

Participation, Empowerment and Sustainability: (How) Do the Links Work?

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Summary. This paper investigates the relationship between participation, empowerment and sustainability. Using the multisectoral and multicontextual experience of participation amassed in South Africa, both pre- and post-*apartheid*, we address two questions: does participation lead to empowerment; and does empowerment, in turn, lead to sustainability? Further, what external factors mediate and influence that relationship? Analysis shows that a relationship does exist and is contingent on a number of contextual factors, crucial to its success. Findings are discussed in terms of the international literature on community participation and local democracy, and policy implications are identified.

Introduction

Community participation, in all its forms, has become an increasingly important aspect of urban and rural policy in both North and South over the past 20 years (Mitlin and Thompson, 1995). However, despite the strong interest in empowerment and participation, both concepts are vague and poorly defined, causing confusion over expectations and over the evaluation of outcomes of the participatory development process (McArthur, 1995). In addition, we suggest that the vagueness associated with the concepts of participation and empowerment has contributed to the poor understanding of the relationship between participation, empowerment and sustainability—another area which has also been heavily criticised for lacking definition and clarity. Therefore, before analysing this relationship, we explore the concepts of participation, empowerment and

sustainability, putting forward our own understanding of these concepts, in a development context.

Before proceeding, it is important to locate this paper within the extremely wide debate, and diverse interpretations, of sustainability. In this context, our understanding of sustainability is in terms of the longer-term viability of development projects and not the more popular conception of environmental sustainability—of natural resources, for example. While not wishing to diminish the importance of this particular interpretation of sustainability, its scope falls beyond that of this paper. Our definition of sustainability in this paper is confined to the viability of particular development projects and the establishment of ‘socially sustainable conditions’ (Friedmann, 1996). We are aiming to clarify the relationship between participation in devel-

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opment projects, empowerment and development sustainability, and to offer meaningful insights into the design of development projects, thus enabling successful projects to contribute towards fulfilling the broader conception of sustainable development.

Empowerment: What Is It?

Despite the centrality of the term 'empowerment' to both political and theoretical debate today (Perkins *et al.*, 1996), it is often defined only vaguely or by implication, in contrast with a state of 'disempowerment' tacitly assumed to have a generally accepted definition (see, for example, Marshall, 1998). The discussion can usefully start from the housing sector, however, for a generic view of empowerment as "any process by which people's control (collective or individual) over their lives is increased" (Somerville, 1998, p. 233). It follows that 'empowerment' relates to power relations and, as a result, the term is rarely neutral. Like 'partnership' (Atkinson, 1999), 'empowerment' is a discursive construct, its assigned meaning resulting from the exercise of power (Friedmann, 1996). Because the term cannot be neutral and because the way it is framed can steer action, its definitions vary with context and over time, as regards a number of issues.

The first issue over which variation can be found, is that of a 'unit of empowerment'. The definition adopted by the *Dictionary of Social Work* focuses on empowerment as a means to the realisation of rights (Barker, 1991, in Zippay, 1995). By implication, its importance is seen to lie in improving a community's negotiations with external agents. It sees the essential characteristic of empowerment as "the process of helping a *group or community* to achieve political influence or relevant legal authority" (Barker, 1991, in Zippay, 1995, p. 74; emphasis added). Increasingly, however, in the North, as central government has withdrawn from direct service provision, empowerment is seen as a strengthening of *individuals'* positions in the market for privatised and

semi-privatised services, based on a philosophy which is both individualistic and consumerist (Sanderson, 1999). At the same time, embodying a development agency view, the World Bank Group (1999) sees empowerment as the transfer of control over decisions and resources to *communities* or *organisations*.

A second important differentiation is to do with the purpose of empowerment. Unlike the *Dictionary of Social Work*, the World Bank Group's (1999) emphasis is not on empowerment as a facilitator of rights in general, but as a realisation of rights to enable greater control over livelihood resources. The ultimate target, it is implied, is independence by the community from external agents in formulating its agenda and managing its affairs so that, ultimately, only funds need be transferred from donor to agent. The process involves capacity-building, particularly in management skills, transfers of authority from donor to recipient and support for new initiatives by stakeholders (World Bank Group, 1999). This is a definition which, by implication, focuses on the management of resources, in the context of management of resource transfers between North and South, and acting within a broad range of political structures. The outcome is a notion of empowerment which focuses on the intellectual and social assets of communities or organisations.

Another form of empowerment is the development of individuals and this focuses primarily on 'human capital'. The Northern concept of social work largely assumes a free or semi-free society, in which economic and social constraints act as the prime barriers to realisation of rights. This approach is apparent in development studies alongside the agency approach. Friedmann (1996, p. 164), for example, considers empowerment at this more personal and individual level, where he defines psychological empowerment as a "consequence of participating in collective action and gaining greater control over the means to one's livelihood". In this view, social networks and organisations are of importance because they can contribute to indi-

vidual, or household, empowerment. This is closely related to concepts of individuals' 'social' or 'organisational capital'.

The focus on individuals in general, and on livelihoods in particular, also serves to some extent to neutralise issues of partiality. Where power has both negative and positive connotations, Friedmann (1996, p. 162) defines it in the sense of 'capacity'—for example, the ability to read and write, which is empowering.

For the purposes of the paper presented here, we agree with Somerville (1998), that empowerment can take place at distinct organisational levels, ranging from individuals, through households to communities. In both cases, we accept empowerment as being an increase in influence and control through an acquisition of knowledge and skills. However, while Somerville recognises that control may be exercised in a number of spheres and by a range of social groupings, the issue of its sustainability over time is assumed, rather than argued. It is in this connection that participation is particularly important.

Participation: How Is Empowerment To Be Achieved?

Participation has been associated with the development of an engaged and capable body civic. As Gaye and Diallo (1997, p. 12) observed

the newly empowered local community, through democratic decision-making and problem solving, matures into a body capable of interacting collectively with the local authority and even with agencies from higher levels of government.

