The question is, does the low expectation of response derive from a fundamental disinterest on the part of the decision-makers in the opinion of new participants, or are the decision-makers simply incapable of processing more than a very limited amount of input?

As stated, there is both a supply and a demand side to the issue of participation. Emphasis in the literature and among the donor agencies may be on one side or the other but rarely does there seem to be interest in balancing the equation. Donors and other agencies are probably right to stress assistance to new civil society entrants, since the majority of assistance still goes to government -- the problem, however, is that relatively little of that support actually goes to addressing the problem of improved capability for response (Rothchild, 1994). Much can and remains to be done to improve the receptiveness of policy decision-makers. Simply addressing the needs of the demand side of the question will not solve the problem

When donors suggest that there be more or greater participation, interventions may be aimed at the decision-makers or civil society groups, but only rarely are interventions aimed at both simultaneously. Where there is lack of capacity on both sides, then merely trying to fix or improve one will only result in a half-satisfactory solution - - one side will improve but the other will be unable to respond. While it is clear that there is a problem in many societies on the demand side of

the participation equation, there are usually equal or even more serious problems on the supply side -- legislatures do not work well and are frequently subject to considerable irregular influence; the courts are frequently non- or even dysfunctional with staggering case loads, lack of administrative staff, and without the ability to extract compliance even in judgments faithfully rendered; executive branch offices are often unable to meet even the most minimal level of demands for lack of funds or technical capability or both.

A. Supply and demand: the balance between increased participation and capacity for response.

Effective participation requires systems and capacities among both the suppliers and demanders of policy or services. The supply side of the equation is made up of the state and its representatives¹⁵, who develop and implement policies and provide goods and services, and act as final arbiter of resource allocations. If participation is to be effective, then the supply structure must be receptive to and capable of accommodating expressions of demand for participation aimed at affecting policy decisions and service delivery. The ability of the supply side to receive demands depends on the transparency, openness and accessibility of the policy decision-making structure, the capacity of decision-makers to actually process and be responsive to demands, and the breadth and depth of participation (Landell-Mills 1992)

Those who demand policies and services are the other party to participation. The demand side, largely composed of members of civil society, ranges from individuals to informal associations to established interest groups. The influence of the demand side's participation will be limited by the enabling environment for participation, the

¹⁵ At times, NGOs also become part of the supply side. Generally it is because they have been delegated functions normally carried out by government, either at the national or the local level. While in many cases they are relatively autonomous, at others they act as surrogates. Regardless, when such functions have been delegated, they are "representatives" of government.

tradition of participation extant, the standing relations between the government and select groups, the degree of competition from other groups, the capability of civil society groups to actually articulate their demands in a coherent and compelling manner, as well as groups' prior positive or negative experience with participation.

Since supply and demand are both necessary elements for participation, there must be some rough equilibrium between the two. While donors and international financial organizations have recently increased attention and assistance to civil society and to the demand side, this may not always be a complete strategy. In certain cases the lack of capacity on the part of civil society can cause it to lose valuable opportunities to influence the policy agenda -- in which case the stress on assistance to the demand side is correct. However, in other instances, the government's inability or unwillingness to hear or act on demands, even if articulated clearly and coherently, limits civil society participation. In these circumstances, bolstering the capacity of the demand side will likely produce little, if any benefit, at least in the short run (Bratton, 1991). Let us now examine some of the practical dimensions to increasing participation.

B. The problem of increasing civil society¹⁶ participation

Merely wishing for greater participation will not bring it about -- there are numerous and varied obstacles, most of which are not susceptible to quick fixes. These include: laws and customs limiting participation, lack of tradition of participation, institutionalized relations of certain groups with decision elites, a lack of capacity to articulate demands by civil society, and increased competition in an environment of scarce or diminishing resources. Each of these, by themselves, will be difficult enough to overcome;

¹⁶ The term civil society is broadly interpreted here to include those groups and sectors that are not part of the government. It includes the broad range from business organizations to service NGOs, and from the church to political parties.

however, the problem is that in general, there is not just one of these elements present but several.

1. The enabling environment

The enabling environment for participation consists of laws and customs which set “rules of the game” for participation. In some circles, the enabling environment is largely viewed as the laws that either restrict or permit participation (Brinkerhoff, 1996; Foley and Edwards 1995). The development of flexible legislation regulating behavior and activity of NGOs, advocacy groups, or other associational activity are considered key to creation of a conducive environment. However, it should be pointed out that there are several important instances of increasing restrictions on participation through creation of laws regulating associational activity. In Egypt, NGOs must first meet strict requirements to organize and then are directly regulated by the Ministry of Social Welfare. New laws in South Africa and El Salvador permit greater state intervention in NGOs through new regulations on the organization’s financial operations and have met with stiff opposition from the NGO communities. More than laws however, the enabling environment is the larger “rules of the game”, the framework within which human beings interact, and which establishes the competitive and cooperative relationships of society and norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals (North, 1990)¹⁷. And, fundamental to the development of a conducive enabling environment for participation is tolerance of divergent opinion. In extreme cases, such as Taliban Afghanistan, the Balkans, and parts of Central Africa, divergence is heavily repressed.

