

# Activating Empowerment:

Empowering Britain from the bottom up

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**involve**

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The research was originally commissioned in 2006. As such, some of the research findings reflect this.

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***“Local people often know what the solutions to problems in their area are – but too often we don’t include them in the process. If we want the highest quality services that really meet people’s needs then we need to find better ways of hearing what they have to say and put communities in control of the services that affect their lives”***

Hazel Blears MP (2008)

# **Executive Summary**

## Executive Summary

**“...Over the next 10 years, Government should take further steps to empower citizens to shape services around them. Specifically, this means providing the tools, the information and the mechanisms necessary for citizens to exercise effective influence over services so that they change to meet their needs”**

HM Government, Policy Review

The much anticipated Empowerment White Paper – Communities in Control (2008) – was published in July 2008, outlining the commitment of government to strengthening local democracy and activating citizen empowerment. In the words of the White Paper itself:

*“Communities in control: real people, real power’ aims to pass power into the hands of local communities. We want to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country, and to give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens”*

*“We want to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens. This is because we believe that they can take difficult decisions and solve complex problems for themselves. The state’s role should be to set national priorities and minimum standards, while providing support and a fair distribution of resources”*

The White Paper signals exciting and challenging times ahead for local government. Communities in Control (2008) documents policy proposals and ideas for re-energising local democracy, increasing the accountability of local government and opening up genuine potential for enhancing citizen empowerment. Some of the most noteworthy include:

- The ‘new duty to promote democracy’ to help councils promote citizen involvement
- Extending the ‘duty to involve’ local people in local decision-making;
- The ‘new duty for councils to respond to petitions’;
- Extending participatory budgeting, with the aim of all local authorities having citizens help set local priorities for spending by 2012;
- The introduction of an ‘Empowerment Fund’ of at least £7.5m to help national third sector organisations turn key empowerment proposals into practical action; and;
- The piloting of ‘Community Contracts’ which agree priorities between all public service providers and citizens to deliver a platform of consensus and ensure accountability on both sides of the relationship.

*Communities in Control (2008)* is published at an interesting time and this is reflected in the response it has received so far from across the political spectrum. Alongside this white paper a number of other policy documents have highlighted the importance of public engagement, including the Policing Green Paper and the Ministry of Justice’s discussion paper on greater public engagement in national decision making. While perspectives on **how** to strengthen local democracy and empower local people and communities to take control over their lives differ markedly, there is widespread consensus on **why** both are needed.



There is an emerging consensus across the political spectrum that citizen empowerment is a vital mechanism through which radical public service reform can be achieved, and strong localised governance established. Over the past decade, 'empowerment', 'engagement', 'involvement' and 'consultation' have all become political buzzwords, signifying a shift towards a more inclusive, open form of government. The substance and emphasis of *Communities in Control* (2008) embodies this shift.

Yet despite the prominence of the 'empowerment agenda' in British political debate, and an increased focus on local government, a lack of clarity remains among local authorities and other public service providers as to what citizen empowerment is and how it can be used as a mechanism to improve policymaking and outcomes for local people.

This report provides a detailed account of many of the mechanisms local authorities and public services can use to empower local communities. *Activating Empowerment* shows how empowerment mechanisms - such as participatory budgeting and deliberative forms of engagement - have the potential to restructure the relationship between service providers and users, state and citizen, and with it the very nature of political decision-making in the twenty first century.

## **This study**

This report is based on extensive desk research undertaken by Ipsos MORI's Participation Unit and Involve. The research was commissioned by Communities and Local Government (CLG) in 2006 to understand the main theories of citizen empowerment and what this means for local authorities at the practical level of developing, improving and implementing effective community engagement strategies.

The publication of this report comes at a time of new developments in local government policy. The introduction, for example, of Comprehensive Area Agreements and the new Place Survey, means that more than at any time in the past, local authorities are now being assessed on their success in engaging, consulting and ultimately empowering their local communities. In this report, we begin to develop an evaluative framework to enable local authorities and other public service providers to better meet their obligations to involve and empower citizens and service users.

The key finding of *Activating Empowerment* is that empowerment mechanisms work – they empower citizens. But they do so in different ways, at different levels and to different degrees. But what is clear from our research, is that the fundamental benchmark of success for any initiative or innovation that aims to empower citizens, is the degree to which they offer local people real opportunities to influence change in policy and the public services they receive (*de facto* empowerment), and ensure that people feel and understand this to be the case (subjective empowerment).

More than an academic study of what the principles and theories of empowerment are, *Activating Empowerment* (2008), offers a detailed review of a selection of empowerment mechanisms - such as participatory budgeting and deliberative forums from across the world – that local government can use to empower communities and give local people increased power and influence over the decisions that impact on their everyday lives.

## Research objectives

The research aimed to address the following research objectives:

- To deliver an evidence base for policymakers to draw upon which is drawn from aspects of public service delivery that are relevant to the key concerns of citizen empowerment;
- To gather examples of good citizen empowerment practice in public service delivery, and to suggest specific learning points for frontline public services;
- To support the development of policymaking within CLG on how to move the 'empowerment agenda' forward, in order to support local authorities in improving their service delivery within performance framework parameters; and
- To provide suggestions of how to integrate citizen empowerment into the community engagement strategies of local authorities.

## The policy context

The debate surrounding citizen empowerment has generated a rare amount of consensus in the political world. Today, all the major political parties in the UK strongly support the ideal of a fortified, more organic form of local governance based on shared responsibility and the engagement of local people.

The 'empowerment agenda' first emerged onto the political stage with John Major's emphasis on 'citizens as consumers' in the mid-1990s. It is only over the last 10 or 12 years however that democratic renewal and radical public service reform have become key government priorities. As a recent Ipsos MORI report, *Socio-Political Influencers (2007)*, has argued:

*"As private sector products and services are becoming more personalised, consumers are becoming more demanding not only of the private sector, but also of public services. Where previously a one-size-fits-all approach could have been acceptable, there is now general agreement across all political parties that choice, voice and empowerment are vital elements of successful public services"*

The 'empowerment agenda' is reshaping the way local authorities engage and consult with local communities. Residents, service users and tax payers can no longer be treated as passive consumers. Increasing calls for personalisation of services and the decrease in public deference is driving the demand for participation in public decision-making. Since 1997, government has initiated a wide range of reforms which seek to ensure more citizen-focused public services, and improve accountability. Central to this is a shared belief across government that local communities themselves are likely to be the most effective at dealing with their own problems. They have the most intricate knowledge of their own neighbourhoods, and are uniquely placed to understand both the problems specific to their area and the types of solutions that are likely to work for it.

Acceptance of this belief has placed citizen empowerment at the heart of modern government and policy decision making. In the UK, public engagement is no longer the preserve of the most forward-thinking public service providers but a requirement of all departments and authorities. It is no longer a choice but a statutory duty.

Governments are starting to realize that engaging citizens in the shaping of decisions which affect their everyday lives improves legitimacy, as well as the quality of public services. As a recent Demos (2008) report has argued:

*“Advocacy of greater citizen participation in governance is backed by democratic theorists and social psychologists, who show that when participation works, it is not only good for government, it can give people a sense of belonging, a sense of control over their lives and can even be a source of happiness”*

## The challenge

There is a strange paradox at work, currently, in the arena of citizen participation. Clear commitments have been made to citizen empowerment by the public sector, as evidenced by an increasingly widespread use of empowerment methods such as deliberative forums, citizen juries, participatory budgeting and sustainable community strategies. Yet this commitment does not appear to have translated into an improvement in measures of public satisfaction with their personal influence over decision making (or subjective empowerment) among citizens.

Recent research undertaken by Ipsos MORI for the Hansard Society’s latest Audit of Political Participation (2008) showed this paradox clearly:

*“Around 12% of people are politically active, according to our definition (i.e. in the last two or three years they have done at least three political activities from a list of eight). Almost half of the public (48%) report not having done any of these activities”*

*“Less than a third of the public believe that ‘when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run’ (31%), while 42% disagree with this statement”*

It is worth noting that other research lists the rate of civic participation as higher. For example the Citizenship Survey (April 2007 - March 2008, England and Wales) states that 39% of people had at least once in the past year engaged in some form of civic participation, such as contacting a local councillor, attending a public meeting or signing a petition.

What is clear however is that activists tend to be disproportionately well-off, middle aged and white (Tenants Services Authority, 2008). This is reflected in the Audit of Political Engagement (2008), which shows that only one percent of members of minority ethnic groups are activists and, of those without qualifications, three percent are activists compared to twenty-six percent for those with postgraduate degrees.

As this shows, the challenge for government and all public services is to turn the rhetoric and talk of empowerment into a practical reality for all residents, service users and citizens who want to instigate or be involved in influencing change.

## What is empowerment?

“This is what empowerment is all about – passing more and more political power to more and more people through every practical means”

Communities in Control: Real people, real power (2008)

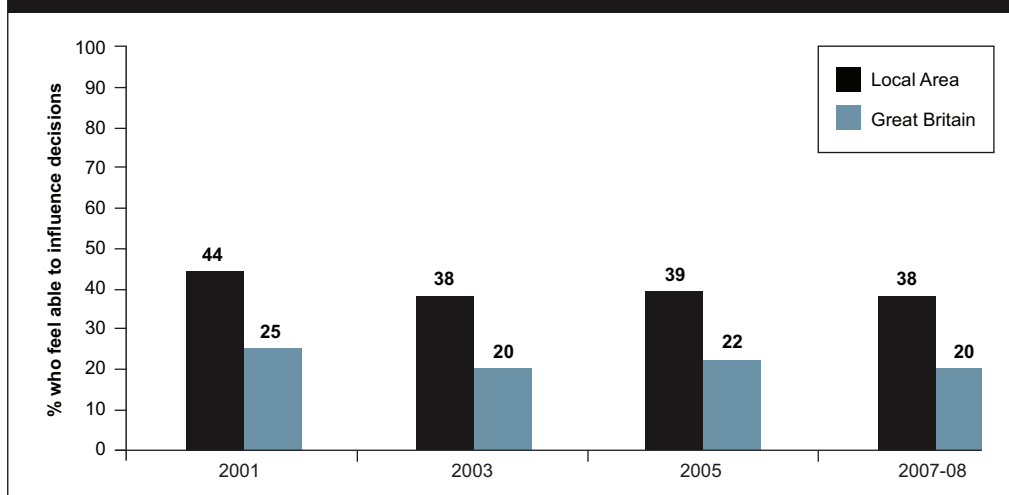
There remains a degree of vagueness surrounding the meaning of ‘empowerment’, and variation in the ways in which it is used in government communications and practice. However, it is crucial that local authorities have clarity on this issue in order to reliably and consistently assess the extent to which their engagement strategies are empowering their residents. This report will aim to provide an answer to this problem.

