STRENGTHENING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE MAURITIAN CONTEXT

Deepa Gokulsing
University of Mauritius

Abstract

If we agree that sustainable development has to be human-centred development, it is the concern of all actors participating in the decision-making process. Since the government in Mauritius aims at making it a sustainable island, citizen participation is an essential tool towards achieving sustainable development. The objective of this study is to investigate the current state of citizen participation among the different stakeholders, namely the public, private and civil society organisations in Mauritius. Both secondary and primary data have been collected. This paper has reviewed the citizen participation literature and has also analysed some key considerations in determining whether community participation is an effective policy-making tool and producing effective citizen governance. In-depth interviews have been carried out among the different stakeholders in the public, private and civil society organisations.

Key findings have shown that there is a lack of knowledge and information on the concept of participative democracy among most of the stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, most respondents believed that citizen participation is important since it benefits both the citizens and the participation itself. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process result to better decisions. Time, cost, poor communication skills, lack of capacity building, fear of criticism and harassment are some of the constraints faced by the respondents in participating in decision making processes. Based on the findings, a few recommendations have been proposed to strengthen real citizen participation for sustainable development of Mauritius.

Keywords: citizen, participation, sustainable development, stakeholders
INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation has become a commonly used term in political speeches in the last two decades, especially in relation to sustainable development. However, participation may have different meanings for different people. People’s participation in development has assumed the centre stage as an important condition for achieving accelerated and sustainable development. According to Olaleye (2010), people’s participation has become globally a central element of the people-centred development strategy. People-centred approaches to sustainable development, if harnessed and nurtured, are being increasingly recognised for their ability to strengthen democracy, increase social cohesion and balance the excesses of the market. By embedding the notion of governance, it is also important to emphasise the centrality of issues of equity, justice and participation to the sustainable development agenda.

The importance of people’s participation in sustainable development is increasingly acknowledged. Stakeholders and civil society organisations want to have a greater say and participate in the future direction of development. It is also increasingly recognised as an effective framework for addressing objectives of poverty alleviation, economic development and social equity. However, there are a number of constraints hindering the ability of citizens around the world to effectively participate and influence decision-making concerning these issues. This has serious implications for sustainable development and the livelihoods of people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen Participation

It is therefore important to understand the theories of civil society before discussing citizen participation and its link to sustainable development. People resort to theories of civil society, trying to make some reflections, criticise and adjust the extremely tense relationship between state and society, in order to reconstruct the supposedly good relationship between them by rebuilding the civil society (Deng and Alexander, 1999). According to western scholars, the more people manage affairs by themselves while the less government is needed in dealing with affairs, the better civil society it is (Taylor, 1999). Another remarkable characteristic of civil society is that it is a non-official social organization and process in contrast with government, such as civil organization of different kinds, various civil social movements and interest groups, all of which belong to the category of civil society (Yan, 2006).

Alexander (1999) points out that liberal discourse is used to summarise “the best” of a civil community and its code is considered to be sacred. It is the key value of sustainable development to endow local civil society with autonomy of future development, give them equal opportunities to participate in the construction of power, and free them from the complete dependence on command of technician elites. Davidoff (1965) attached great importance to the citizens’ democratic participation when making future plans. In his opinion, citizens are playing a greatly important role in making public strategy and citizens should not be excluded. Forester (1982) put forward a progressive planning theory with an aim of citizen participation to help citizens be able to participate in making future policies directly. According to the theory, only by free access to real information and unfair structure of politics and economy for citizens could they have the power of criticism and could the real democratic decision theory be possible to realise. The real future decision theory means
increasing the communication with citizens and listening carefully to the voices from citizens; in contrast, future decision theory which used to highlight essence has been doubted. The later one took science and technology theory as the only principle of action while excluded some important ideas such as justice and morality. However, the post-modern sustainable development view of humanity needs to participate in the future action together with citizens.