Equally, if not more important than laws and customs conducive to greater participation is the openness of the decision-making system. Where there are multiple centers for decision-making and where significant delegation of decisional authority exists, there is a greater likelihood for increased participation. In the United States there is a broad array of alternative mechanisms for

decision making ranging from the local community on up to the county, the state and national levels. Where power is centered in a narrow elite, or where little if any decisional capacity is delegated or devolved to local government or authorities, what little opportunity there is for participation will be highly circumscribed and highly competitive. The historical experiences of the disenfranchised can discourage their participation; where participation has been repressed, even though the system now may be open, there will be reluctance and even fear on the part of the formerly repressed to participate.

2. Tradition of participation

The prevalent degree of civil society participation varies widely. In some countries there is little tradition or history of participation while in others participation is both common and long-standing. Even in societies that appear relatively closed, such as in formerly apartheid South Africa, the growth of civics (the local term for civil society groups) stems from a much older tradition in African society (Brinkerhoff, 1996). In the former Soviet republics and in Eastern Europe, there is a relatively long history of ample civil society participation even though it was largely of a corporatist nature (Ressinger et al, 1995) In western Europe and the United States, traditions, practice of, and mechanisms for participation are widespread and longstanding (Putnam, 1992; Koopmans, 1996). The primary advantage of a tradition and history of participation is the practice that it provides, as well as a sense of psychological empowerment. Through practice of participation, groups become more capable of articulating their demands and more knowledgeable about how the decision-making systems work. And the more practice groups have at participating, the more likely they are to be successful in achieving their demands.

Historic and entrenched traditions of participation are relatively rare in the developing world however.¹⁸ In Latin America for example, the

¹⁷ For an interesting and useful treatment of the importance of the enabling environment, see Chapter 4, of the NPI Resource Guide (USAID, 1997).

¹⁸ There are certainly exceptions to this generalization; for instance, many of Africa’s traditional societies were highly participative.

notion of broad participation is rather new. While there are some exceptions, especially during the corporatist periods of countries such as Argentina, for the most part broad societal participation is rare. In part this may be due to the highly centralized nature of most Latin American societies, stemming from the colonial period. There is a single highly centralized church (though some Protestant sects have made inroads during the last twenty years). Education policy is dictated from the center; local boards of education, where they exist, are mainly for some of the more marginal aspects of implementation and occasional support. While local governments exist, their budgets are usually controlled from the center and there persists a high reliance on line ministries for the implementation of projects. Although public ownership of firms is perhaps the norm in the United States and much of Europe and other industrial democracies, in Latin America it is still extremely rare -- firms are privately held and internal organization is quite hierarchical. Such lack of tradition and history for participation helps to explain why the growth of interest groups in Latin America has been slow,¹⁹ and why they remain relatively ineffective.

3. Standing relations of select groups with government policy makers

Sometimes participation simply means changing the few actors interacting with policy-makers. In countries characterized by relative stability, relations between stakeholders and policy-makers tend to be rather stable and restrict the opportunities for other groups to participate. As noted above, in certain Latin American countries, a variety of official groups were created to represent different sectors (particularly the professions) before the government. As official bodies they excluded the possibility that others would get the ear of decision-makers, effectively precluding wider participation. On another level, the informal associations and "cronies" developed by any politician but most especially by authoritarian figures, also restrict access and participation (Good, 1996). Though not official, such relations take up time and can monopolize the attention of the policy-maker. Where the policy-making structure is narrow, several sectors will be unable to gain access. However, it should not be assumed that this only occurs under more authoritarian regimes -- favored groups will always be first in line even if the demands posed by other groups are cheaper, better articulated, and more productive. And, it should never be assumed that such favored groups will welcome the input of others.

4. Lack of capacity on the demand side to articulate and transmit demands

When a political system democratizes and begins to open, it may find it difficult to find new enthusiastic participants at the outset. At their outset, new decision-making institutions may lack the capacity to play the role intended for them (Thompson, 1995). But even when they do have at least some modest degree of capacity not only to make decisions but to receive and process demands, it may take some time for groups articulating demands to become aware of and learn how to use the new centers. For instance, the committee system in El Salvador's national assembly provides for "hearings" or audiences with testimony or argument from invited organizations or individuals, but according to

However, the imposition of colonial rule and subsequent independence movements and institutions of government dramatically eroded such participation - the tribal structures became irrelevant mechanisms for participation in many, if not most of the post independence African states.

¹⁹ There are some interesting exceptions to this, of course. During the 1930's, and again in the 1950's there was a considerable surge in the organization of the labor movement in Latin America. However, most of these organizations represented only relatively small proportions of the overall sector. Where they actually became effective, it was largely because of corporatist or quasi-corporatist affiliation -- such as *sindicalista* movement in Argentina under Juan Perón, the COBOL in Bolivia during the first Paz Estenssoro government, and Mexico's PRI affiliated Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM).

observers, such committees are rarely used by groups or individuals to argue their point of view. It will take time for (newly mobilized) stakeholder groups to learn how the system works and at which points it can intervene.