In this section, we look at three aspects of the participatory relationship, to assess its quality and impact over time.

Is It 'Deep'?

Essentially a question about the extent and quality of influence exerted over the process by participants, this is closely related to the debate about the aims of participation.

Covering a number of options, between co-option and agency, is Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' (Arnstein, 1969).

Writing about South African development, de Beer (1996) distinguishes between two approaches to participation. One approach, characterised by 'involvement' and prevalent in South African government programmes before the end of *apartheid* in 1994, is perceived more as the co-option of communities in the implementation of projects resulting from top-down decision-making. The emphasis is on institutional initiatives with outsiders identifying needs and planning responses, and ultimately results in the "failure of participatory involvement as a development approach" as very little learning takes place and the ownership of development is never taken (de Beer, 1996, p. 68).

The second approach to participation, is characterised by 'empowerment' and is linked to the new South Africa, the strong grassroots structures which evolved during *apartheid* and South Africa's particular approach to development embodied in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which evolved from them (see below). It involves decentralising control and decision-making to civil society. Empowerment thus involves action at the grassroots level, creating self-awareness and the transformation of society, leading to a negotiated power-sharing in, for example, urban management (Abbott, 1996). In a similar interpretation, Friedmann (1996, p. 162) refers to empowerment as the "self-organisation of the poor" (in a co-operative and not insurgent manner) as a means of surviving, preserving some dignity and gaining control over the means to a livelihood.

This debate, essentially about the extent and influence of participation, runs parallel to a separate and broader debate about the objectives of participation (Abbott, 1996)—the 'ends-' versus the 'means-oriented' approaches (Rakodi, 1991). Partial participation, controlled and managed by the state or by some agency external to a project's (or programme's) locale, may stem from a range of objectives. The achievement

of either set of objectives implies a cost, which can vary.

Where participation is used as a means to legitimate the predetermined actions of an outside agent, the costs may be political, including exacerbation of local rivalries; or developmental, including the imposition of inappropriate development and, therefore, of developments which are not sustained over time. On the other hand, where participation is used primarily as a means to conscientisation, its role is largely as a political tool, and it involves a significant reduction in the number and quality of development issues which can be addressed (Abbott, 1996).

A different paradigm sees empowerment as the true end of participation, although this is closely related to a paradigm in which participation is seen as an end in itself (Friedmann, 1996; Rakodi, 1991). Indeed, a strong link has been shown between participation and empowerment (Perkins *et al.*, 1996, Atkinson, 1999), although some authors have questioned the directness of this link (Somerville, 1998).

In the paper presented here, we attempt to examine the links between participation and empowerment through a comparative analysis of the depth and extent of community participation on the one hand, and of its outcomes in terms of individual and collective empowerment, on the other.

Is It Stable?

Waddock (1989) examines the notion of social partnerships, or 'social problem-solving mechanisms' (more commonly known as public-private partnerships), between otherwise-independent organisations, over a common interest. The term 'social partnership' is chosen to convey "a collaborative action in which organisations from multiple sectors interact to achieve common ends" (Waddock, 1991, p. 480). In her (1989) paper, Waddock (p. 80) examines the evolution of social partnerships, as the product of a range of environmental forces, which determines the content or focus of the partnership, through three concurrent and iterative stages.

These are: issue crystallisation, coalition-building and purpose formulation, which may include a re-evaluation and possible broadening of the agenda. Social partnerships are tenuous relationships which involve collaboration and culminate either appropriately, after the successful attainment of a clear objective, or unfortunately, if an issue remains unresolved (Waddock, 1989, 1991).

A further body of opinion suggests that communities are themselves 'temporal beings' and change over time. For example, when environmental issues are at stake, even where communities may be geographically constructed, "communities ... are formed around specific issues" (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1993, p. 101). In other words, the allegiances within communities are not permanent and the focus of strife may shift. Over a period of time, such as the life of a construction project, both the issues and the constitution of these *ad hoc* communities may change (Lyons and Smuts, 1999). Even within a relatively stable institutional framework then, partnerships may be *ad hoc* or institutionally oriented. The inevitable conclusion must be that the constitution of participatory development, based as it is on social partnerships (Waddock, 1989), cannot be assumed to remain constant over time.

Although participation in a development context need not necessarily involve public-private partnerships, this analysis allows the formulation of a clear distinction in type, which is more generally applicable: while some participatory arrangements are long-lived, others are short-lived. More importantly, although some are based on deeply institutionalised structures, others are constructed *ad hoc* and do not necessarily survive in the longer term. Thus, the very structure of participation can vary in its conception and its participants may vary over time.

In this paper, we examine building developments, from inception to completion and occupancy, over a period of at least 10 years, with the objective of identifying the impact of changes within communities, on the extent and nature of participation.

Is it Formal?

Although some writers focus heavily on inter-agency conflicts of interest in service delivery (Berry and McGreal, 1995), others have suggested that conflicts within communities may be just as important in the development process. Conflict can also arise between well-informed sections of the community in the development process (Grant, 1994). It has been suggested that some players "are entering the participation process with quite different, and possibly conflicting, motivations and objectives" (McArthur, 1995, p. 70). A growing body of opinion now suggests that intracommunity conflict in the development process is interest-based and that sub-groups form along structural lines (Clark, 1996). Although there is some debate regarding the respective roles of economics, gender and culture (Sharp, 1996), there is clear understanding that internal conflict can fundamentally jeopardise project success, while physical development projects offer a real opportunity for focusing community-building processes (Asthana, 1994).

Against this background, a number of alternatives have evolved to formalise relationships in the process, not only among participating agencies (see, for example, Waddock, 1989), but also within participating communities. It is on the latter that we focus in this paper. We comparatively examine the formal structures of the participatory process within a number of communities and attempt to identify their implications for the extent and nature of participation on the one hand, and for empowerment of individuals and groups on the other.