In order to establish a working definition of empowerment of practical import for local authorities, it is necessary to break the concept down into categories which show the differing ways in which empowerment can be measured.

- **De jure empowerment** (power that is manifested in opportunities and rights provided through law, contract or other official record) has been substantially increased over the past ten years, for example in the shape of legal instruments, such as the Freedom of Information Act.
- **De facto empowerment** (actual control or influence over an outcome or a decision) is harder to measure. The increased number of projects which co-produce services with users, that devolve budgets to neighbourhood structures and that transfer assets to community groups mean it is highly likely that citizens have more power today over local decisions than they did previously.
- **Subjective empowerment** (the feeling of being able to influence/control/affect a situation) has remained static in recent years but is lower than in 2001, despite massive investment in participation and engagement.

Recent Citizenship Survey (2007-2008) data shows that 38 per cent of people in England agreed that they could influence decisions in their local area and one-fifth (20%) of people felt they could influence decisions affecting Great Britain in 2007. In 2001 the figures were 44 per cent and 25 per cent respectively (See figure below).

**Figure 3: Whether people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area and Great Britain, 2001 to 2007-08**



This 'empowerment gap' - that is the growing mismatch between the increased de-facto opportunities to affect change and the differing capacity and willingness to use these opportunities - is a real issue. If nothing is done to counterbalance this it is likely that the increase in opportunities for influence will simply empower limited sections of society. Put starkly, people who do not feel able to influence decisions tend not to sign petitions, and tend not to participate in participative events, no matter how meaningful they may be.

Whilst de-facto opportunities are vital, on their own they cannot guarantee that larger segments of the public will take part. The growth of structural and institutional mechanisms to empower communities and to increase opportunities for de-facto empowerment locally must be matched by action to develop a subjective sense of empowerment across British society.

CLG has officially adopted two definitions of empowerment: objective and subjective, which correspond roughly to our first and third definitions.

Ipsos MORI and Involve strongly believe that the benchmark for any programme of citizen engagement that aims to enhance citizen empowerment must support and deliver both subjective and *de facto* types of empowerment. This view is reflected in the definition of empowerment which we have used throughout this research, namely:

Empowerment is when people feel they can influence the decisions that impact on their lives and are provided with meaningful opportunities to make this an actuality not a mere possibilitythe

## Empowerment in action

The variety of citizen empowerment mechanisms which are available to public services has expanded significantly over the past decade, and many of these mechanisms are used by a broad spectrum of bodies across central and local government.

Below is a selection of the empowerment mechanisms Ipsos MORI's Participation Unit provide to local authorities and other public service providers.



Involve's practitioner website People and Participation.net (<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net>), which is funded by CLG, provides free information and advice on over forty of the most widely used methods. This study also shows that whilst there is a diversity of mechanisms aiming to bring about citizen empowerment currently in use in the UK, there is also a widely variable 'success rate' in terms of how deep the level of citizen empowerment they deliver in practice. Large and unsubstantiated claims are often made for methods of engagement; evaluation is sorely needed. Mechanisms for empowerment include:

- **Individual-level** mechanisms such as choice-based lettings (in housing) or Direct Payments (in social care.);
- **Collective-level** mechanisms such as the role for citizens on Foundation hospital or (New Deal for Communities) NDC Boards;
- Schemes that, alongside other aims, explicitly set out to raise subjective empowerment at a societal level and provide a genuine forum for views to be aired and heard, such as National Pensions Day or the 'GM Nation' debate;
- Schemes that are focused on service delivery improvement through de facto empowerment, such as the devolution of significant funding to NDC Boards, or the use of Place Survey results as Key Performance Indicators for local government; and
- Informal schemes that set out to improve a community's ability to make use of more formal opportunities for involvement/empowerment, for example Community Empowerment Networks or the newly introduced 'health trainers'.

These techniques each achieve a different 'success rate', or 'depth' of citizen empowerment in practice. Several mechanisms have delivered clear and positive impacts on the empowerment and social capital levels of local communities, and have led to significant improvements in the quality of local public services. Some best practice examples of these mechanisms in action (discussed in this report) are:

- Participatory budgeting in Bolivia;
- Citizen assessment for the Wrekin Housing Trust; and
- Community Researchers for Wansbeck Council.

However, other mechanisms have failed to deliver citizen empowerment that meets the benchmarking standard documented in section 3:

- Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships demonstrated that Community Empowerment Network representatives have had *'too little influence'* on Local Service Provider (LSP) Boards (NAO, 2004).
- Despite professional codes of practice and training that emphasise patient autonomy, the Healthcare Commission's State of Healthcare 2005 report concluded that *'there is worrying evidence on how [patients] receive information, what information they receive, and whether they are involved'* (Healthcare Commission, 2005).
- A recent evaluation of Foundation Trusts found that governors drawn from local and patient communities had little de facto influence on strategy (Healthcare Commission, 2006).

A clear finding from our research is that at the most basic level different sorts of empowerment mechanism deliver different outcomes. There is also significant variation in how any particular

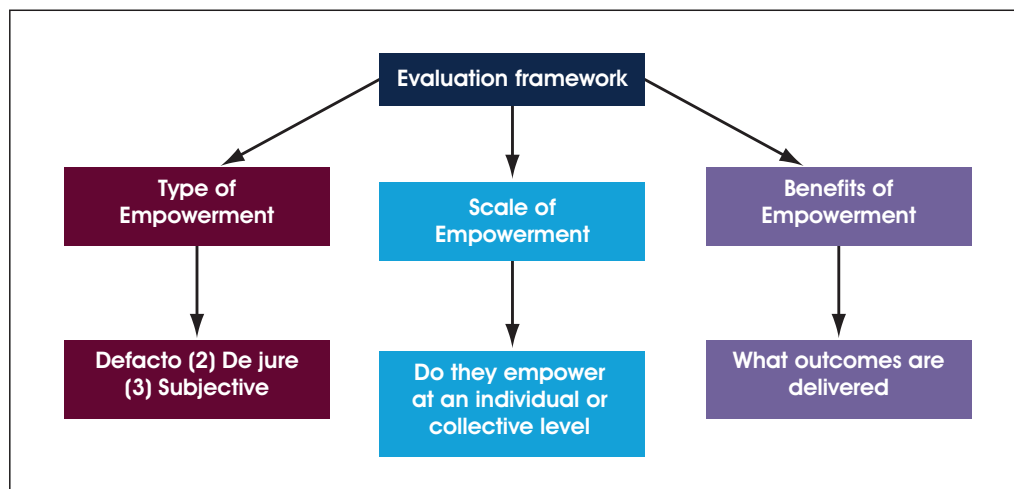
empowerment mechanism may work in different contexts - techniques that work well in local government might not work in healthcare. A recent systematic review (Communities and Local Government 2009) of domestic and international evidence around six community empowerment mechanisms (asset transfer, citizen governance, e-participation, participatory budgeting, petitions and redress) has shown that each mechanism is able to empower to some extent and has the potential to empower those directly participating and to both influence and shape decision making. This is one problem that all public service providers need to explore when deciding how best to deliver services that offer genuine possibilities for citizen empowerment.

## Evaluation framework

Finding an empowerment mechanism which will meet a particular organisation's needs is a key challenge for local authorities up and down the country.

To answer this question, Ipsos MORI and Involve have distinguished three different dimensions of empowerment along which a particular mechanism can be evaluated. These are:

- **Type** of empowerment (as discussed in previous sections);
- **Scale** of empowerment (as discussed in previous sections); and
- **Benefits** of empowerment.



## The benefits of empowerment

Our research found strong evidence to support the 'empowerment agenda' promulgated in the raft of policy documents published in the last few years. To demonstrate this, we have divided the benefits of empowerment into three classes. While based on Fiorino's (1990) well-known justifications for participation, we have broadened the scope of the classification beyond participation to encompass citizen empowerment in general.

Our research shows that citizen empowerment has:

- **Normative** benefits. These are benefits that are claimed to be intrinsically good irrespective of any consequences they have for service delivery. For example, the opportunity to be involved in decision making processes is sometimes argued to be good in and of itself as it is 'more democratic', irrespective of how that power is used;

- **Instrumental** benefits. These benefits relate to the usefulness of citizen empowerment as a means for achieving specific goals. For example, an empowerment mechanism might be justified merely because it ticks a particular box in an audit programme; or, more positively, because it secures buy-in to a decision making process. The relevant ends are selected by their priority within a pre-existing system, not by some more 'objective' justification; and
- **Substantive** benefits. These are similar to instrumental benefits in that they focus on outcomes not processes. However, while instrumental justifications might validate citizen empowerment in terms of its ability to achieve particular ends, substantive justifications validate citizen empowerment in terms of it producing better ends. For example, the instrumental benefit of participation in a citizens' jury which aims to develop a sustainable community strategy may be that residents feel consulted and therefore more satisfied with their local council. The substantive benefit which could also result from the same process would be an improvement in the well-being of local residents.

The fact that an empowerment mechanism scores highly on one of these dimensions does not necessarily mean that it will do so on all of them. For example, citizens' ballots can be argued to deliver normative benefits in that they broaden access to power; but also some substantive and normative dis-benefits - there is some evidence to suggest that they lead to a reduction in minority rights. Similarly, the use of a citizens' jury to claim legitimacy for a decision may deliver instrumental benefits (or *de jure* power) but, given its lack of impact on policy, could not deliver substantive benefits. A mechanism cannot deliver substantive benefits unless it offers some sort of *de facto* power; that is, the capacity to generate real improvements.

However, not all of the relationships between mechanisms and forms of power are straightforward; for example:

- A mechanism that gave legislative power to a self-selected cartel of citizens would be *de jure* empowering of those individuals, but would not offer normative benefits in a democracy. This criticism is sometimes levelled against certain partnership approaches;
- A mechanism could offer *de facto* power but not substantive benefits, if the power was used in a harmful way. For example, choice mechanisms are sometimes accused of allowing ill-informed individuals to make poor decisions that have detrimental consequences to society as a whole, which may not have occurred if the decision had been made in a top-down manner.