The Role of Participatory Process

According to CANARI policy brief (2005), participatory processes can contribute to a social integration agenda by:
1. Improving equitable economic and social development (particularly for marginalised stakeholders) through the use of devolved decision-making to determine how resources are managed and allocated.
2. Reducing the fragmentation which has developed over the years along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, education and political affiliation.
3. Restoring or building a social capital of trust, respect, cooperation and tolerance, which is a critical asset in the pursuit of sustainable development.

By involving citizens in decision-making processes, governments believe that people’s disaffection and distrust vis-à-vis public institutions would decrease (Fuchs 2007). In this logic, citizens are no longer seen as pure passive receptors or implementers of decisions taken at upper levels, but they concretely have to take part to the processes leading to a specific decision or policy. There are both advantages and drawbacks to citizen participation as illustrated in the table below.

Advantages of citizen participation
Enhancing citizen participation often focuses on the benefits of the process itself. According to Nelson and Wright (1995), the participation process acts as a transformative tool for social change. In addition, involving citizens is intended to produce better decisions and more efficiency benefits the society (Beierle, 1999; Thomas, 1995). Heberlein (1976) is also of the view that public involvement results in better decisions.

Table 1: The advantages of citizen participation in government decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision process</th>
<th>Advantages to citizen participants</th>
<th>Advantages to government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education (learn from and inform government representatives)</td>
<td>Education (learn from and inform citizens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persuade and enlighten government</td>
<td>Persuade citizens; build trust and allay anxiety or hostility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gain skills for activist citizenship</td>
<td>Build strategic alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Break gridlock; achieve outcomes</td>
<td>Gain legitimacy of decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gain some control over policy process</td>
<td>Avoid litigation costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better policy and implementation decisions</td>
<td>Better policy and implementation decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, pp. 56)
Disadvantages of Citizen Participation

Certain problems of citizen participation processes may be overcome by effective structuring, if resources permit. Some other problems suggest that some communities are poor candidates for citizen participation initiatives and measurable outcomes may be better achieved with other decision-making methods.

Table 2: The disadvantages of citizen participation in government decision making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision process</th>
<th>Disadvantages to citizen participants</th>
<th>Disadvantages to government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming (even dull)</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointless if decision is ignored</td>
<td>Costly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May backfire, creating more hostility toward government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse policy decision if heavily influenced by opposing interest groups</td>
<td>Loss of decision-making control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility of bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less budget for implementation of actual projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, pp. 58)

Participative Democracy

In a democracy, citizens participate in political and social activities that build communities and shape the nation. These activities can take place in government, places of worship or voluntary associations. This kind of civic responsibility creates productive, responsible, caring and contributing members of a democracy. Citizens must engage in civic participation in order to ensure the continuing life of the democracy. The quest for more democracy and social equality that spread in the sixties alimented a critical revision of liberal democracy leading democratic theory to divulgate the normative and practical advantages of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970; Cook & Morgan, 1971; Macpherson, 1977).

The idea of for community participation as a central mechanism for collaborative politics (i.e. participatory democracy) is seen to be an important aspect for sustainable development. Nowadays, a new way of conceiving private companies’ behaviour has been affirmed, stressing the need for private corporations to include social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in the interaction with their stakeholders (Persson 2007, Baron 2001). Even though the immediate aim of a company remains making profit, they have been encouraged to consider the implications of their actions that go well beyond the economic market. Hence, private companies have been called to be responsible also vis-à-vis the society they are embedded in. Corporate social responsibility has gained consensus through the years becoming an accepted code for companies’ behaviour full of ethical prescriptions vis-à-vis both their internal structure and their relations with social and physical environment (EC 2001, Gallino 2005).
Mauritius is considered as one of the best-governed, most stable and prosperous African countries. It is a democratic state that has promoted the development of its people since independence in 1968. In general, the government of Mauritius has managed the economy soundly, with relative fiscal transparency, good provision of education, sanitation, water and health services (EISA, 2008). The Mauritian Constitution’s main features include the rule of law and strict separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary. The country has managed its ethnic, religious and cultural diversity with maturity and tolerance. The vibrant business climate has been conducive to investment, with sophisticated financial and communications infrastructure. Compared to other African countries, as well as many developing and developed countries across a range of governance measures, Mauritius emerges at or near the top of the rankings.