Sustainability

Although the conservation of physical capital, particularly natural resources, was the original aim of sustainable development (WCED, in Pezzoli, 1997), it has rapidly become apparent that local environmental sustainability requires a commitment to local care. This in turn assumes a certain level of awareness and empowerment amongst com-

munities, thus linking environmental objectives with social, political and economic development (Selman, 1998).

Essential to empowerment is the idea that change is interactive and that both donor and recipient cultures must undergo change over time, with new networks and norms of trust and reciprocity evolving in the face of national and global change, which are different from traditional groupings (Buckland, 1998). The corollary of this argument must be that sustainable development cannot be static. Accepting Drakakis-Smith's (1995) argument that sustainability should not be confounded with sustained development, we nevertheless suggest that sustainability can only be measured as sustained change.

We accept that the frugal management of biophysical resources must be seen as part of a broader process of sustainable development and that we need

development which addresses present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

In turn, we define sustainable development as the ability acquired and held by communities over time, to initiate and control development, thus enabling communities to participate more effectively in their own destiny (Buckland, 1998, p. 237).

On the Three-way Relationship

The aim of this paper is to analyse the relationship between participation, empowerment and sustainability. It uses experience of the participatory process in South Africa to exemplify the links between participation, empowerment and sustainability, and the factors which affect those links.

The empowerment debate acknowledges that, through empowerment, gains can be made in a number of interrelated spheres, from the individual to the collective. This is paralleled in the analytical framework used to underpin the debate on sustainable livelihoods (Carney, 1999) which recognises implicitly that sustainability (and empower-

ment) must be achieved at both an individual and a collective level.

In turn, there is an on-going debate on the relationship between individual empowerment and collective action where, at certain levels of analysis (for example, in the realm of government and non-governmental organisations), the individual is assumed to be powerless. The argument put forward in this paper, however, is that gains in power and control, too, can be sustained, or fail to be sustained, at a number of levels and that the level of the individual is of key importance to the outcome.

This argument has three components:

- (1) There is a strong link between participatory development and sustainable development.
- (2) This link works through a process of empowerment at several organisational levels.
- (3) The link between participation and empowerment is vulnerable, even in an official environment which endorses both.

Methods

In order to address the relationship between participation, empowerment and sustainability, we looked at 18 community-based development projects, of which 8 are discussed in the present paper. All are sited in South Africa where post-*apartheid* development policy has the idea of empowerment at its core. The projects are located in the 3 main metropolitan areas of the country, allowing a spread of institutional, physical and cultural conditions to be assessed. Within the sphere of community-led initiatives, we have focused on projects involving the provision of public amenity buildings, which aim to address socioeconomic imbalances.

Data on each project had to provide a multidimensional view of that project, including:

- the full history of the project management, throughout the project cycle(s);
- the extent of participation at various times,

in terms of ‘breadth’ (i.e. numbers of people involved);

—and in terms of ‘depth’ (i.e. the extent to which influence and control over the project were in the hands of members of the local community);

—peoples’ reasons for participation and, particularly, for non-participation, and

—the broader picture of local political, cultural and economic conditions.

In examining these projects, we follow them through the project cycle to their successful completion—or failed completion. However, the notion of a ‘successfully completed’ project is open to interpretation. In this paper, we take it to mean: successful completion of the physical facilities in terms of the project brief; successful management of the programmed operation of the project; and, that it serves the needs of the community and is serving its intended purpose.

The data gathered were largely qualitative, and came from four sources:

- (1) *Evaluation workshops*: based on Action Planning workshops (Hamdi and Goethert, 1997), the evaluation workshops, in which community members and representatives of other participating organisations were invited to present their ideas, were organised at each site to elicit information about conflict within communities, and between communities and external agencies.
- (2) *Interviews with key informants*: these were questionnaire-based and semi-structured, and took place within each community and with operatives in several related sectors, provided detailed information on project histories and their relation to policy and institutional factors.
- (3) *Household interviews* (held in six selected projects): these were also questionnaire-based and semi-structured and provided detailed information (relative to other socioeconomic data) on individuals’ and households’ levels of participation and reasons for participation.
- (4) *Ward level data from the 1996 census*:

the data, covering a range of basic socioeconomic variables, were used to quantify structural problems in the communities.

All projects selected have in common a partnership involving the community, local government (if only as a ground landlord), funders (from both public and private sources), consultants, who acted in a range of capacities, and, to a lesser extent, the central state. In terms of South Africa's national policy framework (described below), these projects had roots which went back more than 10 years prior to the RDP, and they continued to develop and change after the introduction of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR).

Background: South Africa's Policy Framework

All development projects in South Africa take place within the framework and guidelines of South Africa's national development policy—the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was officially implemented in 1994. The adoption of the RDP as the official policy and cornerstone of the new government (Blumenfeld, 1996) has been described as

the most important significant statement on South African society since the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 (Friend, 1994, p. 36).

The RDP's main objective was to redress the socioeconomic imbalances and extreme poverty that beleaguered many communities after *apartheid*, ultimately achieving social, political and economic justice through a 'people-driven process', characterised by 'empowerment through participation' (Blumenfeld, 1996; Carolus, 1994; de Beer, 1996). Emerging from grassroots development strategies during the *apartheid* era and attracting widespread support, the RDP quickly became a powerful symbol for reconciliation and reconstruction.

Empowerment is the key concept behind

the RDP and this idea quickly filtered down from national policy to influence the delivery of development at the community level. Municipalities drew up local guidelines and policies, which prioritised empowerment and participation and were bound to the principles of the RDP, to structure local-level development. Other organisations involved in development work, such as parastatals, amended their policies in accordance with the principles of the RDP.