## The effects of different empowerment mechanisms

We have found that different empowerment mechanisms tend to produce different effects. Using the dimensions of **type, scale and benefit**, we are able to summarise the predominant effects of each of the empowerment mechanisms we assessed. However, it should be noted that this typology is based on each type being used at an optimal level. Where this is not the case, the potential for delivering empowerment is obviously restricted.

### Choice and Exit

We have found examples of Choice and Exit to be mechanisms focused on giving individuals greater control over the services they receive and access. But they can also be used as a collective mechanism, for example, when choices are made on behalf of patients.



Our research has found that Choice and Exit in the form of Direct Payments and Individual Budgets can deliver both subjective and *de facto* empowerment in equal measure. However, it is important to point out that the level of *de facto* empowerment is entirely dependent on the real level of choice available to the citizen. Where real choice is limited, so is the potential for *de facto* empowerment, which can have a detrimental impact on the level of subjective empowerment.

Overall, we have found that Choice and Exit can have instrumental benefits such as increased system efficiency and potential costs savings. But the evidence suggests that the benefits are largely substantive in nature. Particular examples of this are better outcomes for the citizen involved with services tailored to their specific needs.

### **Highly participative voice mechanisms**

The evidence indicates that highly participative voice mechanisms such as deliberative forums, citizens' juries or citizens' summits are most likely to provide citizens with subjective empowerment. However, as we show later in this report, they all also have the potential to deliver real *de facto* empowerment depending on the context in which the mechanisms are operating.

The scale of empowerment mechanisms like these, which focus on bringing groups of citizens together in deliberative debate, tend to be collective by their very nature in that they focus on group discussion and collective decision-making. However, we have also found examples where highly participative voice mechanisms can also deliver empowerment at an individual level such as when a participant is representing a community group, e.g. as a Community Empowerment Network representative.

Our research shows a lack of evidence regarding the instrumental benefits of this type of empowerment mechanism – an area of research that needs to be filled but will be very difficult to do. However, our research does suggest that deliberative forums and the like offer substantive benefits for participating citizens and organisation alike, as they tend to result in better policy decision-making. Furthermore, there is a strong research base in support of the normative benefits underlying mechanisms that foster the direct engagement of citizens in decision-making processes.

### **Participatory budgeting**

The evidence gathered thus far points to the mainly subjective empowerment offered by participatory budgeting initiatives. However, emerging research in this field suggests that participatory budgeting also offers citizens and communities *de facto* empowerment.

However we have found that levels of *de facto* empowerment are largely dependent on the amount of budget under discussion and the degree of accountability that is actualised to ensure decisions are carried through.

The scale of empowerment offered by participatory budgeting is collective and potentially on a large-scale, ranging from neighbourhood level discussions up to city wide mass participation.

Current and ongoing research suggests that participatory budgeting has the potential to deliver subjective, normative and instrumental benefits to participating citizens and wider society alike. The research outlines strong normative benefits, especially where it has been undertaken in the developing world, and instrumental benefits which are strongly associated with the active citizenship agenda.

## **Ballots, referenda and empowered petitions**

Much of the research on voice mechanisms such as ballots, referenda and empowered petitions question their *de facto* and subjective empowerment potential. However, we have found that empowered petitions (not standard ones) do offer citizens *de jure* benefits and empowerment.

Our evidence shows that the scale of empowerment provided by these voice mechanisms operates at both an individual and collective level. While it operates at an individual level in terms of voting in ballot or creating/signing petitions, they can also work at a more inclusive and collective level when a real depth of collective voice is heard and listened to.

Our research shows that the substantive benefits of this type of empowerment mechanism are variable. The real benefits are more likely to be normative and instrumental. And we have found, for example, that empowered petitions can have instrumental benefits in securing buy-in to a political process.

## **Triggers**

While there is variability depending on the empowerment mechanism, we have found strong supporting evidence that high degrees of subjective and *de facto* empowerment are possible when citizens are involved in setting trigger levels (dependent on mechanism used). We have found that strong *de facto* empowerment is most likely when involving citizens in identifying and establishing satisfaction triggers.

The scale of empowerment is largely more focused on delivering collective benefits to community/area/service covered by the trigger. But there is also potential for empowerment at an individual level through setting trigger levels and monitoring.

The research suggests that involving citizens in setting service delivery triggers may offer instrumental benefits such as the establishment of services better focused on meeting the needs of service users. We have also found anecdotal evidence of the substantive benefits; for example, standards being set by service users rather than politicians. But there is a lack of hard evidence supporting this.

## **Citizen Assessors**

The research undertaken in this area is minimal. However, the research that is available suggests that having citizen assessors has both *de facto* and subjective benefits. But we have found that these benefits tend to be concentrated on the assessors and service users, so long as the assessment process runs smoothly.

As this indicates, the scale of empowerment tends to be focused on the individual empowerment of the assessors.

Much of the evidence is anecdotal. Indeed, there is quite strong anecdotal evidence suggesting that this type of empowerment has substantive benefits as seen in the increased quality of inspections that lead to better services. Others have pointed towards the instrumental benefits offered and which are associated with its role in the active citizenship agenda.

## Optimal empowerment

But what do these benefits mean in reality for public services? Our research shows that when empowerment mechanisms achieve an optimal level of empowerment they:

- Enable you to situate the views of service users at the heart of your decision-making, increasing service efficiency and subjective user empowerment;
- Ensure that hard-to-reach audiences are involved in your public consultation and engagement activities;
- Inform you, giving a real picture of how service users feel and what they really need - getting beyond top-of mind ideas and knee-jerk reactions;
- Build mutual understanding between your organisations and your service users, which cultivates a stronger customer relationship and a sense of shared responsibility; and
- Deliver a safe way of bringing you and your service users together in a neutral, controlled environment to agree reasoned solutions to pressing problems.

## The importance of context

Our research shows that it is not just the *nature* of the mechanism that determines the sort of empowerment it delivers in practice. We believe that the *context* in which the mechanism operates is of equal importance.

This interaction can be understood through a simple analogy with horticulture, based around the interaction between soil and seeds. In our analogy, the 'seeds' are the mechanisms themselves. There are many varieties of seeds – from participative fora to satisfaction surveys. However, the extent to which a seed blooms is determined by both the type of seed, and by the soil in which it is planted. Whether a particular seed is suited to a particular type of soil will heavily influence whether empowerment blooms successfully or not.

The illustration overleaf identifies some of the key 'soil types' we have identified in this project. These are loosely ordered by the ease with which policy measures can influence them; the more stable, harder to change factors are closer to the 'bedrock'. This ordering is useful when thinking about where interventions can be most easily made, and which contextual factors most strongly inhibit or encourage empowerment. For example, there appears to be little that can be done to address the innate 'interestingness' of a service type; our experience as research practitioners shows that people are more interested in being involved in decisions about healthcare than refuse collection.

This type of consideration should be borne in mind when deciding which empowerment mechanism to employ; to expand the previous example, ongoing participation mechanisms with high levels of involvement may be appropriate in healthcare, but the same process is unlikely to attract many participants if the topic under discussion is refuse collection.

## What is the soil of empowerment made of?

	<b>Central inputs</b>	Investment eg NRF Targets, CPA
	<b>Structures</b>	LSPs neighbourhood charters, etc
	<b>Institutional culture</b>	Leadership Role perception
	<b>Political culture</b>	Electoral competition Councilor role
	<b>Social capital</b>	Associational activity System navigation skills
	<b>Service type</b>	Quality Interest
	<b>Geography</b>	Transport Topography

When thinking about mechanisms, we believe it is vital to think about the effect of context on a mechanism's ability to cultivate empowerment. Whilst a systematic review of the impact of contextual factors is yet to be published, we have drawn practical examples from a wide range of case studies to illustrate some of the potential effects.

## Next steps

Citizen empowerment is a major policy area for all government departments and public services providers. Over the past decade citizen empowerment has come to be seen as both an end in itself, and an integral mechanism for delivering effective, customer-focused public services

Our research has shown the diversity of citizen empowerment mechanisms being used across the spectrum of public services, and the multitude of ways in which they can empower local people. However, we have also demonstrated the wide variation in depth of empowerment achieved by these different mechanisms.

It is clear that the benchmark for all public service providers is to deliver empowerment strategies that generate practical opportunities for citizens to influence decision-making (*de facto* empowerment) as well as making them feel that this influence is real (subjective empowerment).

## Empowering the most disempowered and disadvantaged

If citizen empowerment initiatives established by government and public services are to benefit all in society they need to place additional emphasis on facilitating subjective empowerment for those who are currently disempowered. Without this there is a real risk that the empowerment agenda will lead to increased inequalities in influence between groups.

Simply providing new opportunities for empowerment (e.g. a local authority using participatory budgeting for the first time) risks increasing the empowerment gap because those included/empowered groups will use the empowerment opportunity and traditionally excluded/disempowered groups will not, because they do not believe their actions can 'make a difference'.

People who do not feel able to influence things tend not to sign petitions, participate in opt-in activities such as deliberative workshops, or make use of choice mechanisms.

A double-barrelled approach to empowerment is therefore required. Supporting citizen involvement across the board needs to be enhanced by programmes to build the self-belief of excluded groups in their ability to engage with decision makers. As such, the findings of this report raise important questions for public service providers - local authorities in particular - seeking to empower the socially excluded. Providing opportunities for *de facto* empowerment, where local people have real, tangible influence over the decision-making processes and services that impact on their lives is vital if local democracy and civil society are to be reinvigorated.

But it is equally clear that without processes in place to support people to believe in themselves and in the impact of their engagement with local government, citizen empowerment mechanisms will ultimately fail to extend beyond private opportunities for the already empowered to consolidate their influence.

This is separate from increasing trust in public sector institutions per se. As our research shows, many of the most successful approaches to delivering subjective empowerment occur outside institutional processes. Subjective empowerment requires a process which is highly responsive to the needs of citizens and service users and focuses on questions such as “What are you motivated by?”, “What change would you like to see?” and “How would you like to achieve this change?”

### **More direct empowerment is needed**

Much public policy and strategy for involving people in public service decision-making and delivery is still too focused on top-down forms of empowerment with public services **providing** citizens with opportunities to discuss and inform policy. These can provide real empowerment to people and should remain an important method for democratising power.