Mauritius has been successively a Dutch, Portuguese, French and British colony. It became independent of Great Britain on 12 March 1968 and acceded to the status of Republic within the Commonwealth on 12 March 1992. The Constitution of independent Mauritius modelled after the Westminster system, is the “bedrock of Mauritian democracy” (Mohamedbhai, 2002). Critics have pointed out that participation of the public in the political process at regional, local and national levels starts and ends at the election booth on polling day. However, Mauritius is considered a successful democracy in the African context. Storey (1997) has argued, though, that Mauritius is a corporate state where decisions on major issues are thrashed out outside Parliament, after bargaining between the state and various strong corporate bodies like trade unions, employers’ federation, socio-religious bodies, socio-cultural groups, and so on. The annual compensation rate to employees has been for long the result of tripartite negotiations between the state, employers’ and trade union federations. Reform of education regarding the inclusion of oriental languages for the Primary School Certificate was discussed and negotiated between the State (Ministry of Education), religious bodies and other stakeholders. As far as governmental decisions are concerned, government consults stakeholders and civil society in general, not only over the budget, but also in the framing of various legislations. Ad hoc consultative committees involving different partners are sometimes set up. As for the implementation of policy, NGOs do have representatives on boards of parastatal or statutory bodies, whereby they are meant to be the relay between organized civil society and the implementation body/agency.

According to the EISA Report (2008), the civil society is quite dynamic in Mauritius but organised civil society engagement with parliament is weak. However, Bunwaree (2007) further argues that, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process in Mauritius has been almost a failed one and this may be the best illustration of the weakness of the Mauritian organised civil society. On one hand many speak of a vibrant civil society in Mauritius, while on the other hand the reality is that the country’s civil society organisations are fairly apathetic with little popular debate (Bunwaree, 2007). However, civil society has two instruments to interact directly with parliament namely by way of petition and by way of bills promoted through a member of parliament.

Dukhira in his book “History of Mauritius: Experiments in Democracy” (2002) underlines that the two important partners to bring about good governance are government (meaning all state actors such as central government, the civil service and other public authorities) and all the citizens of the country. He postulates that: “The responsibility devolves on Government,
the civil service and the police to achieve social and economic goals, ensure peace and order, exercise authority and enforce laws”. He also adds: “Participation and citizen involvement should not be mere slogans. (…) Nor is participation an end in itself. It is vital to the effective delivery of services and to further democracy. ”

Moreover, representation and consultation exist in governmental and other public or semi-public institutions that affect groups or the whole population is a fact. Those who are excluded from the talks can still have the opportunity to express their views through the media, although it is the latter which decide which voices are heard. However, the contribution of the media to the vibrancy of democracy in Mauritius cannot be underestimated. The right to demonstrate also exists, just like the possibility to start a campaign to support or reject a public or private endeavour. It is possible for public gatherings to be organised by citizens and/or organisations to express a standpoint or to voice protests against certain projects, issues, or decisions taken by the Authorities. Organisations are sometimes set up to protest against certain projects or issues, and they are sometimes successful in making decision-makers review projects that are, for example, not environmentally-friendly (e.g. the case of Vallée de Ferney). However, it is to be pointed out that, certain projects can be initiated for political or financial interests.

In 2008, ‘Maurice Ile Durable’ (MID) is a long term vision set up by the present government, aimed at promoting sustainable development. The main thrust of MID is to make Mauritius a world model of sustainable development, particularly in the context of small-island states. The protection of the environment and the social dimension of development are crucial aspects of MID. At the heart of policy making is consultation with civil society. Since last year, the consultation process for the development of the National Policy for a Sustainable Mauritius has been launched in ensuring that needs and aspirations of the Mauritian society are reflected in the White Paper, which will be submitted to the Cabinet. Several consultative meetings comprising of open public meetings, special interest groups meetings (NGOs, private sector, women and youth organisations, etc), meetings with district and local government and consultation with the ministries were held. This consultative process provides a platform for the different stakeholders to participate in the MID project.