Learning the skills necessary for effective participation in the policy decision-making or implementation decision process is not automatic. To formulate and articulate policy positions requires analytical and presentation skills. A group must be able to collect and process information that will reinforce its position and it must be able to present that information in an accessible manner to the appropriate people. To know whom to present information to implies a solid grasp of the workings of the policy process. To get a message across requires advocacy capacity. It is unlikely that a group that has recently begun to try to voice its demands will have a very clear grasp of how the policy-making process works. Groups which have worked with government policy-makers before will not necessarily know how the process works for another issue since actors will change and the number of steps in the process might vary as well. Similarly, when legislatures are either introduced or become true alternative decision-making centers, stakeholder groups may be unable to take advantage of the new opportunities presented simply because they are unfamiliar with how legislative processes works or know how to and which members to approach for greatest effectiveness.²⁰ Limited capacity in any of these areas will ultimately affect the quality of participation of a given group.

When a country shifts to more democratic and transparent processes of policy-making, those accustomed to merely employing a few key contacts may suddenly find themselves struggling

²⁰ In one consultancy carried out by the author in 1991, the leader of the most prominent business chamber in one Latin American country could not accurately describe how a piece of legislation moved through its Congress because prior to that time one only needed to gain the assent of the President, and the Congress would merely follow that lead. But with democratization of the country, the Congress took on a stronger role.

to access the new process (Ribot, 1995). These groups must also begin to assess their resources and learn which ones will be the most helpful in presenting their demands so that the group's participation is effective. When groups are new they may be unable to formulate or articulate their demands in a way that catches the attention of the policy-maker, and therefore go unheard.

Not all groups are equal in their ability to present cogent and persuasive arguments before the policy decision makers. A slick presentation, one with color transparencies or one which uses one of the high-tech presentation techniques, may well be received more favorably than the presentation which uses less sophisticated methods, even though the latter's content is of higher quality. Capacity and availability of resources clearly affects the quality and effectiveness of participation. Some groups, typically influentials and those close to powerholders, have considerably larger pools of resources to draw from than others, thereby giving them a stronger competitive edge over others in both developing persuasive analyses and in the advocacy lobbying processes required for convincing the decision-maker.

5. Competition and pluralism

It should not be assumed that groups will voluntarily encourage the participation of other groups in the marketplace. Frequently, groups in civil society, intentionally or not, turn out to be monopolistic. The fact that civil society groups do not necessarily welcome other groups opinions or participation is certainly not novel, but it is one that is frequently overlooked. Those participating on a particular issue may do everything possible to assure that others cannot or will not participate, in order to achieve their own demands. In part this may be due to natural differences between groups regarding ideas and demands; but it also may be due to competition between particular individuals or certain natural cleavages arising from ethnic or regional differences. Even within the same sector and where groups have appropriated specific niches, collaboration between the groups through a coalition is rarely a simple matter. Where coalitions exist, it is usually for collaboration or coordination on short-term, highly specific issues.

The notion of selfishness rather than selflessness in participation actually is normal. In politics, the idea is to prevail with the smallest possible coalition in order to retain control and assure that it will be the group's ideas which order policy rather than another. To the extent that a larger coalition is necessary to prevail in the decision, the less control there will be for any single group (Haggard and Kaufman, 1994). Large and diverse coalitions are difficult to manage and run the risk of diluting already scarce resources. When groups choose to remain apart, it will be up to the decision-maker to decide between them which will be satisfied. When the number of groups competing becomes excessive however, the demands may simply turn into noise, with the consequence that the decision-maker simply stops listening.

Pluralism, when it becomes excessive, can result in fragmentation. Where there is fragmentation, resources can quickly become diluted and result in significantly less impact. Before the civil war in El Salvador came to an end, there was a very large commitment of resources from a variety of donors. Since most of these were programmed for delivery to civil society organizations rather than the government, thousands of non governmental organizations came into existence to absorb the funds. Although a considerable effort was made on different occasions to develop coordination mechanisms, they were rarely successful; and many of the expected objectives and expected achievements, in the end, were rather diluted. In participation, as in many other areas, one can sometimes have too much of an otherwise good thing.

C. The problem of responding to increased participation

For policy makers to hear and incorporate participation into their decisions, institutional structures capable of responding to increased participation must actually exist. If a group were formed at the local level, there need to be mechanisms available for that group to access the appropriate policy makers. Structural elements that discourage participation should be dismantled and those that facilitate participation need to be encouraged; mechanisms capable of capturing

demand for policy change from the environment need to be enabled and multiple channels of access created; and obstacles to existing channels of access removed.