The RDP is constituted around six basic principles which, "form the basis of its underlying economic and political philosophy" (ANC, 1994, p. 1) and whose underlying objective is to carry forward development in South Africa, while reinforcing and advancing processes of social and political change. Listed below, these principles, which had been enshrined for some time in grassroots politics and the practise of NGOs in the course of the anti-*apartheid* struggle, embody a clear conceptualisation of South Africa's approach to participatory development. Any development process must:

- (1) Integrate all levels of the state together with non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.
- (2) Be 'people-driven' and be "not about the delivery of goods ... but about active involvement and growing empowerment".
- (3) Combat exclusion and divisiveness and strive for peace and security for all through fair representation, and "must reflect the racial and gender composition ... and provide fairness and equality".
- (4) Link reconstruction to economic development and economic growth, and incorporate concepts of sustainability, distribution, human resource development and environmental management.
- (5) Democratisise the country through active participation of the citizenry in decision-making.
- (6) Projects should strive for a convergence between developed and developing sections of the community through a strategic approach to development in South

Africa's 'Third World'-type (or developing) communities (ANC, 1994).

In 1996, a new macroeconomic policy (GEAR) was introduced to ensure a competitive and growing economy with sufficient levels of job creation; the redistribution of incomes and opportunities in favour of the poor; equitable access to social services; and a safe and secure environment (ANC, 1997).

There is an on-going debate about the relationship between the RDP and GEAR, and the impact of GEAR on the RDP, argued differently from the perspectives of social scientists, development practitioners and economists. This debate is closely linked to the debate over the success of the RDP, which emerged within a year of the 1994 elections (Blumenfeld, 1996). The differences in interpretation are found at every level of South Africa's political and social structures. One view is that, with the government's failure to meet the high expectations of many South Africans, the RDP policies were officially abandoned in 1996 and replaced a few months later with those of GEAR (Blumenfeld, 1996; Padayachee, 1994). An opposing view, voiced more frequently in development circles, is that the introduction of GEAR has had little influence at the local level, because of the strong commitment of partnerships and local government to RDP principles.

Case Studies

The case studies (see Table 1 and Figure 1) were analysed with respect to their sustainability on two counts: personal empowerment and community empowerment. Following from the objectives of the paper, outlined above, these questions were addressed:

- What form did participation take?
- Was it accompanied by personal empowerment?
- Was it accompanied by collective empowerment?

In both cases, we ask:

- Under what conditions was empowerment sustained?
- Was it accompanied by sustained development of buildings and services?

Participation

The management of each of the projects was carried out by an executive committee. These committees were elected and appointed on behalf of broader bodies, which varied among communities. In some cases, they were working on behalf of voluntary associations (AX, RH), or Section 21 non-profit companies, formed specifically to promote that project (VM, ZM, HL, AP). In others, they were working on behalf of Community Development Trusts (NN). (See Appendix for details of interview sources.) This differentiation was, however, more or less irrelevant from the point of view of the willingness and ability of committees to involve a broad array of residents in the process. In this respect, projects varied widely, despite the similar frequency and regularity of formal 'report back' meetings everywhere.

The extent to which decision-making was broadly based, making the committee an implementer of decisions taken more broadly and based on information which was genuine and timely, varied widely and was largely associated with the existence of a strong local democratic culture and of relatively strong local democratic institutions. Thus, in Langa, where a strong development forum has evolved, incorporating both the directly elected representatives of each area and the management of local cultural and business enterprises, both Section 21 companies and voluntary associations had a high degree of accountability and inclusive practices (CR, EH). In contrast, where a broader community did not exist, participation was mainly formal (BB, KN, SM).

Sustaining Personal Empowerment

The principles of the RDP, incorporated in local and municipal frameworks, were evident to some degree in every project we

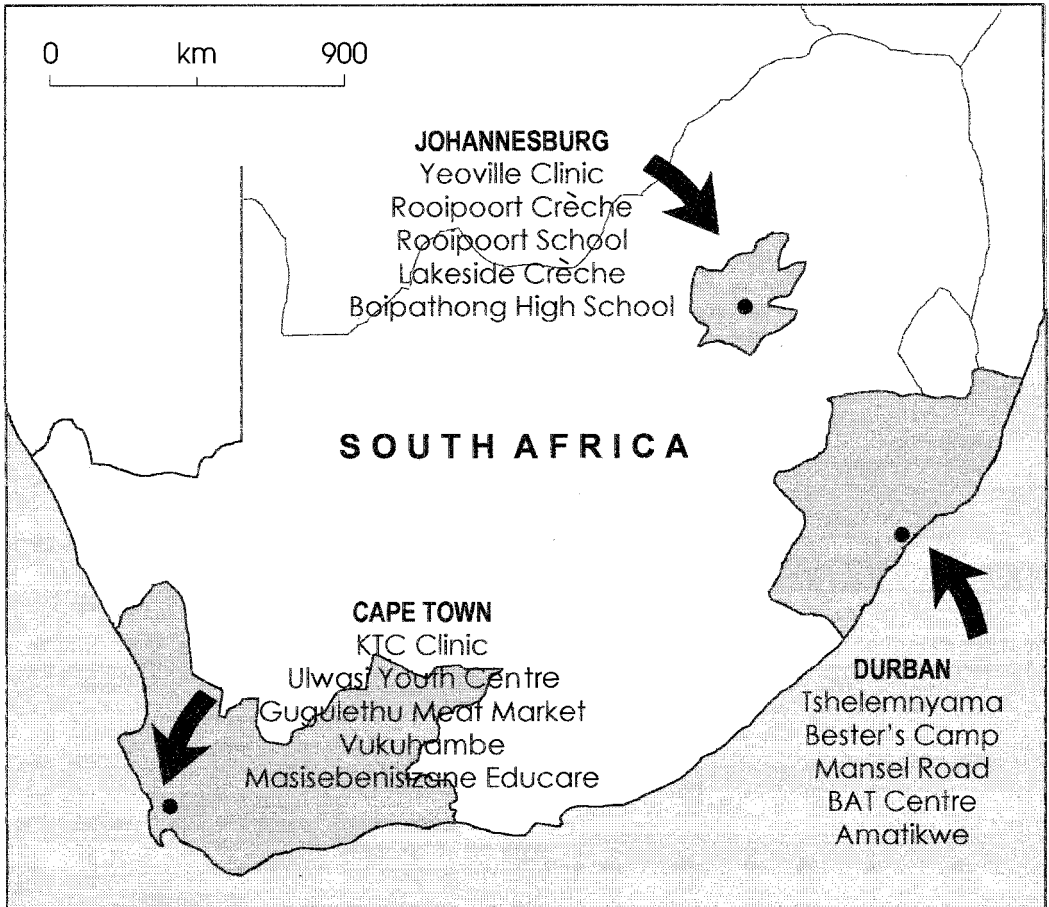


Figure 1. The location of the case studies in South Africa.