Sometimes it can be also too late for the public or any group to react when decisions have not been made known – not only to the public, but sometimes also to institutions concerned. Information can be at times published in obscure newspapers and consequently, the information not known until it is too late to act or react. Although certain decisions taken by the authorities might be justified, the lack of information, communication, and consultation not just regarding the public, but regarding existing stakeholder bodies mandated for the very specific purpose, as well as specialists, or citizens directly concerned, leave an impression of lack of transparency and of democracy.

**METHODOLOGY**

This paper sheds some light on citizen participation in the Mauritian society. It also contributes to the scarce literature on participative democracy in the African continent. The main objective of this study is to investigate the current state of participative democracy among the different stakeholders of the economy namely the private sector, the public sector and non-governmental institutions. More precisely, the aim is to evaluate the extent to which participative democracy in its different forms is being applied in the various institutions and
organisations. It also analyses the stakeholder’s opinions on the importance of citizen participation and the constraints faced by the citizens in participating in the development process.

For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary data were collected. A quantitative approach was adopted to evaluate the extent of participative democracy to have a better understanding of the degree of participation at different levels. In-depth interviews were also carried out and seen as an appropriate research technique in order to explore and capture the perspectives of the respondents namely in the government, private sector and the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Boyce & Neale (2006) stressed the importance of in-depth interviewing, as a qualitative research technique since it involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents and their perspectives are used to explore a particular idea, program, or situation.

The first phase of the study consisted in identifying the stakeholders to be included in the study. Stratified random sampling was used in terms of gender. A representative sample of 30 respondents in different institutions was selected and responded positively to participate in the study as shown in table 3. High-level representatives of ministries, private firms, CSOs were interviewed to have a better understanding of what is the present status of participative democracy in the institutions and its application as well as policies being implemented to further promote participatory democracy at various levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministries</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs: NGOs and trade unions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As far as the public sector is concerned, 10 respondents were selected from 5 ministries (out of 19 ministries). In the case of the private sector, 10 respondents from the 5 leading companies in the field of banking, insurance, offshore and textile participated in the study. From the above table, it can be seen that 10 respondents from different in civil society organisations, whereby both men and women in NGOs and trade unions were interviewed in order, to analyse the levels of participation by different categories of people.

The second phase of the study consisted of carrying out in-depth interviews. An interview schedule was designed to carry out the in-depth interviews with the different stakeholders. Questions asked were mainly open-ended. Interviews focused on the different themes such as the concept of participative democracy, its relevance, awareness and application in the different organisations and institutions and its contribution to sustainable development. The importance of citizen participation and the constraints faced by citizens were also discussed. Apart from the primary data collection through the in-depth interviews, secondary data were also collected in the form of academic journals, studies conducted by researchers on citizen participation, survey reports by international agencies, company publications, annual reports and press cuttings.
FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

After the collection of primary and secondary data, interview data were transcribed and analysed. Key findings were grouped under the three main themes namely:

- Concept of participative democracy (awareness, relevance, applicability).
- Importance of citizen participation to strengthen democracy and development.
- Constraints faced in adopting citizen participation and the concept of participative democracy.
- Concept of participative democracy (awareness, relevance, applicability)

The first aspect relates principally to whether the respondents were aware of the concept of participative democracy. It can be observed that out of 30 respondents, only 14 knew the concept while the remaining 16 respondents were not aware of participative democracy. A breakdown by sector shows that most respondents within the private sector knew the concept whereas there seems to a lack of knowledge and information on participative democracy among respondents in the public sector and the CSOs. This confirms the need for greater flow of information across the ministries or greater sensitisation on the concept across the different departments of the public sector as well as non-governmental organisations.