Where there is competition of ideas, it is up to those who process those demands to decide which are the most satisfactory or appealing (indeed, all too frequently criteria such as which group offers the most compensation or rents may actually be the most salient.) When there is a relatively free marketplace of demands and ideas offered as solutions to those demands, the policy decision maker must develop criteria of some type merely in order to decide whom to listen to. To the extent that overall levels of resources to satisfy multiple demands and interests are scarce, the problems are compounded. The decision maker is asked not only to make choices regarding the "most salient" demands but is also asked to decide which types of demands have the most priority relative to others. While in the more developed countries this may not seem such a burden, in countries where training of officials tends to be rudimentary at best, the simple ability to evaluate competing proposals and arguments is absent. In this sense, it places considerable burden and responsibility on the decision maker to decide what and who is most important -- posing risks of eventual rent seeking (Bates and Krueger, 1993).

1. Lack of "processing capacity" on the part of decision-makers.

A serious constraint to participation is the inability of the decisional structure(s) to process multiple demands -- the supply problem. Since time and resources are constant decision-making parameters, low processing capacity means that certain demands will not receive adequate attention or simply be ignored. In newly democratizing countries, policy makers are frequently new to the game and have yet to master the peculiarities of their particular policy area and/or organization. Expertise and skill to measure the quality of input from those with policy demands and to determine which of several, if any, proposed alternatives will produce optimum benefits is not acquired overnight (Lamb, 1987; Silverman, 1996). When decision-makers are nearly completely unequipped to make

a judgment regarding a particular demand or input on a given issue, they may choose to hide their ignorance by refusing to listen to anyone, rely only on the advice of those closest to them, or choose to listen to traditional sources of influence or constituencies.

Even if a new decision-making center becomes available, it does not mean that it will in fact be able to make meaningful decisions, or be able to effectively process petitions. When new decision-making centers are created, they usually have only a reduced capability for receiving and responding to demands. The new institution must first learn to function, to develop its own culture, rules, and procedures -- and perhaps most importantly, the capability to assess the differing points of view that will be presented in the course of its deliberations. The capability of the United States House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee to analyze and assess the US budget was not acquired overnight. The expertise of the members has only been acquired through lengthy tenure on the Committee. It seems, therefore, that the expectation of capability of a committee whose members tenure averages less than three years, as is the case of the budget committee in El Salvador's Legislative Assembly, should be quite modest.

Thus, not only must a system open up if it is to become more democratic but it must also equip all its decision-making centers with the skills, resources, and behaviors to listen to and effectively decide on demands (Frischtak, 1994; Hirschmann, 1993). When decision-making centers are merely reformed so as to open them to a larger number of petitioners, the process of developing adequate capacity may be more difficult than in the case of a new institution (Grindle and Thomas, 1990, Robinson, 1990) because of ingrained non-participatory behavior. Centralized, "top-down" practices and arrogance of officials are common residuals of traditionally closed decision-making systems. Trying to change the behavior of long-time staff accustomed to certain procedures and practices of ignoring demands of petitioners can be a tedious and often frustrating experience.

2. Openness of the policy-making structure and structural capacity to handle demand

The existence of a relatively differentiated decision-making structure is key to expanding participation (Cernea, 1992) Where the policy making structure is narrow and decision-making is concentrated in a very few hands, access will be difficult and participation restricted. In authoritarian or dictatorial systems, decision-making is a closed and narrow process; there are few alternative centers of decisional authority. For example, under some of the more personalistic regimes in Latin America and Africa, such as Nicaragua under Somoza or Malawi under Banda, virtually all decision-making flowed to the top -- while other institutions (legislature, courts, municipal councils) existed with nominal decisional authority, in practice they had very little. Policy making occurred only at the top; such that if a group did not have direct or indirect access to the top leader, the chances of its petition getting a fair hearing were practically nil.²¹ Again, the mere existence of alternative decision centers is not sufficient to facilitate effective participation -- they must have some degree of capacity and resources to satisfy the demands made. If not, alternative centers are not particularly useful, nor will they effectively help to expand participation.

. The capacity for real decision making exists in various institutions apart from the executive such as the legislature, the courts (including the multiple levels of jurisdiction), independent and/or regulatory agencies, municipal or state governments as well as their various components. It is important to note that not only must such agencies have the authority to make decisions, but they must also have the resources to be able to satisfy the petitioner. Unfortunately but frequently in developing countries, agencies are created to (presumably) open the decision-making system, but are not accorded either the resources

²¹ While the constitutions of many countries spell out relatively decentralized systems, quite often the local structures are very poorly equipped to make decisions, mostly because resources will remain controlled from the center.

or the authority to implement decisions, either because there was never a serious intention of doing so, or because the President or other powerful leader has chosen to ignore or ride roughshod over them.. Systems that are only theoretically open are little better than closed systems and perhaps more frustrating.²²

3. Breadth and depth of participation

When participation is initially expanded, such as during the relatively early stages of the democratization process, it is unlikely that the intensity of participation can or will be very high for the new entrants. Breadth and depth of participation can only increase as societal participants gain capacity to articulate their demands (or capacity to actually participate in implementation) within the context of what may be a largely unfamiliar decision-making structure, and equally importantly, as the decisional structure increases its capacity to take on and respond to new and wider demands.