But there needs to be greater experimentation with new ways of empowering citizens and communities to have more **direct control** over policy decision-making that impact on their lives if the full benefits of empowerment are to be realised. Recent government advocacy of individual budgets and participatory budgeting are good examples of more direct forms of empowerment. But they remain at the margins of public service delivery, not central to it.

More direct forms of empowerment will require a new model of dialogue and engagement between citizens, their communities and public services. This will mean more and more decision-making capabilities and responsibility devolved to local people, with public services increasingly functioning as ‘enablers’ (e.g. providing resources) and ‘facilitators’ (e.g. providing guidance and support) of civic engagement and decision-making rather than determining outcomes.

### **Empowerment requires building social capacity and innovation**

Empowerment is dependent on cultivating and harnessing social and organisational capacity. Future strategy and policy needs to better understand how this can be done.

Much of the existing research and policy we have reviewed as part of this research focuses on the participants and their reasons for engaging, or not engaging, in civic life. But there needs to be a more systematic understanding of which mechanisms of empowerment are more or less attractive to citizens and how they can be used to harness and cultivate social capacity.

This will require more detailed and action-orientated research that explores the institutional structures, conditions and contextual forces that foster or impede citizen empowerment and civic innovation.

These include sufficient investment, strong leadership, social capital and political culture, which all impact on the success of citizen empowerment initiatives and can either enhance or undermine their successful delivery.

### **Making empowerment real not abstract**

But the real next step – the one that is necessary to ensure the legitimacy and future of citizen and community empowerment as a key public policy area – will be to ensure that empowerment becomes an everyday reality for citizens and communities across the UK who want more control over the direction of their lives.

This means ensuring the innovative and transformative potential of empowerment is embedded in cross-governmental strategy and essential to public service delivery.

### **What we need to know next**

These actions are long-term goals that require immediate action.

This desk research should be used to inform a next stage focused on a more practical level of inquiry. This will be vital if we are to develop a fuller understanding of what citizen empowerment could mean in practice for both different user groups and those in charge of delivering citizen-focused public services, and to ensure that the rhetoric of empowerment becomes an everyday reality.

This requires a systematic analysis of the political and institutional cultures that are key to creating a situation in which empowerment mechanisms can be used effectively.

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Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute and Involve

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# 1. Introduction

# 1. Introduction

CLG commissioned Involve and Ipsos MORI to bring together learning on the most effective approaches to user empowerment in local government service delivery. This report is based on extensive desk research and aims to outline the main theories underpinning thinking on empowerment, methodologies for citizen engagement, and the relationship between empowerment initiatives and local service delivery. We have also included a section on the policy implications of our work.

## 1.1 Background and Objectives

Since 1997, HM government has introduced sweeping reforms which aim to promote more citizen-focused public services, and increased accountability of public service providers to those whom they serve. Examples of these reforms include:

- Requiring all local authorities to undertake the triennial Best Value Performance Indicator surveys; the introduction of the Place Survey and new Comprehensive Area Agreements (CAA);
- The SRB<sup>1</sup> and NDC<sup>2</sup> regeneration initiatives have consciously sought to empower and involve local communities;
- Area governance initiatives have been promoted widely by and for local government;
- The new Duty to Involve, Consult and Inform, applicable to Local Authorities and numerous Arms Length Bodies.

Central to all this is a shared belief across government that local communities are likely to be most effective at dealing with their own problems. They have the most intricate knowledge of their own neighbourhoods and are therefore uniquely placed to understand the problems they face, and the types of solutions that are likely to work.

This report aims to address the following **research objectives**:

- To deliver an evidence base for policymakers to draw upon which is drawn from aspects of public service delivery that are relevant to the key concerns of citizen empowerment;
- To gather examples of good citizen empowerment practice in public service delivery, and to suggest specific learning points for frontline public services;
- To support the development of policymaking within CLG on how to move the 'empowerment agenda' forward, in order to support local authorities in improving their service delivery within performance framework parameters; and
- To provide suggestions of how to integrate citizen empowerment into the community engagement strategies of local authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Single Regeneration Budget programme aims to enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people and to tackle the needs of communities in the most deprived areas. <http://www.urban.odpm.gov.uk/programmes/srb/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> A Government programme to regenerate 39 very deprived areas across England over a ten-year period. <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/ndcomms.asp>



## 1.2 Report Structure

We initially provide an overview of the theoretical foundations of our work, focusing on the meaning of power. This enables us to place our work in its historical context and ensure transparency about how and why we have taken a particular analytical approach. Whilst this section is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of current academic debate in this field, it is hoped that it will stimulate discussion, and signpost the reader to more information about the issues, if desired.

The main section of the report takes as its starting point a number of possible empowerment mechanisms provided by the research team within CLG. Each particular mechanism is assessed against three dimensions: type, scale and outcome of empowerment they produce. In addition, we look at the overall benefits and risks of the type of empowerment each mechanism produces, which groups in society it tends to empower – and disempower – and which groups tend to favour/disfavour it.

The report then discusses the context in which the mechanisms operate, using a simple analogy with horticulture as its base.

## 1.3 Publication of the Data

As with all our studies, these findings are subject to Ipsos MORI's standard Terms & Conditions of Contract. Any press release or publication of the findings of this research requires the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

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## **2. Theories of Empowerment**

## 2. Theories of Empowerment

This chapter briefly outlines the theoretical foundations of our work and provides a sense of how we understand the term 'empowerment'. This enables us to place our work in its historical context and ensure transparency about how and why we have taken a particular analytical approach.

It begins by providing our working definition of empowerment, which is derived from the findings of the literature review. We then provide a brief overview of the existing empowerment literature - gleaned from disciplines as wide ranging as political science, education and self-help manuals focusing on the factors that are relevant to local governance and public service provision.

### 2.1 Our working definition of 'empowerment'

Having explored some of the existing definitions of empowerment, we found it very helpful to think about the key factors that underpin them, when drawing together our own definition for this project. There are essentially 3 types of empowerment.

#### ***De facto* empowerment**

This is actual control or influence (power) over an outcome or a decision. For example, when a citizens' ballot caps council tax levels it has de facto power because it has limited tax levels. When an elderly person uses their individual budget to change their carer, they have de facto power because they changed their service provider. Importantly, the presence or absence of de facto power is independent of perceptions – if a satisfaction survey leads to a service provider losing or keeping a contract, the survey participants have de facto power over the service provider, even though they probably do not know about it.

#### ***De jure* empowerment**

This power is manifested in opportunities and rights provided through law, contract or other official record. The key point about de jure power is that it does not have to be exercised to exist. So, for example, registered voters who do not vote on election day have de jure power over who represents them (because they have the right to vote), but not de facto power (because they have not in fact influenced the result).

#### **Subjective empowerment**

This is the feeling, or perception, of being able to influence, control, or affect a situation. A person can have subjective power without de facto power – a person may feel they have power over things that they cannot in fact influence. While post-structuralists see this as the only real form of power, for most theorists this is not a form of power at all, as it does not necessarily involve the capacity to actually do or influence anything in practice.

Breaking empowerment down in this way is highly relevant to this study for two reasons. Firstly, much empowerment activity does explicitly set out to foster a subjective sense of empowerment, often in tandem with *de facto* or *de jure* power. Secondly, subjective empowerment is often a pre-condition for delivering *de facto* power. People who do not feel able to influence things tend not to sign petitions or participate in opt-in participative fora, or make use of choice mechanisms.

Ipsos MORI and Involve believe that successful empowerment initiatives must support both subjective and *de facto* empowerment. This view is reflected in our definition of empowerment for this project, namely:

**Empowerment is when people have a personal sense of agency and the state provides meaningful opportunities through which to channel that agency.**

## 2.2 Competing and contrasting theories of empowerment

This section provides a brief overview of the existing empowerment literature focussing on the factors that are relevant to local governance and service provision.

### 2.2.1 What is empowerment?

*“Asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription-like, contradicting the very concept of empowerment.”*

Zimmerman, 1984

The challenge of defining empowerment is well established. The term ‘empowerment’ is interpreted in many different ways and there is no universally established definition. Whilst the word is widely used, when the usage of the word by different authors is contrasted it quickly becomes obvious that their meanings differ. Additionally, in many texts a definition of empowerment is not explicit.

Zimmerman (1984) reveals the tension between creating clarity and avoiding prescription. He feels that the latter can undermine the gradual and organic evolution of empowerment that is essential for the creation of a sense of ownership of both the process and content by participants. This captures the essence of the dilemma facing any government: the empowerment process involves some degree of power transfer - how to balance the responsibility to lead with the obligation to effectively involve citizens?

### 2.2.2 What is power?

*“People without power tend to use the term empowerment to mean the acquisition of power. Those who have power tend to mean processes which mask the withholding of power.”*

Milward, 2004

Behind any definition of empowerment lies the difficult topic of power. Is empowerment a zero sum game (does one person's increase in power automatically lead to a decrease of someone else's power?), or a more complex relationship? Does power reside in individuals, in collective groups, or in institutions and structures – and how can it be transferred between these different sites? Does the definition of power one uses depend on how much of it one already has?

Williams et al (1994) identified four different types of power:

- **Power over:** a relationship of domination/subordination, ultimately based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation. In terms of empowerment, the first kind of power is rarely the focus. If anything, the drive to empower citizens and users is seen as a way of moving away from a top-down type of relationship between the public and the state;
- **Power to:** having decision-making authority, or the ability to solve problems, which can be creative and enabling;
- **Power with:** involving people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals; and
- **Power within:** self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. This definition of power relates to how individuals become aware of how power operates in their lives, and how they can gain the confidence to change these structures of power.

Alsop (2005) uses the '*power with*' and '*power within*' aspects of this framework in her definition of empowerment:

*"If a person or group is empowered, they possess the capacity to make effective choices; that is, to translate their choices into desired actions and outcomes"*

The concepts of 'capacity' or 'capability' which Alsop introduces here are also crucial to our understanding of the empowerment process. Bolger (2000) describes capacity as the

*"abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviours, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, networks/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time"*

Alsop is not alone in aligning empowerment and capacity building; in fact Mayo and Anastacio (1999) consider capacity building to be the most basic, or essential, 'level' of the empowerment of citizens. For them, true empowerment consists of three stages:

1. enabling the community to increase their levels of skills and information.
2. learning the rules, and having enough clout to get things on the agenda; effectively devolving control of as many decisions and resources as possible to the local level.
3. changing consciousness, engaging with wider political processes, as well as dealing with some problems of 'who participates'.