examined. Given these safeguards built into the South African system, there is a clear association between investing in public buildings at the local level and achieving individual empowerment. Public projects involve individuals at many levels and in a wide range of capacities. Human capital is enhanced through education, training and experience, thus developing political, planning, building and management skills.

Personal empowerment was achieved if skills and abilities were acquired through the projects. The extent to which these skills were successfully carried over into other activities and jobs in the longer term, and were transferable to other aspects of an individual's life, reflected the degree to which per-

sonal empowerment was sustained. Three groups of transferable skills are central to the development of personal empowerment, namely: social skills, managerial skills and technical skills.

Social skills entailed the abilities of negotiation and conflict resolution, which are necessary skills to operate effectively in a project management capacity. An understanding and the ability to engage in active citizenship (for example, knowledge of one's rights and civil duties) is a further social skill that enhances the empowerment of an individual. These are transferable abilities and highly valuable in other aspects of an individual's life.

Managerial and administrative skills are

Table 1. Summary of case-study data

Case-study details	Project context	Community structure	Project completion
<i>Bester's Camp (Library)</i>	<i>Inanda</i>	<i>Development Trust</i>	<i>Successful</i>
Date 1995	1984-99; settled	Elected and appointed representatives;	Fulfilled project brief; fully
Funder DMC library services	1995: included in Durban Metropolitan Area	spatial basis; pyramidal structure;	operational; other projects
Landowner ICDT		strong leadership; cohesive community	developed
Value R1 000 000		structure and politically organised	
<i>Mansel Road Market</i>	<i>Greyville, central Durban (near station)</i>	<i>Informal</i>	<i>Partial success</i>
Date 1994	1984: hundreds of women migrate to live and trade on Durban streets;	Committee members appointed strong leader; trust has signed 20-year lease agreement for the buildings with DMC	Community out-maneuvred by competing traders; no further developments planned
Funder City of Durban	persecution		
Landowner City of Durban (on lease)	1992: after negotiation, city formalises the small market as a pilot		
Value R1 000 000			
<i>Tshelimnyama Community Hall</i>	<i>Marianne Hill, Durban Inner West</i>	<i>Voluntary association</i>	<i>Partial success</i>
Date 1997-98	1991: land invasion	Elected representatives and ward councillors, low participation rates; violent conflict and violent crime; weak leadership	Hall completed, but seldom used and poorly maintained; no new projects planned
Funder Provincial Housing Board	1995: regularised, upgrading started on new settlement, with parcelisation, tenure formalisation and infrastructure work		
Landowner City of Durban			
Value R750 000			
<i>Boipathong School</i>	<i>Vanderbijl Park, Gauteng</i>	<i>Voluntary association</i>	<i>Partial success</i>
Date 1996-98	Major schooling shortage, local school funded belatedly after 10 years of platooning, against background of rent boycotts	Elected representatives and ward councillor; both have not changed in 10 years; poor participation; strong leaders	Building completed and fully occupied; frequent and serious instances of vandalism; recent plans largely to do with removal of neighbouring squatters
Funder National Public Works			
Landowner Municipality			
Value R5 460 830			

<i>Lakeside Crèche</i>	<i>Lakeside, Vereeniging, Gauteng</i>	<i>Development trust</i>	<i>Successful</i>
Date 1996-97	New community settled in 1992;	Heavily backed by SANCO (CBO);	Project fully operational;
Funder Gauteng Public Works	private developer donated land to raise	elected representatives, strong	additional uses evolved for it;
Landowner Lakeside Association	values through development of	participation galvanised around	additional projects in pipe-line
Value R1 262 000	amenities	project	
<i>Ulwasi Youth Centre</i>	<i>Langa, Cape Town, Western Cape</i>	<i>Section 21 non-profit co.</i>	<i>Successful</i>
Date 1989-98	Older formal township on outskirts of	Comprises representatives from all	Despite tumultuous history,
Funder I: Viva Trust; II: NEF ^a	Cape Town, good transport links to	CBOs, local political parties, business	houses wide range of activities;
Landowner Ulwasi Section 21 co.	centre, strong links with municipality	and institutions; good participation,	has been refurbished and
Value I: R100 000; II: R790 000		broad leadership; wide-ranging debate	extended recently; further
			activities planned; difficulties
			with staff salaries
<i>Masisebensizane Crèche</i>	<i>Gugulethu, Cape Town, Western Cape</i>	<i>Voluntary association</i>	<i>Extremely successful</i>
Date 1996-97	More recent formal township; good	Strong representative system; several	Flourishing crèche; provides
Funder South Africa Breweries;	transport and administrative links;	strong CBOs and local political groups	approximately 15 jobs and frees
D. J. Murray Trust	project launched to give permanent	active; within project: strong committee,	mothers to work; building well
Landowner SANCO	home to crèche run successfully	annual elections, strong leadership and	maintained; further funding
Value R404 000	in garage	good participation levels	applications have already been
			made
<i>Gugulethu Central Meat Market</i>	<i>Gugulethu, Cape Town, Western Cape</i>	<i>Section 21 non-profit co.</i>	<i>Successful</i>
Date 1995-96	Located within traditional single-male	With regard to this project, however,	Despite difficulties reaching
Funder Grants and loans (DBSA)	hostels and informal structures, traders	strong rivalries between traders'	agreement on various issues,
Landowner Section 21 non-profit co.	requested protection from the	association and Umzamo were	high occupancy in some sectors,
Value R1 700 000	elements	manifested	attempts to resolve problems
			with others; improvements in
			management and buildings
			planned

^aNational Economic Forum

by nature important and increase one's eligibility for a wide range of job opportunities, but are clearly skills which require both training and experience. All development projects we selected offered this chance to a small number of people. The skills acquired during the project period included a range of transferable abilities including book-keeping, site management, minute-taking, knowledge of the correct protocol for running meetings and the management of information. Other skills might include computer proficiency, public speaking and report-writing.