The breadth and depth of the decision-making structure are crucial to participation. Creation of alternative decision-making structures at all levels is necessary to engender greater breadth of participation. When those alternative structures delegate authority to lower levels, then there is greater depth of opportunity for participation. The lower level access for participation are frequently overlooked but are particularly important for influencing decisions regarding how policy will be implemented in practice. Where the structure is deconcentrated and differentiated, opportunity for participation increases dramatically. For example, when education policy is set by a Ministry of Education (perhaps the norm in most developing countries), there is only one effective decision-making center for policy -- the Ministry -- and policy can only be affected by intervention directly at the Ministerial level. However, where

the regional representatives of the Ministry or community actually has discretionary authority regarding local policy issues (on such matters as local curriculum, dress codes, hiring, and salaries), there will be as many decisional points as there are communities. With a large number of decisional centers, the opportunities for participation, especially effective participation, increase dramatically.

Structures for deepening and broadening participation cannot be created all at once. For example, in the early eighties in Central America, at the outset of the democratization process, a variety of programs were developed for inter-sectoral dialogue on economic policy reform. The participants were a broad and highly diverse group incorporating representatives from the organized private sector, NGOs, peasant and cooperative organizations, labor unions, the military, church, and various sectors of government. In some cases, these dialogues were the first opportunity that some sectors had to participate in discussions on significant policy reform issues. Although participation was uneven and even dominated by a few groups, the dialogues created considerable enthusiasm and interest on the part of the participants. Unfortunately, much of that enthusiasm was dissipated in the wake of little or no follow up. In the dialogue, participants were consulted but had no role in the decision-making process -- since there were no appropriate structures to deepen their participation. This is in contrast to a similar mechanism created in Uganda in 1992, the Presidential Forum. The Forum, like the Central American dialogues, engaged a diverse group of participants in discussions on economic reform. However, once the initial two-day exercise was concluded, the Forum participants created a series of "working groups", which included both government and civil society representatives, to both follow-up on recommendations made and to monitor their implementation. In Uganda, a deliberate effort was made to develop a structure that would not leave participation only at the "consulted" level, but which would allow civil society to both broaden and deepen its participation.

²² See Jorge Dominguez and Jeanne Kinney Giraldo (1996) and Fareed Zakaria (1997) for interesting discussions of the persistence of closed systems even within the trappings of democracy or democratic openings and the difficulty of creating true alternative decision centers.

V. Mechanisms for the manager to assist in increasing participation

Though there are no simple prescriptions, managers can assist in developing strategies and mechanisms to increase participation. This section explores mechanisms to improve both the demand and the supply side for participation. It also suggests some available tools to assist the manager in sorting through competing demands and for managing increased participation.

A. Assessing the need for increased participation.

In many developing countries, the promotion of initiatives towards increasing participation often are not accompanied by in-depth analysis of the long-term management and organizational implications. As a consequence, these initiatives may soon collide with cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus and highly centralized management styles. At this crossroad, the options are obvious -- forfeit the participatory initiatives, or undergo the onerous and difficult reorganization of the institutional and management structures. In order to avoid unrealistic commitments and unachievable expectations, a manager also must ask whether enhanced participation is part of a larger governance scheme to achieve and sustain effective stakeholder involvement, a one time event, or simply rhetoric or worse, demagoguery. Obviously, the necessary resources and expected results will vary accordingly. *Ad hoc* measures taken for the latter might well be costly, unproductive, inefficient and disruptive of sound public management.

In assessing the need for and desirability of increased participation, the manager must consider and decide whether and to what extent greater participation is necessary, desirable, and attainable. The manager must also carefully analyze the real and practical implications, costs, and benefits of a participatory process within the context of the actual political, economic and social environment. As noted earlier, several questions should be answered affirmatively for expanded participation to have the impact and

results envisioned. If it is a sound idea to increase participation, then all efforts should be made to operationalize it; if not, then such efforts should be deferred or dropped. Increased participation without thoughtful consideration can raise unrealistic expectations, cause the involved sectors to incur costly expenses, and eventually create a lack of trust and interest for future necessary participatory processes.

Box 1: Participation Assessment Checklist

Deciding on the need for more participation:

1. Will increased participation bestow the policy with the required legitimacy?
2. Is additional support required to adequately implement the decision? How much more will be needed?
3. Is additional participation necessary to assure transparency and responsiveness?
4. Will adding new participants unacceptably dilute the objectives sought by the new policy?
5. Will the offering institution be able to meet the stakeholders expectations?
6. What level of participation will be required to bring the group on board; and what level of participation can the institution offer?
7. Are mechanisms available to respond to demands made by additional participants?
8. Will the benefits of additional participation outweigh the costs?

In Box 1, several questions are posed as part of an assessment toward determination if 1) more participation is required, and 2) what sort of participation would be most suitable assuming that the answer to one is affirmative. In addition, the IPC project has developed several tools of potential use to the manager in considering expanded participation. The

strategic management²³ toolbox offers several methods or mechanisms useful to ascertaining both the need for more participation and how much and of what type is required. One method, SWOT analysis can aid in telling the manager what the organization lacks and help specify what sort of participation might be most suitable. Another, political mapping²⁴ can assist in determining the level of support for a particular policy and where it is most sorely needed.