### 2.2.3 Why empower?

Fiorino (1990) identifies three justifications for increased participation in civic society, itself a key component of empowerment:

- **Normative:** because it is good in itself
- **Substantive:** because it makes things better
- **Instrumental:** because it achieves certain goals

**Normative** rationales for empowerment rest on principles of democracy and equality. Theorists such as Rawls (1971) and Habermas (1975) view the commitment to empowering citizens (especially those with marginal or excluded interests) as a matter of principle. From this standpoint, participation is a good thing in its own right, without the need for further justification (Stirling: 2005).

A more practical 'slant' on this normative analysis is provided by Crick (2001), who argues that, because the act of participation provides people with life skills which enable them to function more effectively as individuals, participation itself creates value regardless of any defined output of the participation process.

**Substantive** rationales for participation are based upon the belief that empowerment will improve the process of decision-making, the quality of decisions made and services delivered. There are two areas in which improvements can be made via citizen participation:

- *Information gathering:* by working with external parties, institutions can gather 'intelligence' which they can use to improve service provision or decision-making.
- *Improved service delivery:* many services, such as recycling collections, require participation or support from the community to improve.

**Instrumental** rationales for empowerment focus upon the goals that it is hoped empowerment will deliver. Gaining support for policies and complexity management are commonly given reasons for public participation; actively taking part in, and learning about public service delivery systems builds participants' trust in institutions and decision-making structures. Similarly, many hope that empowerment processes can reconnect many of the links between society and the state that have been broken by the decline in union and political party membership.

Lobby groups (e.g. Oxfam, Friends of the Earth) often advocate citizen participation as a means to achieve the specific goals they are working towards. Such groups tend to be less interested in the techniques used to achieve participation, and more concerned with ensuring that the process achieves the specific changes they value.

In practice, it is common for an empowerment initiative to incorporate all three rationales, depending on which parties perspective one views the initiative from. For example, Miliband (2005) perceives two roles for empowerment in Britain today, which can be seen to encompass normative, substantive and instrumental reasons for participation:

*"Empowerment can help improve public services. And empowerment can help bridge the gap between citizens and their democracy which is such a dispiriting part of public debate."*

Similarly, the UN has stated that investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable per se but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development<sup>3</sup>.

According to Stirling (2005), these different drivers of participation lead to very different ways of understanding what is meant by the term 'empowerment':

*"Normative democratic perspectives tend to hold in common the aim of countering or ameliorating undue exercise of power in social choice. Instrumental perspectives are aimed uncritically at achieving ends that are conditioned by existing power structures and so – intentionally or not – will tend to support these. For its part, a substantive perspective is ostensibly blind to considerations of power, focusing instead on apparently transcendent qualities in the resulting social choices."*

## 2.2.4 Who is empowered?

Whether considering definitions, or methods, of empowerment, the question of who is (or should be) empowered is critical. Empowerment is commonly seen to be directed at vulnerable or marginalized groups, rather than society at large:

*"Empowerment is the expansion of capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives."*

World Bank, 2002

*"...processes through which disenfranchised social groups work to change their social surroundings, change detrimental policies and structures, and work to fulfil their needs."*

Dugan, 2003

Empowerment also tends to be characterised as a collective endeavour. In the academic literature a distinction is often drawn between engagement based on individualistic consumer models, and those based on collective structures, or the engagement of people as citizens.<sup>4</sup> Often this dichotomy is value laden, with the latter being considered more empowering than the former.

The more individualistic ideas of empowerment can be found in management and technology literature, where software developers frequently speak of empowering the users of their software<sup>5</sup>. For Maccoby (1999), *"empowerment means investing authority in a role or person"*, with a view to creating more competent employees. This view is obviously very different from those which consider that empowerment is a collective endeavour in which the whole is larger than the sum of its parts.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (1995) Human Development Report 1995, New York: UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis J., Inthorn, S. and Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2005) Citizens or consumers?: What the media tell us about participation, Maidenhead: Open University Press; Cornwall, A. (2001) Beneficiary, Consumer, Citizen: Changing Perspectives On Participation For Poverty Reduction, Stockholm: SIDA.

<sup>5</sup> Kynigos, C. (2004) A "Black-and-White Box" Approach to User Empowerment With Component Computing, Interactive Learning Environments, Vol.12, 1-2: 27-71; Barker, T. (1994) The Empowered User: A New Approach to Software Documentation – paper from Annual Conference-Society For Technical Communication 1994.



### 2.2.5 The role of institutions in bringing about empowerment

The role of established institutions in empowerment is a contentious issue. Can the institutions of the state actively support empowerment, or is a more 'hands off' approach necessary to avoid accusations of state control/bias in the process of citizen participation?

Whilst most agree that institutions have some role to play in facilitating empowerment, there are differing views as to how much it should intervene in the actual process itself. Some see the state taking 'a back seat' and leaving local communities taking charge. Skidmore & Craig (2005), amongst others, argue that empowerment is an intrinsically bottom-up process and cannot be provided from the top down.

*"If you start from communities then empowerment and enforcement combine. If you start from agencies then enforcement prevails."*

New Start, 2005<sup>6</sup>

Rowlands (1995) goes further than this, arguing that genuine empowerment requires a clear link between community voice and local government response, which can only be achieved if local government is *"independent, democratically elected and directly funded by their own communities"* and significant power is devolved from central government. This argument is also made by Travers and Esposito (2004)

Milliband (2005) and the World Bank (2002) emphasise that institutions can play more of a defined role in facilitating empowerment, by creating the democratic structures to allow the views of citizens and service users to be easily accessed, heard and acted upon. Participatory and representative systems do not have to necessarily be seen as anachronistic, but can in fact complement each other well.

*"Empowerment is not just a matter of individual opportunities to run services or make choices. Both are important, but it is also about creating systems of representative devolved government in reach of local people that they can relate to, influence and rely on to deliver the collective decisions central to the quality of their lives."*

Stoker, 2005

*"Participatory democracy through local groups is complementary to representative democracy through local councillors and should be treated as such. (...) External agencies should welcome and respect, and not seek to circumscribe, the independence of community groups."*

Social Exclusion Unit, 2005

Finally, some theorists emphasise that less involvement in participative exercises by citizens/users in institutions can actually result in more substantive 'empowerment', provided the extra effort is expended by the state to deliver high quality services, which will limit the need for complaints and engagement.

<sup>6</sup> New Start (2005) With all due respect, New Start, 29 June.

*“The greatest empowerment of all is a system of governance that makes life easier, more liveable and more full of potential. Running things yourself and making choices can be fulfilling. Having things run for you in a way that enables you to live your life can be even more rewarding.”*

Stoker, 2005

## **2.2.6 Dangers of empowerment**

Our review of empowerment literature revealed broadly positive discourses about empowerment. However, we did come across a few critical views which are worth bearing in mind. The primary concern is that as the use of the term ‘empowerment’ grows – and as a universally acknowledged definition fails to emerge – the term is becoming increasingly devoid of meaning, in much the same way as ‘eco’ has become a marketing tool rather than a genuinely environmentally sustainable approach to business.

*“Participation and empowerment have now come to symbolise the legitimacy to pursue today’s generation of development blueprints, under the rubric of poverty reduction. The downside of all this is discursive closure: it becomes more difficult to disagree with the use of words like ‘empowerment’ than it would with the ideas that underpin the way of world-making. Nice-sounding words are, after all, there for the taking, and the nicer they sound, the more useful they might prove to be for those seeking to establish their moral authority.”*

Cornwall & Brock, UNRISD 2005

There are also critics who fear that, rather than empowerment changing the way ‘politics is done’, existing power relationships ingrained in ‘top-down’ institutional structures may simply be transferred uncritically to the new ‘empowered’ structures, thus undermining efforts to affect real change. There is also a risk that the empowerment of communities can be taken too far and can undermine existing democratic structures, if the outputs of participative initiatives are used to inform policy and practice too directly.

*“Participation is bounded by the need for elected politicians to make final decisions in ways that are accountable to the wider community. (...) Participation is about having a chance to shape the decision; it is not about automatically controlling it.”*

Ellis, 2004

### **3. Assessing the mechanisms**

## 3. Assessing the mechanisms

Whilst there are a wide variety of empowerment mechanisms currently in use in the UK, there is also a widely variable ‘success rate’ in terms of how far they actually achieve their empowerment objectives. Large and unsubstantiated claims are often made for methods of engagement; evaluation is sorely needed. The remainder of this report seeks to discuss some of the causes of this variation. It contains three sections:

- Firstly, we set out below the **framework for our analysis**, which is based on three different dimensions along which various mechanisms will be evaluated.
- We then discuss each **type of mechanism** in turn, describe its defining features, and analyse the empowerment delivered. This includes a discussion of who it tends to empower and who it tends to exclude, who tends to favour/disfavour it and their reasons for doing so.
- Finally, we look at some of the main **contextual factors** which influence the success of the different mechanisms

To ensure that our findings are as relevant and useful as possible, we have based our choice of mechanisms to scrutinise on those which are being considered by the CLG team. We have endeavoured to provide best practice examples of empowerment activities and local service delivery where appropriate.

### 3.1 Introduction

There is a wide variety of empowerment mechanisms currently in use in both the UK and around the world. These mechanisms vary greatly in terms of purpose, scale, approach and success. The most common and well regarded techniques are:

- **Individual-level** mechanisms such as choice-based lettings (in housing) or Direct Payments (in social care.);
- **Collective-level** mechanisms such as the role for citizens on Foundation Hospital or NDC Boards;
- Schemes that, alongside other aims, explicitly set out to raise **subjective empowerment** at a societal level, such as National Pensions Day or the ‘GM Nation?’ debate;
- Schemes that are focused on **de facto empowerment** and service delivery improvement, such as the devolution of significant funding to NDC Boards, or the use of satisfaction surveys results as Key Performance Indicators for local government; and
- Schemes that set out to **improve communities’ abilities** to make use of other empowerment mechanisms, for example Community Empowerment Networks or the newly introduced ‘health trainers’.