People who are active in committees and in planning acquire political skills. The projects we examined showed that this is an opportunity for apprenticeship. In each settlement, a core of active people in each project brought with them political experience from other spheres. They encountered people with a specific interest in the project, who had had little prior experience of activism. A particularly clear example may be seen at Masisebensizane Educare in Gugulethu, where the head teacher had a very clear understanding of township politics and was able to involve members of her committee in negotiations for permission to use a particular site very effectively. It is a measure of her success that, since the start of the project, she has never acted as the chair of her committee.

Due to a number of national initiatives, such as the 'Ten Point Plan', training in construction trades (for example, brick-laying, carpentry, plastering), was linked to every public-sector building project. However, problems emerged, linked to the unrealistically short 11-week training period.

A second requirement, for 'emergent contractors' to carry out all works, has increasingly been reviewed. First, it is difficult for the community to appoint only one of several competing contractors (KN) which can lead to ambiguities about responsibility for works (PM). Despite using a recommended form of contract which recognises the additional complications of using emergent contractors (MM), consultants in Lakeside Crèche were unable to save the community all of the

additional expenses which were incurred through this process (RK), in particular paying both glazing contractors for the whole job. Neither the community nor its consultants at Boipathong School were able to enforce completion of the building, in which four contractors were involved (KN, PM).

A compromise has emerged where large-scale works are put out to tender to experienced contractors, with sub-contracts or smaller works being undertaken by local contractors, and all labour hired locally. This compromise has been adopted across South Africa and in a wide range of sectors (JS, CR). We found some examples of foresight. At Bester's Camp, for example, none of the amenities built post-1994 relied solely on emergent contractors, who were instead used as sub-contractors for smaller jobs (JM, NN). This may be due in part to the large body of experience on which the seasoned activists at Bester's Camp were able to draw, but may also be a result of the difficult and hilly terrain that surrounds Durban.

The difficult decisions about who should be offered these opportunities were generally dealt with in ways reflecting the local political structure. Where structures were democratic, the decisions were generally transparent and devolved. Where local politics were dominated by individuals, nepotism (Amatikwe and Mansel Road), fear (Tshelemnyama) and favouritism (Boiphatong) ruled.

However, if empowerment is about the increase of control over one's life, then an increase in human capital is only the first stage of this process. The opportunity to continue to exercise new-found skills is of paramount importance. It is then that empowerment could be seen as sustained.

In theory, this could happen in three ways: within the project, in new projects, or by finding employment outside the community. First, in some cases, there is continued employment in projects that have been developed. Unfortunately, this can only happen in a fraction of cases. A good deal of the work which goes into producing a building to house a service, has little continuing function

once the building is completed. Thus, the bulk of labourers and even skilled tradespeople trained in the production of our case-study buildings were without work once the building was finished (IJ, Mr Ngoshu, UH). To some extent, this drop in employment was mitigated by opportunities for work on other public and private projects within the township. It is widely accepted that most residents make even incremental improvements to their homes using professional, rather than their own labour. However, the demand for even such casual work depends on continuing investment in housing by residents and can only take place in the long term if enough people are employed. Demand for building workers in public projects implies continuing initiative by the community in creating new projects. Not all our case-study communities were able to undertake further developments. This matter is taken up below.

While construction skills serve several economic and psychological purposes, they may well not lead directly to further paid employment. However, successfully completed projects, especially if they can prosper and grow, can employ a small number of people in the longer term, although these are often not the same people who were involved in planning and building them. Once a public amenity is completed, if run successfully, it offers opportunities for a range of jobs. Masisbensizane Crèche, which started as the enterprise of one woman in a garage, now employs 15 people. It also enables women to go out to work, who would not otherwise be able to do so. Ulwasi Youth Centre offers employment to a small number of core staff, and a venue in which to conduct business to a range of self-employed teachers (VM, JH, Aaron). However, this is not always the case. At the other end of the spectrum, the community hall at Tshelemnnyama can offer employment to no one (JN).

A second means by which increased human capital can be employed, is when knowledge is exported from one community to another. Trained or experienced people take their skills with them—sometimes to

other informal settings, sometimes to formal, salaried positions, occasionally to positions of political influence. In some of our projects, employment was created, but not necessarily for local people. In the school at Bester's Camp, for example, very few of the teachers live in the area, Inanda (KKN). The librarian lives in Kwamashu (CH) and users of the community hall pay a fee to the municipality, but create little direct income locally (NN).

Moreover, the movement of skilled labour may be resented. In Cape Town, the attempt by building workers from Nyanga to gain employment in a community project being developed in nearby Langa, created tensions which threatened to erupt into violence (SG).

Nevertheless, people trained in management and negotiating skills are in high demand, particularly in local government, and the training and experience acquired in the course of a community project, or of a prolonged period of community work, often have a market value. Thus, people may move into salaried positions in local or provincial government (ZM) or, occasionally, with NGOs (IJ). The migration of trained people is often experienced within the rest of the community as a loss and its spectre looms as a threat. The more isolated a community, the greater the sense of dependence on skilled people and the greater the fear of their potential loss (Ngwame).