The first three questions ask what the added participation is for – is it to improve support, greater legitimacy, or might it provide for greater transparency. The next two questions ask what the impact of bringing new participants into the decision-making process might be – might it cause a transformation in the objectives sought, for instance. The last three attempt to get at whether the organization can afford to bring in additional participants and whether it will be able to balance new competing demands with those of other existing stakeholders and their expectations.

Once it is decided that added participation might be beneficial then the manager must turn to the task of selecting the new participants. Another strategic management tool, stakeholder analysis,²⁵ can serve as a valuable aid in learning more about potential participants, what they might offer, as well as their interests in participation in the policy issue. In Box 2, most of the questions are directed at trying to determine what a group brings to the decision (process) and how much difference the group might actually make. It also raises questions regarding the costs and the benefits of bringing in

Box 2: Participation Assessment Checklist (cont.)
<p>Selecting additional participants:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who are the stakeholders, and what do they want? 2. Does the group have anything to offer? 3. Does the group bring new and important support? 4. Will the sort of support or input offered by the group actually improve the likelihood that the decision will be implemented? 5. Does the group offer new insights or information on the issue? 6. Will the group's support attract other groups to support the policy/decision? 7. Will failure to take into account the group's demands cause the policy to fail or create problems in other quarters? 8. What will be the costs of bringing in a new group? And can the manager deliver on the groups demands? Can these demands be balanced with other interests supporting the policy? 9. Can the group provide some resources that will assist in implementation or alleviate the manager's burden? 10. Could the group share costs of implementation?

a new participant, and whether the manager has the resources to bring in new participation. Questions are also aimed at determining the level of participation that will be required by the group. Stakeholder analysis is useful for sorting out the various groups with demands for participation and SWOT analysis provides the manager with an important tool for assessing the capabilities of potential participants. Force field analysis can also be used to determine the balance of support and opposition to a particular issue and can be helpful in showing the impact of a particular group's support on that balance.

²³ See Derick Brinkerhoff, "Enhancing Capacity for Strategic Management of Policy Implementation in Developing Countries", IPC Monograph No. 1, Washington, USAID, 1996.

²⁴ See Benjamin L. Crosby, "Management and the Environment for Implementation of Policy Change" IPC Technical Note No. 4. April 1992.

²⁵ See Benjamin L. Crosby, "Stakeholder Analysis: A vital Tool for Strategic Managers", IPC Technical Note No. 2. March 1992.

B. Levels of Participation

Exactly what level of participation is adequate and acceptable can be a difficult question for the manager. Different levels of participation offer increasing degrees of power and control to those involved as well as increasing loss of control and decisional authority for the manager. While there is no litmus test to decide the appropriate level, higher levels are not necessarily “better,” and different levels will be suitable for diverse situations and interests -- selection of the appropriate participation level is perhaps best done on a case-by-case basis. The manager should also bear in mind that the level of participation offered conveys to the stakeholder the importance of its presence in the process.

Many attempts at increasing participation fail because those promoting it are unclear about the level of involvement that can or should be offered to the various interests. While identifying and negotiating the appropriate level is an important early stage of any participatory process, it is nonetheless extremely important to be realistic about what can be achieved. Box 3 shows a range of levels of participation, along with some basic questions regarding stakeholder involvement.²⁶ The first two mechanisms promote learning and stakeholders’ active involvement, while the last three mechanisms enable potential stakeholders to influence and share control over decisions and resources (See World Bank and Participation, September 1994).

²⁶

Techniques to carry out each level are not within the scope of this paper. A plethora of guides, manuals and reports provides guidelines to address the issues concerning the multiple levels that range from information and consultation to substantial support for stakeholders’ initiatives.

Box 3: Choosing a level of participation

- **Informational mechanisms** -- these should be used where it is necessary that certain groups be kept informed so as to maintain transparency/legitimacy. Mechanisms may include newsletters, town meetings, informational briefings.
- **Consultative mechanisms** -- these mechanisms are useful to better understand the nature of and how to treat the needs of stakeholder groups. Useful mechanisms for consultation include town meetings, forums, stakeholder consultations.
- **Shared decision-making mechanisms** -- useful where the potential participant brings unique resources, or provides particular added value. Should be used if the group’s input is likely to be critical to the successful implementation of the policy (implementation is still carried out by government.) Mechanisms include planning teams, steering groups, joint government/stakeholder workshops.
- **Collaborative mechanisms** -- these should be adopted if the stakeholder is a critical partner to the activity, and where the activity cannot be implemented solely by the decision-maker. Mechanisms include working groups, joint implementing bodies, partnership initiatives between public and private or NGO sectors, local development trusts.
- **Empowerment mechanisms** -- these should be used where it is important that stakeholders take on the activity in their own benefit, where populace is best served by stakeholder organization carrying out the activity. Mechanisms include narrow range groups such as cooperatives, associations, or broader groups such as chamber or professional associations.