The evidence suggests that whilst across the board empowerment approaches have produced mixed results, several mechanisms have delivered significant improvements in levels of empowerment of local residents, the quality of services used by them, and the levels of social capital within them. Further details on all these examples can be found in the case studies that follow, covering:

- Participatory budgeting in Bolivia,
- Citizen assessment for the Wrekin Housing Trust and
- Community Researchers for Wansbeck Council

However, other mechanisms have failed to deliver a similar impact:

- Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships demonstrated that Community Empowerment Network representatives have had *“too little influence”* on LSP Boards (National Audit Office 2004).
- Despite professional codes of practice and training that emphasise patient autonomy, the Healthcare Commission’s State of Healthcare 2005 report concluded that *“there is worrying evidence on how [patients] receive information, what information they receive, and whether they are involved”* (Healthcare Commission 2005).
- A recent evaluation of Foundation Trusts found that governors drawn from local and patient communities had had little de facto influence on strategy (Healthcare Commission 2005).

Finally, an Ipsos MORI survey of residents of Birmingham in 2004 found that while 85% of local councillors feel that they ‘make a real effort to listen to the views of local people’, just 32% of the public share their view.<sup>7</sup>

It seems clear that different sorts of mechanism are delivering different outcomes. However, there is also significant variation in the experiences of using the same model in different locations, or with different audiences; it would seem that for reasons we will explore in Section 11, mechanisms that work well in one context are sometimes less successful elsewhere.

## 3.2 The framework of analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, the complexity inherent in the definition and use of empowerment poses some problems when trying to evaluate each of the mechanisms under consideration. Should a mechanism that gives people a strong sense of empowerment but makes no difference to actual policy decisions be counted as empowering or disempowering? What about one that did the opposite?

Given this, we did not feel it appropriate to attempt to evaluate the mechanisms by a single yardstick. Instead, we have distinguished three different dimensions along which an empowerment mechanism can operate, and evaluated each mechanism by its profile along these three dimensions. The dimensions are:

- Type of empowerment – what does the mechanism do?
- Scale of empowerment – who does it empower?
- Benefits of empowerment – what outcomes does the mechanism deliver?

<sup>7</sup> Base: 198 members, c.1600 Members of the public. MORI residents survey for Birmingham City Council

### 3.2.1 Type of empowerment

As discussed, we believe there are three different types of empowerment. Where mechanisms are claimed to deliver 'empowerment' in general, what is usually being claimed is that it delivers one or more of the following:

- **De facto** empowerment: actual control or influence over an outcome or a decision;
- **De jure** empowerment: power that is manifested in opportunities and rights provided through law, contract or other official record; and
- **Subjective** empowerment: the feeling of being able to influence/control/affect a situation.

*De jure* empowerment often plays a supplementary role to the more significant *de facto* and subjective empowerments. This is because our conception of empowerment is such that it is not satisfied by formal rules associated with a democratic state. While actions to improve the legislative or regulatory context are important for laying the groundwork, we believe that real empowerment must go beyond the provision of rights and allow citizens real and/or perceived control of outcomes. For example, policy-makers can easily provide *de jure* empowerment by providing more options for service users. But the type, quality, variety and accessibility of choices provided will be central to determining if *de facto* and subjective empowerment can follow.

Chapter Headings	CLG mechanisms
Choice and Exit	Choice and User-led contestability
Direct Payments and Individual Budgets	Choice and User-led contestability
Highly participative voice mechanism	Neighbourhood Contracts and Community Service Agreements (CSA)  <i>NB we have added in and also considered Partnership Boards and Neighbourhood Forums in this section</i>
Ballots, referenda and empowered petitions	Ballot Initiatives
Participatory budgeting	Participatory budgeting
Triggers	Local Triggers National Triggers Satisfaction Triggers Satisfaction-driven assessment Democratic Capping
Citizen Assessors	Citizen Assessment

### 3.2.2 The scale of empowerment

Again, as discussed in the previous chapter, approaches to empowerment are shaped by whether they empower at the **individual** or **collective** level. Typical individual level mechanisms include, for example, consumerist choices such as choice over the time of day for an appointment with a council officer; or a student's choice over the GCSEs they will study. Typical collective level mechanisms include partnership working such as the workings of an LSP board including a CEN representative, or the deliberation of a people's panel or citizens' jury.

For some services the choice of individual or collective level mechanisms is relatively straightforward: it makes little sense to have collective empowerment about an appointment time, or to have individual empowerment over park maintenance. However, many issues and mechanisms can be treated at either - or both - an individual level and a collective level. For example, allocation of children to school places can be managed by empowering parents to choose schools (individual level) or local education authorities to assign children to schools (collective level).

Some mechanisms can deliver both individual and collective level empowerment: for example citizens' ballots offer individuals the opportunity to influence policy marginally by deciding whether to sign a petition or not, and provide 'society' with the opportunity to influence policy significantly by collectively achieving (or failing to achieve) the requisite number of signatures. They can also conflict; for example, allowing individuals to top up Individual Budgets with their own money to secure better personal care could conflict with collectively agreed pay agreements with care providers.

### 3.2.3 The benefits of empowerment

Different empowerment mechanisms deliver different sorts of benefits. We have found it useful to divide the sorts of benefit into three classes, which are based on Fiorino's (1990) classification of justifications for participation, as discussed in Chapter 1. However, unlike Fiorino, we have broadened the scope of the classification beyond just participation to empowerment in general. It is important to emphasise again that participation is not identical to empowerment, nor does participation necessarily lead to empowerment, as will be seen in our discussion of participatory mechanisms. Empowerment is a process that can be achieved by a variety of mechanisms of which participation is but one. Despite this distinction however, the same sorts of benefits can be realised.

Building on Fiorino's initial model looking at participation, we have identified three sorts of benefit to empowerment, namely:

- **Normative** benefits. These are benefits that are claimed to be intrinsically good irrespective of any consequences they have for service delivery outcomes. Within the context of a democracy, normative benefits tend to be democratic benefits. For example, the opportunity to be involved in decision making processes is sometimes argued to be good in and of itself as it is 'more democratic', irrespective of how that power is used;
- **Instrumental** benefits highlight the usefulness of empowerment as a means for achieving set goals or ends. These goals are pre-determined and intrinsic to a particular system. For example, an empowerment mechanism might be justified merely because it ticks a particular box in an audit programme; or, more positively, because it secures buy-in to a decision making process. The relevant ends are selected by their priority within a pre-existing system, not by some more 'objective' justification; and

- **Substantive** approaches are similar to instrumental ones in that they focus on outcomes. However, rather than being based on the pre-existing aims of the particular group of policy makers, they are based on some sort of independent conception of which outcomes are to be valued. Put differently, instrumental justifications validate empowerment in terms of its ability to achieve *particular* ends, while substantive justifications validate empowerment in terms of it producing *better* ends.

These sorts of benefits are linked but independent of each other. For example, citizens' ballots can be argued to deliver normative benefits in that they broaden access to power; but also some substantive normative dis-benefits in that there is some evidence that they lead to a reduction in minority rights<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the use of a citizens' jury to claim legitimacy for a decision that is not in fact influenced by the jury, could deliver instrumental benefits but, given its lack of impact on policy, could not deliver substantive benefits.

The sort of benefit delivered is closely linked to the sort of empowerment a mechanism delivers. In particular, a mechanism cannot deliver substantive benefits unless it offers some sort of *de facto* power – because unless the mechanism really has the capacity to change things, whether directly or indirectly, it cannot lead to real improvements. However, the categories are independent; for example:

- A mechanism could offer *de jure* power but not normative benefits if the *de jure* power it offers is not in line with the values of a democracy; for example a mechanism that gave legislative power to a self-selected cartel would be *de jure* empowering of those individuals, but would not offer normative benefits. This criticism is sometimes levelled against certain partnership approaches;
- A mechanism could offer *de facto* power but not substantive benefits, if the power was used in a harmful way. For example, choice mechanisms are sometimes accused of allowing ill-informed individuals to make poor or detrimental choices that would not be made if there was more top-down provision.

### 3.3 The mechanisms

The next seven sections discuss each of the mechanisms under consideration within CLG, as provided to the consortium at the end of 2005. Clearly there is a great deal of overlap between mechanism types and some can work in concert. For example, trigger mechanisms and satisfaction driven assessment have significant overlap in that they can both involve service users triggering actions on the basis of their views. Advocacy and user information including navigation information, significant overlaps with choice in that choices need to be made on the basis of information, and in some cases (such as severe mental impairments) choices have to be made on behalf of individuals by advocates. There is also a role for advocates in advising councils on which choices should be on offer.

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<sup>8</sup> see Chapter 7 for more discussion on Citizens Ballots



Given these overlaps and our desire to avoid repetition we have grouped the mechanisms slightly differently from the original classification provided to us by CLG at the start of the project. The difference between the two models is as follows:

Chapter Headings	CLG mechanisms
Choice and Exit	Choice and User-led contestability
Highly participative voice mechanism	Neighbourhood Contracts and Community Service Agreements (CSA)  <i>NB we have added in and also considered Partnership Boards and Neighbourhood Forums in this section</i>
Ballots, referenda and empowered petitions	Ballot Initiatives
Triggers	Local Triggers National Triggers Satisfaction Triggers Satisfaction-driven assessment Democratic Capping

A small number of the original CLG mechanisms are considered across the chapters rather than as specific mechanisms in themselves, as they have a supporting role in the delivery of all the mechanisms under discussion.

The first of these is advocacy/navigation/peer support which is discussed in the context of other mechanisms as its use is so intimately linked to other mechanisms, especially choice.

Co-production of services and assets is also not treated as a separate mechanism, as it covers a wide range of mechanism types. For example, advice and information provision can be key to co-production in health care; citizens making choices over care-providers are involved in the co-production of their care; a local gardening club that works on a local park are co-producers of civic space, but may be engaged through any number of mechanisms and so on.

We do not include social marketing, user information or robust consultation as specific empowerment mechanisms; instead these have been grouped as 'information provision' and are discussed throughout.

Finally, for the majority of mechanisms, there is more evidence around the sort of empowerment they are **designed to deliver** than there is on the **actual benefits** that arise as a result of that empowerment or on the extent to which the mechanism enjoys public support.



## **4. Choice and exit**

## 4. Choice and exit

### 4.1 What is the choice/exit mechanism?

Choice has long been linked to issues of empowerment. The women's, anti-psychiatry and disability rights movements in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, brought the issue of 'choice' into health and social care services, particularly in the United States (Robinson 2001). Family planning and anti-discrimination campaigners challenged the notion of professional autonomy and 'done-to' services, with excluded groups claiming choice over their fertility, and the choice to live independently. These developments foreran a broader patients' rights movement that challenged medical paternalism and asserted choice for patients over whether they took part in research or consented to risky treatment. Choice in service delivery has therefore partly arisen within the context of citizen empowerment.