Finally, individuals can become involved in new community projects, building on skills acquired in previous developments. Informal skills, such as networking and negotiation, can be redeployed, as can formal skills such as book-keeping, building or site management. The ability of a community successfully to articulate its needs, and thus attract new projects, is heavily dependent on its continuing empowerment. It is this which we now turn to discuss.

Sustaining Community Empowerment

The term 'community empowerment' refers to a process through which a community gains increasing control of its own affairs,

and increasing initiative regarding its own destiny. In practice, this implies two things. First, that, collectively, a community increases its ability to negotiate with external agents and institutions, drawing investment and rights into the community. Secondly, that it increases its ability to manage its internal affairs, in terms of representing the interests and views of its members, agreeing on priorities, formulating briefs and managing the development process. These two important stages are now examined.

The case-study communities varied in their ability to carry through projects to successful completion. By and large, the points at which problems arose were not idiosyncratic, but reflected generic weak points in the development process (Lyons, Smuts and Stephens, 1999). At the same time, the problems themselves were often reflections of long-term, structural problems within the communities.

An interesting finding, addressed in an earlier paper (Lyons *et al.*, 2000), was that there are points in the development process at which a project is particularly vulnerable. In other words, weaknesses in a community, which may be due to a variety of reasons, are likely to manifest themselves at predictable points in the development process. In general, these arise because of major change to a situation in which an organisation is not necessarily experienced, and the implications of which have not necessarily been fully understood. In this situation, the community's ability to exert authority over its members and to hold people to account, can be severely tested.

First, when funds became available, the mechanisms for management and accountability were severely tested. Individual jealousies or agendas for personal enrichment were then brought into play, often for the first time in the life of the project (VM, SM). This problem, in its many forms, was so ubiquitous that, in every project we visited, direct management of funds has been removed from the hands of communities. At least where public funds are concerned, the communities now control the signing-off of

funds against completed works or purchasing, but the local authority holds the funds (PL, NN). In Durban, where many of the construction projects were only started after 1995, no other system had operated.

A second vulnerable point is moving into a big building. Change in the nature of management needed, adjustment in spending patterns, adjustment to lines of accountability: all appeared to be too much to handle in some cases. Problems ranged from relatively simple issues, to more complex ones. In Tshelemnyama, the community hall was the most sophisticated building in the township (JN). There was no clear-cut programme for using or maintaining it and formulating such a programme was a baffling undertaking for the committee (TK). Elsewhere, as where informal trade has been formalised, the costs associated with a new building may alter the economics of trading. In Mansell Road Market, the women are struggling to meet rent payments (Beauty), although some traders may have an easier transition than others (AP, Ntotovivane).

Strains may develop between the committee and the community, particularly associated with the processes of on-job training and capacity-building. In some cases, training created expectations in terms of wages and terms of employment (RK), while quality of work suffered from the use of unskilled labour; and capacity-building was used as a cover for nepotism or for getting friends on-site. There was also stealing on-site, as this could easily be organised as an 'inside job'.

Where projects conformed to principles enshrined in the RDP, this went some way to mitigating problems. It allowed a broad cross-section of the community to have a voice at every stage of development and at all levels of management. It provided mechanisms for defusing distrust, through regular feedback and accountability, and allowed the operation of the project to be judged not only in terms of legality or financial performance, but also in terms of working within the 'spirit' of the programme (Lyons and Smuts, 1999).

While communities organised along more autocratic lines were also able to complete individual projects, they rarely thrived as well as those which were completed in more democratic communities. Communities varied even more in their ability to sustain the gains made through the development process. At one end of the range was Bester's Camp in Inanda, with a master plan including a wide range of amenities, which are progressively being built (NN, JM, CH). The elected councillors create further opportunities for training and the Trust is working to sustain existing developments, to develop new projects and to engage with new development programmes. Similarly, Langa Development Forum's master plan for the development of amenities in Langa was endorsed in 1995, and the Forum has initiated and endorsed a chain of projects, including a community garden, a cookery school and restaurant, a sports centre and, most recently, a museum and cultural centre.

At the other end of the range, were communities which, after project completion, appear to have come to a standstill. At this end of the range are Tshelemnyama and Mansel Road Market. In the former, the completion of a community hall has, as mentioned above, exposed the community's inability to take action to manage the facility effectively, but also, its inability to agree on a future direction and on desired future projects. In the latter, widely felt dissatisfaction with the present development has not materialised into action, or even a programme for action.

In other words, wide differences in the extent to which community empowerment is sustained affect the development process. We would argue that the ability of communities to sustain the process of empowerment is amenable to logical explanation. Our findings suggest that the continuing empowerment of a community depends heavily on its commitment to empowering a large number of individuals and to spreading information, training and opportunity. In contrast, communities in which power is hoarded by a leadership élite, whether elected or not, and whether from fear or from ambition, must stagnate.

Tshelemnyama's crippling indecision is reflected in its development committee. Despite being based on a spatial democratic structure, the committee is comprised almost entirely of one political faction. Almost all its members are very young and inexperienced, as they have, in effect, seized power from the older generation. They lack a sense of direction from other residents, who are reluctant to participate in local democracy; but also the experience that would help them to take a proactive leadership role.

In parallel, the Mansel Road Market's leader effectively appoints the committee. The leader's hold on power is strong because she is able to mediate and interpret and because, as chair of the committee, she controls the 'democratic' decisions taken by the committee in terms of allocation of spaces and other joint decisions.

In both situations, the leadership élite closely manages the democratic project process and this is reflected in the spread of opportunities offered within projects and in the suspicion exhibited by local residents at committee decisions. In Tshelemnyama, local residents have repeatedly attacked external contractors, on the grounds that work should have gone to local, emergent contractors. In Mansel Road Market, the committee is bitterly criticised for failing to address the needs and ideas of younger women.

In sharp contrast to both these situations, Langa and Inanda appear to have developed a broad-based participatory process. It is noteworthy, however, that the two are different in style and character and that this has implications for development work in general and for the sustainability of its effects in particular.