1. Information

Information is the level of participation that offers least involvement. Control over the decision remains entirely with the manager. This level can hardly fit the definition of participation given before, i.e., a process by which people gain some measure of influence on development decisions, and not simply involvement in the implementation or benefits of a development activity. Nonetheless, it is a first crucial step that, according to set objectives, needs to be followed by higher levels of participation.

Information is appropriate, for example, where there is little or no room for maneuver; or where the decision will not be changed by what stakeholders have to say. If stakeholders have a legitimate interest and capacity for developing other options, however, then another level of participation should be chosen.

2. Consultative mechanisms

Here, stakeholders are invited to offer their views on a given policy. Consultative processes should identify all major stakeholders and encourage their participation. Stakeholders should be provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of the issues sufficient to enable effective involvement and mechanisms should be at the ready for processing input in a timely manner. Input can be broadened and enhanced by participation of groups with professional expertise in the intended policies. It is important that public institutions prepare to meet the stakeholders' expectation that views will be heard and considered.

In those countries enjoying economic success, policymaking frequently has been embedded in consultative processes, which provide civil society, labor, and the private sector opportunities for input and oversight. In East Asia public-private deliberation councils—such as Korea's monthly export promotion meetings, Thailand's National Joint Public and Private Consultative Committee, and the Malaysian Business Council—have provided mechanisms for feedback, information sharing, and coordination.

(World Development Report 1997) In Honduras, the Economic Policy Analysis Unit (UDAPE) attached to the President's economic cabinet carried out a series of consultative stakeholder workshops aimed at both channeling sector producer input toward the development of and the generation of support for a public sector rural investment strategy. (Crosby, 1996)

3. Shared decision-making mechanisms

Shared decision-making is the level at which diverse interests develop options and choose from them, with one of the parties primarily responsible for carrying out the main, agreed-upon actions. This is the appropriate level when it is important that other groups "own" the solution, when fresh and innovative ideas are necessary, or when the policy cannot be feasibly implemented in a unilateral fashion. Participation may take place through brainstorming workshops, discussion forums, planning workshops and the like where discussion centers on the determination of priorities, solving conflicts, seeking agreements, and developing ownership.

In Bulgaria, the IPC project on small and medium enterprise reform (SME) illustrates the utility and effectiveness of shared decision-making. Through a three pronged partnership (public sector, private sector, NGO think tanks), the landmark SME Strategy and Law was developed that effectively sets the stage for sustainable growth of the SME sector. Development of the law demonstrates the benefit of positively engaging private groups in policy development and in creating ownership for reform. (Brinkerhoff, Coletti, and Webster, 1999) In Southern Africa, the Southern Africa Transport and Communications Council (SATCC) used a series of local, national, and regional stakeholder workshops to hear demands, debate ideas, create ownership, and seek agreement for the development of seven protocols in the area of transport, telecommunications, and postal services. The SATCC workshops were carried out in each of its twelve member countries. (Billings and Miller, 1996)

4. Collaborative mechanisms

Collaborative mechanisms are applicable where the public sector cannot achieve its goals on its own. Hence, it becomes necessary to involve short-term collaboration or forming more permanent partnerships with interest groups. Here, the main responsibility for implementing the policy is given to stakeholders. At this level, participation takes place through the formation of joint committees with stakeholder representatives, joint working groups and task forces, and joint work with intermediary organizations and other stakeholder groups. Commitment to the time and effort required to develop a partnership is critical.

A case in point is the Regional Livestock Trade Reform project in the Sahel. It illustrates a partnership focused on developing and implementing a specific set of policy reforms regulating the cross-border trade of livestock among three countries. The partnership operated via a set of public-private task forces/committees with cross-sectoral membership including public sector officials and private associations representing operators involved in cross-border trade. It combined an emphasis on technical problem-solving with advocacy on the part of the civil society sector associations involved. A collaborative scheme of participation was imperative since the private sector associations were in a position to block any reform not to their liking. (Brinkerhoff 1997) In Uganda, the National Forum evolved from a consultative mechanism to a more collaborative mechanism, where the Forum's working group private sector members play a vital role in developing policy and for outlining criteria for implementation. In many cases, the participation of the private sector has played a critical role in providing the necessary technical expertise for developing feasible implementation strategies. (unpublished manuscript for case study on Uganda's National Forum, 1996)

5. Empowering mechanisms

Empowerment implies a working style which aims to assist stakeholders achieve their own objectives by increasing their confidence and

capacity. It is considered the highest level of participation because one of its goals is to develop peoples' capacity to initiate actions on their own or influence decisions of more powerful actors. It entails a more equitable sharing of power and a higher level of political awareness and strength for disadvantaged groups. Empowering includes capacity building of stakeholder organizations, strengthening the legal and financial status of stakeholder organizations, and supporting initiatives conceived by stakeholders.