However, the empowerment agenda has been augmented, and sometimes supplanted, by other developments. Choice in public services is increasingly identified with the idea of a competitive market, with money following the user (be it patient, parent or passenger) rather than being allocated centrally. Much of this shift has been driven by an economic approach to politics, most significantly economist Albert Hirschman's concepts of 'exit,' 'voice' and 'loyalty' (Hirschman 1970).

Hirschman's framework is basic but has had wide-reaching impact on policy. It suggests there are two primary strategies for individuals when faced with a decline in firms, organizations and states. They can either use 'voice' by making complaints or demanding change, or 'exit' by opting out or leaving. Loyalty to an organization or state will affect which strategy an individual is more likely to take.

Traditionally, voice is associated with the political sphere (citizens protesting or airing complaints) and exit with the private sector (consumers switching brands if they are dissatisfied). However, Hirschman's framework has contributed to views that increasing citizens' ability to exit will create better public service provision and more empowerment. This leads to two main approaches to infusing public services with competitive choice:

- Offering choices to individuals within the current provision scheme and allowing them to 'exit' if they are dissatisfied by moving to other options within the public service framework.
- Providing a total exit option in which individuals may opt out of receiving a service from the public system entirely (though it may still be paid for out of public funds).

These choices cover a range of different sorts of decisions to be undertaken by the service user. Le Grand (2004) identifies four sorts of choices:

- **Choice of provider (where?):** e.g. in residential care for the elderly, the choice between home X and home Y;
- **Choice of service (what?):** e.g. in education, the choice between different aspects of the curriculum;
- **Choice of time (when?):** e.g. in social care, the choice time of day that carers arrive; and
- **Choice of access channel (how?):** e.g. in the context of enquiries about council tax bills, the choice of enquiring by phone, email, or face to face.

These are all individual level choices. In addition, there are also ‘collective choices’, for example choices made on behalf of patient groups in the NHS by advocacy groups. We discuss these ‘collective choices’ in the section on highly participative voice mechanisms (see page 56) as they more often than not involve advocates and representatives engaging in dialogue with providers, with both sides giving and taking to produce a compromise solution rather than choosing amongst discrete options.

Individual level choices can vary in importance. Some are fundamental ‘life-choices’, such as where to live. Others are more prosaic, such as what time to see the doctor. Some are made regularly, such as what time carers arrive while others are made only occasionally, such as how to pay a council tax bill. Some are made on subjects where the chooser is well informed about the consequences of different options, such as the time of day that a carer is present, others on issues where information is often lacking, such as in healthcare or financial services. Some are made on one’s own behalf, others on behalf of other people, such as children.

Given this variation in terms of types of choice, importance of choice, and ability to make well informed choices, we believe it is important to be clear about the precise nature of ‘choice’ under consideration for individual local government services, rather than grouping it all under one generic heading.

## 4.2 What sort of empowerment can choice/exit deliver?

**Subjective:** Making choices is a fundamental ingredient of human agency and autonomy. Providing options allows for greater individual control and freedom, regardless of whether the decision is over a major life choice or the more trivial task of appointment-making. Because of this, choice can significantly increase subjective empowerment by enabling individuals to fit public services into their own schedules: public services become something that the user does rather than something that is done to the user. Despite these intuitions, the link between choice and subjective empowerment has received little attention and it is unknown whether such a strong relationship actually exists in the context of service provision and delivery (Le Grand et al. 2003).

**De facto:** In comparison to other mechanisms, in particular ‘voice’ or participatory methods (see 1.2.3); choice can provide *“more direct and precise influence for service users”* (Le Grand et al. 2003). However, this influence hinges greatly on how choices are structured. If users are not offered ‘real’ options, then the outcome of their decision will remain relatively constant regardless of what they choose. A wide range of options capturing a spectrum of preferences is necessary to avoid this problem and enable *de facto* empowerment.

Schwartz (2004) and others have argued that providing people with too many choices can lead to paralysis or arbitrary choices as people are unable to decide between options. This claim seems intuitively true in some exaggerated local government contexts: who would want to pick between 1000 different waste service companies? In many realistic contexts the problem seems less significant. For example, in the context of education, the average secondary school has 6 other secondary schools within a 10-minute drive zone (Burgess, McConnel et al 2004).

Given the importance most parents attach to choice of school, it seems more likely that factors such as proximity, transport and school reputation will influence decision making rather than an arbitrary choice being made – though it is important to be clear that this is conjecture. Whilst the problem certainly cannot arise in the 50% of rural areas where there are no schools within a 10 minute drive time of a given school, it may be more significant in London, where the average number of schools within a 10-minute drive zone of each other is not 6 but 17 (Le Grand 2004). Here parents would have to invest significant amounts of time and have more far reaching methods of sourcing information to decide which of the 17 plausible choices would best suit their child.

### 4.3 What benefits does choice/exit deliver?

**Normative:** As discussed above, choice originally had and continues to have strong ties to empowerment through human rights movements. Whether a specific choice mechanism delivers against this rhetoric depends on the type of choice at hand. For example, it is easier to run a normative argument for choice for disabled people over their care provision than choice for council tax payers to pay online or over the phone.

**Instrumental:** Justifications for choice often focus on the impacts that choice can have on the overall performance of a system, with structural reforms attempting to institutionalise choice to drive change and improvement. In social care and, more recently, in the NHS, purchasers and providers have been separated. Choice at the point of referral from GP to hospital (known as ‘choose and book’) aims to create contestability between providers. In this new ‘quasi-market’ patient choice is a way of allocating resources amongst providers to incentivise them to improve efficiency, quality and innovations by competing to attract patients. This approach is embodied by the system of Payment by Results (PbR), under which providers are paid at a set tariff for each treatment.

The evidence is mixed around whether this theoretical argument delivers in practice. For example, in social care, the existence of quasi-markets does not appear to have increased quality or efficiency in the UK or in Sweden (Fotaki & Boyd 2005). Instead it has led to Local Authorities constraining individual choices due to financial pressures, and an increase in public expenditure. On the other hand, there is some evidence that Direct Payments have reduced costs and increased efficiency (Zarb & Naddash 1994), (though this is contested – see discussion below). In education, studies by Bradley et al (2000) found a small positive relationship between competition and relative efficiency; however, some other studies fail to find this relationship (Burgess, Propper et al. 2005).

In such a politically charged policy arena, as ‘choice’ currently is, much turns on the findings of such research reports, and it is hard in this sort of broad evidence review to pin down an explanation for the inconsistent findings of different researchers. What appears to be clear, however, is that instrumental benefits and, in particular, cost savings, do not flow automatically from the introduction of choice mechanisms. The detail of the mechanism and the environment in which it operates has a crucial impact on outcomes.

There are synergies between justifications based on the normative value of choice and those centred on instrumental concerns of increasing productivity. Increased productivity frees up resources for use elsewhere - or potentially for return to tax payers. However there can also be tensions between these sorts of benefits, as an emphasis on cost reduction could lead to skimping (institutions providing the bare-minimum service level possible), dumping (avoiding high-cost individuals), and skimming (focussing on low-cost individuals)<sup>9</sup>. These sorts of outcomes can conflict with normative ambitions around respecting individual rights.

**Substantive:** Arguments are made that choice leads to more self-directed individuals, more tailored public services, and better outcomes. Each of these claimed benefits are discussed in more detail below, and are illustrated in the case studies at the end of this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Propper, C., Wilson, D. et al. (2005) Extending Choice In English Health Care: The implications of the Economic Evidence, Bristol: CMPO; Williams, J. (2005) Consumer behaviour and care homes - a literature assessment (Annex K). Care homes for older people in the UK: a market study. London: Office of Fair Trading.

### 4.3.1 More self-directed individuals

The discussion above of subjective and *de facto* empowerment effects shows that greater choice can lead to more self-directed individuals. This claim is most strongly evidenced in the context of health and Direct Payments. Farrington-Douglas and Allen (2005) cite several sources to argue that choice over healthcare can lead people to make healthier choices about their lifestyle, and can improve their health directly. The discussion of Direct Payments below shows the benefits to individuals of using Direct Payments to choose carers and services. However, as the discussion of 'who is empowered' shows, causality runs in both directions: more self-directed individuals are more likely to make use of choices, whilst those who are not tend to make less use of choices.

### 4.3.2 More tailored public services

This claim is almost self-evident, particularly for highly consumerist choices such as:

- Choice over contact channels for public services, for example being able to pay bills online as well as by cheque;
- Appointment times for meetings with officials, for example being able to book an appointment with a care-adviser rather than being told when to turn-up; and
- Choices where there are several good but distinct options, for example where there is choice between a sport specialist school and a science specialist school, both of which are similar in terms of academic performance, class-room behaviour, and so on.

However, again, it is important to consider who is actually making these choices. As we discuss in section 4.4 below, there are significant segments of the population who tend not to receive these tailored benefits either because they are less likely to make choices or because there is a lack of good options. For example, where care homes fail to provide tailored services for minority religious groups, choice over care homes does not lead to more tailored services because the option does not exist. Freeing up the supply side may be a step to solving this problem as new services can be introduced, but where demand is low or geographically distributed, it may not be sufficient to drive market responsiveness.

### 4.3.3 Better outcomes

The discussion of tailoring and self-direction has focused on individual level impacts; this section looks at more systemic impacts. The case is often made that introducing choice for service users creates incentives for service providers to improve their services. At the aggregate level it is argued that this leads to better outcomes than systems lacking choice<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Hirschman, A. O. (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Le Grand, J. (2003) *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Blair, T. (2005) *Speech to Labour Party Conference*. Labour party conference, Brighton.