When respondents were asked about the application of the concept of participative democracy, the responses which were obtained relate to different aspects as discussed below:

- **Equal opportunities at all levels**
  The respondents mainly in the public and private sector argued that by giving equal opportunities to their employees, they are actually adopting the concept of participative democracy. This promotes the idea that everyone within an organisation has an equal chance to apply and be selected for posts, to be trained and/or promoted and to have their employment terminated equally and fairly. There is no discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, racial origin, religious affiliation, disability or marital status.

- **Flatter organisational structure**
  For most respondents in the public, private and civil society organisations, a flatter structure means less hierarchy, wider span of control, and also more employee empowerment. It is the route to freedom from bureaucracy, speedier communication and the development of a customer focused culture in which team working and high involvement working practices will thrive. It encourages participative management whereby the firm promotes the relationship between the organisation and its workers and other stakeholders. It helps in maintaining high levels of effectiveness, productivity, innovativeness, and worker motivation in an increasingly dynamic, competitive environment.

- **Regular meetings with staffs at different levels**
  Another aspect of participative democracy is regular meeting with employees. According to the majority of respondents in the public, private and civil society organisations, this seems to be one important characteristic of the institutions. A high percentage of them claim that worker committees meet regularly and discuss matters with management.
More female executives than in the past
25 out of 30 respondents in the public, private and civil society organisations pointed out there has been an increasing number of the female executives since the last ten years. It has also been observed that women have become more empowered; giving them the opportunity to seek career progression which previously was very difficult. It can be analysed that the greater involvement of women in the decision making process of the firms is also a way of adopting the concept of participative democracy.

Employment of physically disabled workers
5 respondents in the public sector said that, another approach to applying participatory democracy is to give the opportunity to disabled people who can work to be part of the team and be offered the same opportunities as able-bodied people.

Training
For most stakeholders interviewed, training is important to all the workers. Respondents in the private sector pointed out that firms ensure that all employees have accessed to appropriate learning opportunities which are in line with the organisational needs.

High union membership
Some respondents in the private firms argued that there seems to be a high union membership and they have good relationships with trade unions and often consider their claims and needs. On other hand, respondents in the CSOs argued that the unions in the public sector have become more active as compared to long ago.

Greater coordination and networking among NGOs
Most respondents claimed that the public and private organisations liaise more with non-governmental organisations especially for the corporate social responsibility projects. Out of 10, 7 respondents in the CSOs believed that there is greater coordination and networking among the different NGOs and also between the private firms, public institutions and the NGOs. This is likely to be helpful in creating greater synergy across the three sectors in involving people at all levels in one way or another in the policies or decisions of the economy.

Importance of citizen participation to strengthen democracy and development
Respondents have highlighted on the different roles played by the state, private sector and the CSOs in creating a good society before elaborating on the importance of citizen participation. Most respondents have said the three sectors namely the state, private sector and the civil society should collaborate together in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development. Out of 30, 20 respondents interviewed maintained that the role of the state is to provide employment, promote good governance and stability, maintain a high standard of living, provide the necessary infrastructure, access to education and health facilities and ensuring law and order. These respondents also added that the government should create a good economic environment, extend services to the most vulnerable and underprivileged groups and fight corruption and abuse of power. Since Mauritius is a multiethnic country, most respondents said that cultural diversity should be respected by citizens.
Most respondents believed that citizen participation is important since it benefits both the citizens and the participation process itself. They also said that engaging citizens is supposed to produce better and efficient decisions. This is line with the studies carried out by Beierle (1999) & Thomas (1995), as mentioned earlier in the literature review. Better decision making would lead to better policy making outcomes and sustainable development. Out of 30 respondents, 27 argued that citizens should more informed about their rights and roles. Moreover, findings of the MID Report (2009) also pointed out that participative democracy is a neglected and ignored concept.

Furthermore, some 15 respondents both in the public sector and civil society organisations argued that the citizen’s roles should include organising themselves into association for collective action and forming political parties. This is in line with the findings of the Commonwealth Foundation Summary Report (2000).