C. Improving response capacity:

Improving the capacity to respond is intertwined with fundamental rethinking of institutional roles and the interaction between government and stakeholders and the legal framework supporting these roles and relationships. Improving response capacity can be achieved by modification or adjustments in public institutions and in the legal, institutional enabling environment. If the goal is to lessen the distance between government and stakeholders on a sustainable basis, then public institutions must shift from conventional implementers to real enablers that endorse stakeholder empowerment. This transformation is in itself a process where new working rules need to be designed and implemented. It includes changes ranging from training and incentives to the development of less centralized management styles that provide enhanced representation of stakeholder interests.

Institutions may need to redefine their management styles, allocate resources with greater transparency and efficiency, and develop more sensitive and responsive staff at all levels. Managers can better equip their institutions for enhanced participation by increasing internal participation. However, enhanced participation requires resources. Capacity building and training in new processes and the acquisition of improved skills of personnel is perhaps the first step.(King, Feltey, Susel, 1998) Enhanced and more diffused skills are also the base for greater delegation of decision-making and authority. By increasing the delegation of decision-making and authority to departments and divisions, more

points of access are created and new channels are established. While this may sound relatively simple on paper, in reality it is not easy to achieve. It should be remembered that when authority is delegated to lower levels, it erodes the power and authority of the higher level officials. Procedures for “decision clearance” also may need serious alteration or elimination, again eroding power of higher, or “clearance granting” officials. In such situations, the manager will need to think about how internal incentives can be re-structured to gain cooperation. Strategic management and other change process-oriented techniques can be of significant assistance to the manager here. Several United States’ government agencies have found that implementation of re-engineering processes have succeeded in enhancing internal participation.

In the United States and other common law countries, although the creation of more participatory processes consume time and energy, they appear to involve relatively few legal entanglements. However, in countries with civil law traditions, re-organization usually requires new statutes to be drafted while the old statutes need to be annulled. Some problems in the enabling environment may not be owed to a lack of laws which to facilitate the growth and participation of civil society groups, but to laws, procedures, and cultures which restrict the capacity of government or decision-making bodies to listen or admit greater participation. Laws favoring civil society through tax breaks may not be very useful in the face of decisional structures which deny access. Up-dating and simplification of legal codes regulating government and the elimination of often excessive “clearance” procedures accompanying “modernization of the state” initiatives, can succeed in removing barriers to increased participation, and open new channels of access.

In some instances, it may be necessary to create alternative mechanisms for access and participation; or create new forums for participation and arenas for decision-making. Mechanisms such as task forces composed of high-status individuals or groups, though ad hoc, may carry considerable weight and influence --

and may be tantamount to decisional authority. New, creative mechanisms can be particularly useful in transitional situations where the formally responsible decision-making organization is not yet capable of receiving increased input but where the manager and organization will benefit from added participation.

D. Improving capacity to participate

Several factors may constrain stakeholder participation, the most important being, perhaps, lack of capacity. This translates into lack of knowledge, information, resources and expertise essential to playing a meaningful and effective role in developing and implementing policies.

Over the past decade, international lending institutions and donor agencies have broadly endorsed expanded participation of marginalized groups and the poor (Healey and Robinson, 1992; Nelson, 1995). Many, if not most, of their programs for increasing participation specifically provide a capacity building component for beneficiary groups. However, much of that capacity building is not aimed at helping groups achieve better access to the policy process, but at improved internal management or service delivery capacity. While important in assisting groups to become stronger and providing a base from which to begin to develop greater influence, this type of assistance does little to strengthen a group’s ability to access policy decision-making structures and play an informed role in policy decisions.

Stakeholders most likely to be heard are those which can best articulate their interests and concerns, which have a sufficient understanding of the decision-making process, and which have the resources to access that process. It is noteworthy that newly established groups often fail to perform in accordance with international agencies’ expectations because too much was required too soon, and because they lacked the resources and skills necessary to play the game well.

Capacity building which provides a sound understanding of the policy, its opportunities and

its constraints is fundamental to making a contribution to the policy decision making process. Understanding how policy decisions are made also is vital to becoming a player or contributor to the policy process. Capacity building with a focus on “how to play the game” can be of immeasurable value to the stakeholder. Techniques such as policy characteristics analysis can assist stakeholder groups in improving the presentation and articulation of their interests and concerns.²⁷ Grounding in

techniques such as political mapping and policy network analysis ²⁸can help bolster the stakeholder’s understanding of the decision-making system, its leverage points, and how to access decision makers. Training centered on policy analysis and organizational skills will also help provide resources to help the group compete in the policy market place. Finally, training focused on strengthening advocacy and lobbying skills can assist in developing strategies for presenting the group’s agenda and gaining influence.²⁹

²⁷ See Dan Gustafson, “Policy Characteristics Analysis,” IPC Technical Note No. 3, USAID, Implementing Policy Change Project, 1992.

²⁸ Crosby, 1992, *op. cit.*

²⁹ See Benjamin L. Crosby and Deborah Orsini, “Developing Lobbying Capacity for Policy Reform”. IPC Technical Note No. 7, USAID, Implementing Policy Change Project, 1996.

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