In the case of Bester's Camp, a clearly pyramidal structure has evolved for the Inanda Community Development Trust. Reporting to the Trust, consultation and the representation of ideas put forward at grass-roots level appear to be carried out thoroughly, conscientiously and with regularity. At the same time, the leadership is relatively small for a settlement of that size. Moreover, there is a clear allocation of responsibilities

within it. This makes for a very efficient and effective development process, as noted above. It also means that there is wide endorsement for the processes undertaken and that the leadership feels sufficiently strong to take on new ideas and new projects.

However, it also means that the community as a group can become heavily reliant on the continued service of individuals. In particular, there appear to be widespread fears that the executive director might one day take a job elsewhere, as his contacts, acumen and experience are greatly valued.

In the case of Langa Development Forum, a much 'flatter' structure has evolved. It includes elected area representatives, but also representatives of community-based organisations and major projects in the township. On the one hand, this creates a democratic process in which debate and criticism are open and widespread. On occasion, this can slow the development of projects, as open feuds erupt. On the other hand, it has resulted in the development of more semi-independent projects. This means that management skills and knowledge of the development process are more widespread. The corollary of that is that the loss of accomplished individuals, while worrying, poses less of a threat to the ongoing process of community development overall.

It is noteworthy that many of the successful projects relied on the involvement of external agents, such as local government, non-governmental organisations and committed consultants. There may have been only one outside group involved or a combination of groups, but aside from their main responsibility, for which they were initially involved, indirectly their presence helped to ensure and maintain accountability on the project. Accountability was frequently at risk in projects that were not subject to the scrutiny of an impartial group and where those involved had a stake in the process.

Similarly, the involvement of committed external groups, particularly in projects where local municipalities were less active in facilitating community development, was often central to the development of skills train-

ing, site management and other community empowerment programmes. External agents may actively promote empowerment policies in their mission statements or, with the benefit of wider experience, are able to detect weaker points in development projects and act on them.

Summary and Conclusions

The experience of eight development projects in three South African provinces has been used to explore the functional links between participation, empowerment and sustainability, to analyse them and to identify some of the factors which impinge on their success. Findings appear to confirm the existence of a strong link between participation and empowerment. Moreover, a comparative analysis of events in the case-study projects suggests a further link between the nature and extent of participation, on the one hand, and the sustainability of development gains in general and empowerment in particular, on the other.

As an outcome of a participatory development process, three levels of sustainability were identified. At the first level, broad-based community participation leads to future development initiatives, as the result of an empowerment process. This can be strategic, as in Langa or Inanda, reinforcing community structures and resulting in the development of master plans. It is noteworthy that such master plans are not necessarily rigid, and exist as frameworks that are adaptable to changing circumstances. Further development can be dynamic without being strategic. In Lakeside, although a strategic plan has not been developed, a sports field and a workshop were successfully negotiated for, following the crèche project.

This type of sustainability is often associated with an existing culture of participation and activism. The indicators of sustainability at this level include:

- communities which are able to negotiate with local and provincial authorities for future upgrading;

- community leadership which has the capacity to read drawings and plans and engage in the articulation of urban space-making;
- individuals who become directly involved with development initiatives to the point where they lead to employment.

The second level is sustainability at the project level. Although Masisebensizane Educare and the Gugulethu Central Meat Market have not led to further projects, they have both thrived. Indicators of sustainability at the project level include:

- the creation of employment opportunities;
- the successful maintenance and operation of the building;
- the running and adaptation of successful programmes.

At the third level of sustainability, although a small number of individuals may benefit from sustained personal development, there is no sustained development at a communal level. Boipathong School's committee has undergone training, but the lack of political will and of a participatory culture appears to be stifling any initiative. In contrast, Amatikwe and Tshelemnyama, which undertook no capacity-building and in which participants do not have the skill-base adequately to manage the projects, are examples of communities where even individual skills are not being enhanced.

To summarise, if, in the process of participatory development, people receive training in usefully transferable skills, empowerment will develop at three levels: personal, project and community. Fully empowered people, projects and/or communities are then able to contribute towards the sustainability of development projects which, in turn, contribute towards the broader notion of sustainable development.

Importantly, however, one of the key findings of this research has been that, while development programmes may incorporate a greater emphasis on capacity-building, skills training and other empowerment initiatives, the outcome still depends, by and large, on

local politics and the community structure. Where local-political structures are not transparent and accountable, and where there is little social mobility possible within the community, intervention at the organisational level is likely to entrench existing power structures. In turn, this reduces chances of further employment and further skilling, with their attendant increases in human capital. It also reduces the incentives for initiative and innovation.

The case studies also suggest that a process of mentoring, which can be carried out by committed consultants, local authority officers or NGOs, can often strengthen the link between community empowerment and individual empowerment. This is particularly important in the sphere of conflict resolution, familiarisation with state institutions, policies and programmes, and management techniques.

Closely related to this is the issue of efficiency. It is clear that the construction of buildings can be achieved without much empowerment and participation. It is sometimes, although not always, possible to construct them more quickly that way. However, there appears to be a clear disadvantage in terms of the sustained use of the building itself, as well as the lost opportunity for generating further development. It is our conclusion that only a very narrow measure of efficiency would give preference to non-participatory development. Such a measure might benefit funding programmes needing to demonstrate satisfactory disbursement rates spending, but would be ill-conceived in a society where continuing funding is not assured and where independence is an important objective.

If the fundamental requirement for sustainability is local politics, this must have implications for training and deployment of development professionals. Finally, the disjuncture between the expectations of state functionaries and those of local residents and politicians stems from the increasing failure of policy to adopt local structures and expectations. Community participation is, by its nature, anarchic in the strict sense. Its out

comes cannot be dictated because, if they could, the process would be redundant. This suggests that participation at the local level implies a need for larger-scale policies to be informed by local, embodied experience, implying in turn, a need for an iterative process of participatory policy formation.

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- Appendix. Interviews, Conducted between 5 February and 27 April 1999**
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