On certain issues of national interest government sometimes initiates a consultation process with the citizens prior to decision-making. Some respondents in the private sector and CSOs gave the example of the consultation process for the development of the National Policy for a Sustainable Mauritius (Maurice Ile Durable National Policy).

Some respondents in the private sector also gave the example of the different stakeholders involved in the consultation process in budgeting. However, they also mentioned that ordinary people should also be involved if the budget is to become pro-poor. It is important that the poor themselves participate in its formulation, implementation and monitoring in a manner that is equal, inclusive and collegial, which is in line with the views of Khan (2005).

Most of the respondents in the public sector and the CSOs pointed out that there is a positive interaction between government and civil society and civil society influences government policies and programmes and contributes positively in terms of promoting transparency and accountability. This point has also been put forward in the EISA report (2008).

Regarding the written press and private radio stations, some 25 respondents argued that they provide an appropriate forum for the citizens to participate in the formulation of policies. There is a very old tradition of free press in Mauritius dating back to early 19th century. Journalists of the private sector feel that they are free but there is sometimes obvious disregard of ethics. However, the public broadcaster is in a more delicate position since the journalists cannot give their opinions and have been considered as being a tool for government propaganda.

However, some respondents in the private sector have argued that leaders of the civil society and other opinion leaders have easy access to their representatives in Parliament, to Ministers and to the press. Therefore they use these channels of communication to lobby and make their views heard. But gaining access to these people or institutions does not necessarily mean that they succeed in lobbying for democracy.

Therefore, it can be analysed from the findings, citizens should be given more information and education about their rights, roles and responsibilities. Voicing out their opinions on matters that concern them and giving the opportunities to the voiceless and the powerless to participate in decision making act as a tool of empowering people in promoting governance and development. Citizen participation is an educational empowering process in which
people in partnership with those able to assist them, identify their needs and assume the responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess the collective actions that are necessary based on shared interest on what one can do best.

- **Constraints faced in adopting citizen participation and the concept of participative democracy**

For many respondents in the private sector, this concept is still new and they strongly believe it will be difficult to apply the model of participative democracy given the rigid nature of the organisation. The present structure of the institution may often not be favourable to participatory democracy. Further they maintained that wider participation of employees in the organisational structure or participation of community groups may lead to conflict of interest. This may thereby represent a hindrance to the good functioning of their business.

Time and cost are the two factors mentioned by some 18 respondents and they said that participating in community projects can be sometimes time consuming and costly. They prefer to devote their time on their work and family matters. Furthermore, respondents in the private sector and CSOs mentioned that most of the decisions are top down and made for personal gain or even sometimes decisions of the citizens are ignored. It can be analysed that these findings are in line with the literature review. However, some 15 respondents in the public sector and CSOs highlighted some other factors such as corruption in the corridors of power, lack of basic necessities, poor communication skills, inadequate knowledge and education, fear of criticism and harassment, lack of information and sometimes women’s roles are not appreciated. The main shortcomings of the women organisations, trade unions and other groups in influencing policy making are the lack of clear objectives and commitment, capacity building and resources (both human and financial), networking, independence vis-à-vis government and political parties and structures in ensuring real civil society participation in decision-making processes. These shortcomings were also put forward in the EISA report (2008). Time was also a factor which some of the respondents consider and hindered their participation in community development projects.

The concept of worker participation represents a popular theme in analysing the world of work. It refers to any arrangement which is designed to involve low cadre employees (workers) in the important decision making within the workplace. From the interviews, most stakeholders believe in the strong participation of employees, women and trade unions in decision making process of the institutions/organisations. Trade unionists pointed out that there is a low representation and participation of women in the trade union both in the public and private sectors. Form the findings, it can be seen that that some trade unions have a weak leadership and members do not support their unions for fear of a backlash.

Besides greater involvement of employees and trade unions in the decision making process of the firms, the organisations also contend that they consider the views of the community in their decision making. Private companies have been called to be responsible also vis-à-vis the society and corporate social responsibility has gained consensus through the years in becoming an accepted code for companies’ behaviour which is full of ethical prescriptions vis-à-vis both their internal structure and their relations with social and physical environment (EC 2001, Gallino 2005). Similarly, findings revealed that, private firms contribute to society through employment creation, infrastructural development, provide school materials in deprived regions and involve in other projects of corporate social
Responsibility. Respondents in the private sector argued that the members of the community are sometimes invited to participate in the CSR projects in order to meet their needs. However, respondents in the CSOs believed that there should be more collaboration between the business and the NGO sector. Respondents in the civil society sector believed that very few companies are genuine in their actions and many are simply eye-wash and used as window-dressing. It can be analysed that the private sector needs to demonstrate genuine visibility and collaborative partnership is essential in addressing societal problems.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustainable development can only truly exist within systems of governance that are characterised by accountable and transparent decision-making that provide for the participation of all citizens. Participatory processes in determining how resources are allocated and empowering the citizens to be pro-active in decision-making are a precondition for the “sustainability” of all development issues. It demands a strong civil society made up of community organisations and NGOs with the capacity to represent their constituents and provide effective methods for citizen participation. Panyarachun (2008) further argues that to foster a sustainable democracy, a nation must focus its efforts on building a system which empowers people not only through the right to vote, but also through norms, institutions and values that support that right and make it meaningful.

The decision on the future democracy cannot be separated from citizen participation. Deepening democracy, giving a voice to the citizens, allowing for a bottom-up and ensuring that citizens’ concerns and views, are issues to be taken on board in shaping and formulating policies that will affect their lives and livelihoods. Bunwaree (2007) noted that the nature of civil society in Mauritius needs to be examined to ensure citizen’s participation and empowerment. New NGOs are mushrooming daily but to what extent are they truly making a difference on the ground?

Based on the findings, below are some issues that constitute serious challenges for organisations and civil society actors in promoting greater citizen participation in decision making processes.

Building sustainable development through participation – Bottom-up approach

Participation is now seen as a necessary part of development, but the gulf needs to be bridged between rhetoric and action. A bottom-up approach must be adopted instead of a prevailing culture of decision-making that is top down. People’s participation is still seen as a threat and is largely associated with a loss of power by the state and its agencies. Where the notion of citizen participation has been adopted it has tended to overvalue “consultation” and undervalue actual involvement. In this context there is a need to clarify the meaning of participation for government, private sector and civil society organisations and citizens, with an emphasis placed on its potential to transform society.

Promoting a rights-based approach

The predominant approach to governance is still coloured by considerations of effective and efficient government. Efforts aimed at institutionalising civil society participation have made greater reference to a rights-based approach to sustainable development. This approach is not
yet widespread but its discourse, characterised by explicit references to human rights, equity and justice, needs to be championed by state and civil society organisations alike.

**Taking good governance from discourse to practice**

Good governance is on the agenda of national governments and civil society organisations, yet the prevailing culture hinders the development of institutions that promote the participation of citizens in development. A shift is needed whereby states view their power as an opportunity to act in concert with civil society for the common good, rather than as a means to control it.

**Leading by example – Internal governance**

Civil society organisations need to become examples of good governance and they need to call for greater democracy and transparency. Organisations need to be able to demonstrate that they facilitate active participation both inside and outside the organisation in ensuring equal opportunities and inclusion.

**Demonstrating that participation works and Building capacity**

While decision makers have been sensitised to the need for participation, there is plenty to be done to show how it can improve people’s lives. This means there is need for example to develop and promote methods for monitoring and evaluation so that the impacts and outcomes of participation can be assessed. A new framework must encompass all aspects of organisational developmental needs that would equip and place citizens – particularly, women, the poor and the marginalised at the centre of decision-making processes.

**Making linkages**

There is a need for CSOs to build alliances and linkages with other stakeholders (governmental, nongovernmental as well as from the private sector) in order to inform and mainstream sustainable development debates. By doing this, civil society can help to redefine politics.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


EISA. (2008), *Consolidating Democratic Governance in the SADC Region: Mauritius, Johannesburg, South Africa*.