There is strong evidence for this claim in some arenas, particularly from the US. For example:

- Kessler and Geppert (2003) examine the treatment given to elderly Medicare patients admitted to hospital following a heart attack. They find that relatively healthy patients in more competitive markets received less intensive treatment than those in less competitive markets, without any significant loss of health benefits. Meanwhile, sick patients in less competitive markets received less intensive treatment than similar patients in more competitive markets, with worse health outcomes. So it seems that, in that context, choice and competition lead to better allocation of treatment, with more appropriate treatment offered in competitive areas. This treatment is net beneficial to the sickest patients and causes no ill-effects for healthier patients.
- Work by Caroline Hoxby<sup>11</sup> in the USA has consistently shown a link between choice schemes and educational attainment – though the longevity and precise nature of the choice scheme have a significant impact. She argues that it is important that choice sits alongside money following the student, opportunities for market entry and school expansion, and school's strategic decisions being independent of the decisions of other schools. Where these conditions are met:

*“Public schools do respond constructively to competition, by raising their achievement and productivity... Students' achievement generally does rise when they attend voucher or charter schools.”*

Hoxby 2003

Hoxby's finding is based on numerous studies, often using random control groups. However, it is important to emphasise the American context. More recent work in the UK (Gibbons, Machin et al. 2006) has found that:

- Pupils who have a wider choice of schools at their place of residence perform no better than those with more limited choice; and
- Secular schools located in places where they face strong competition from other schools perform no better than secular schools in more isolated, monopolistic settings.

There are numerous plausible ways of reconciling the conflicting findings: the culture of the two countries is manifestly different, the choice mechanisms available in the UK are less developed than the voucher and charter schools schemes Hoxby looked at, and so on. Whether extending choice and competition in UK schools will lead to service improvements is a live – and heavily debated - question.

There are also examples of situations where choice has not led to substantive improvements. The strongest UK example is around choice of care homes, where it is argued that supply constraints, lack of information and the difficult situation in which choices are made (choices often need to be made very quickly to clear hospital beds) has undermined the potential of choice mechanisms to improve service quality<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hoxby, C., Ed. (2003) *The economics of school choice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hoxby, C. (2003) *School choice and school competition: Evidence from the United States*, Swedish Economic Policy Review 10.

<sup>12</sup> Fotaki, M. and Boyd, A. (2005) *From Plan to Market: a comparison of health and old age care policies in the UK and Sweden*, *Public Money and Management* 25(4): 237-243.



## 4.4 Who does choice/exit tend to empower/ exclude?

### 4.4.1 Service user empowerment

Key factors that skew people's abilities to make use of choices, creating disproportionate allocation of its benefits, include:

- **Constraints on choices:** what are billed as empowering choices between different options can turn out to provide little room for individuals to exercise more control over their services. For example, older people have a legal right to choose a residential or nursing home, subject to suitability, availability and cost. However, suitability, availability and cost are such significant constraints that, in practice, choice between homes is very limited, particularly for people from BME communities (Robinson & Banks 2005).
- **Information and confidence:** experience from choice pilots in the Health Service suggests that information, support and practical assistance – including advocacy - are important across all social classes. For example, in surveys of patients offered a choice of hospital for treatment, it was found that they were more likely to take up choice if they discussed their needs with a Patient Care Adviser (PCA) (Barber, Gordon-Dseagu et al. 2004), whilst another survey found that patients who did not take up the offer of a choice were less likely to be satisfied with the information they received (Coulter, Le Maistre et al. 2005). Confidence in decision-making is also key to a person's ability/propensity to make use of choices.

Where there are inequities in access to information and in self-esteem to begin with, then, unless there are mechanisms to address these issues, adding choice to that equation will only exacerbate these inequities. This means that those who are better at making choices could choose better services and achieve better outcomes than those who struggle to make choices. If these skilful choosers are the educated middle classes, then choice could increase inequity and health inequalities<sup>13</sup>.

A more equitable choice programme needs to identify the risks and barriers to informed decision-making and then mitigate them so that all groups and individuals have the opportunity to make informed choices. Disadvantaged groups may have greater difficulties in accessing and using information due to literacy, language, cognitive or sensory impairment, mental illness or lack of access to information technology.

This suggests two complementary responses. On the one hand, support can be provided to enable people to make better choices: for example by providing more accessible information or advice centres. However, this is unlikely to be sufficient: some people will always be better able to understand and influence resource allocation systems. So a second response, which may be necessary in some instances, is to restrict the scope of choices on offer and/or provide alternatives to choice, as is the case with individual budget mechanisms.

These responses can apply equally to other mechanisms. Sometimes it may be necessary to support community members wishing to engage in participative decision making processes; sometimes it may be necessary to limit access to those same people to prevent those most able to take part from dominating proceedings.

<sup>13</sup> Appleby J., et al. (2003) What is the real cost of more patient choice?, London: King's Fund; Klein, R (2003) A Comment on Le Grand's Paper from a Political Science Perspective in Oliver, A. (ed.) Equity in health and healthcare: views from ethics, economics and a political perspective: Proceedings from a meeting of the Health Equity Network, London: The Nuffield Trust.

#### 4.4.2 Service provider empowerment: quasi-market phenomena

In a capacity constrained system, choice can empower service providers rather than service users. If there is excess demand for a good school or hospital, those providers may choose which students and patients to accept, which often leads to a disadvantage for the poor and chronically ill.

For example, it is argued that the introduction of quasi-markets in the British education system in the 1990s has led to a greater segregation of students on the basis of socio-economic class. This is partly due to housing market impacts whereby house prices in the catchment areas of 'good' schools rise, effectively pricing working and lower middle class families out of the area. However, another explanation is that schools achieving high exam grades are able to select which students they wish to attend their schools and consequently avoid students on the low end of the socio-economic scale for fear they will lower their aggregate results. As Burgess et al (2005) argue in the context of education:

*"Parental choice plus poor flexibility on the supply side means that schools have to use some criteria to choose students. The evidence from a number of countries including England suggests that this combined process of choice by parents and schools seems to lead to greater sorting."*

Burgess et al, 2005

To combat this, they argue that increasing supply-side flexibility leads to decreased socio-economic sorting:

*"Thus, in policy terms, if greater choice is to be universal and systemic, then for it not to increase sorting, policy needs much greater supply-side flexibility – for existing schools to expand/contract, for new schools to start and for poor schools to close."*

Burgess et al, 2005

This view is echoed by Hoxby's work in the US<sup>14</sup>. She finds that:

*"There are no general results on the sorting consequences of school choice. The sorting consequences of a school choice plan depend strongly on its design."*

Hoxby, 2003

In summary, quasi-markets can create perverse incentives, particularly under conditions of capacity constraint. Service providers can be effectively empowered to select who they serve, and are given incentives to make these choices on the basis of factors they know drive future choice – so they may systematically prefer to take in higher achieving children (to boost league table results) or less ill patients (to reduce death ratios). These perverse incentives can be tackled to some extent in the design of the system, for example by financially compensating service providers for working on more complex cases, or using value-added pupil performance measures rather than absolute scores.

<sup>14</sup> Hoxby, C., Ed. (2003) The economics of school choice, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hoxby, C. (2003) School choice and school competition: Evidence from the United States, Swedish Economic Policy Review 10.

### 4.4.3 Professional culture

As previously discussed, professional culture and the attitudes of individual public service workers have a big impact on whether their 'clients' make use of choices or not.

Overall, due to a possible combination of the above factors, evidence seems to show that, as choice mechanisms are being run currently, lower classes tend to be disadvantaged by increased choice. Taking education as an example, Burgess (2005) shows how there is a strong class skew in terms of the likelihood that a pupil who lives close to a poorly performing school will attend that school. As the graph overleaf shows, with one exception to the rule, people from poorer postcode areas are significantly more likely to 'choose' to attend a local school than those from wealthier areas, irrespective of the quality of that school. The exception to this rule, and the one situation where those from poorer postcode areas are more likely than wealthier people to attend a school in a different area, is if their local school is of a higher quality.

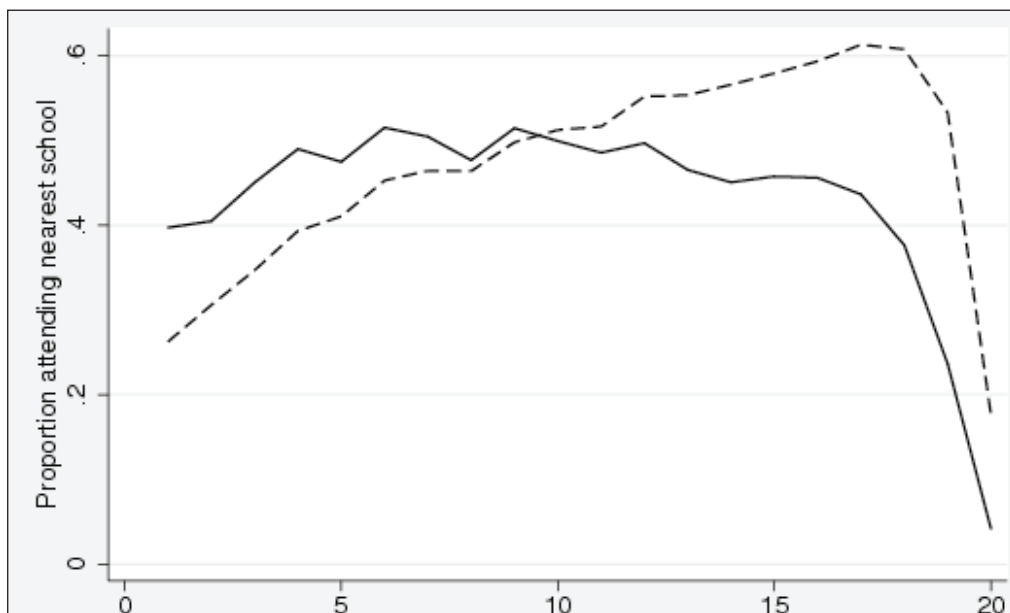


Figure 1 - proportion attending nearest school by school quality and affluence (Burgess 2005)

A key equity test for choice policies in the future is not whether they remove all inequality but whether they exacerbate or mitigate the sort of picture described above.

## 4.5 Who tends to favour/disfavour choice/exit?

The evidence about desire for choice is highly contested and highly contingent on the precise choice on offer.

This can be seen in the evidence below, which seems to contradict the evidence about choice of schools presented by Burgess. A MORI poll for the Audit Commission<sup>15</sup> asked a representative sample of the population how important they considered choice to be in a range of local government services. It found significant appetite for choice, particularly amongst lower social classes. The results are overleaf:

<sup>15</sup> Audit Commission, (2004) <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=B7162BE7-A71A-4237-AD67-DC4DEB9EFFAC&SectionID=sect3>

Percentage of respondents saying that it is absolutely essential to have choice	
Choice of school for children with special needs	43%
More choice in support for elderly people living at home	42%
Choice of school	32%
Choice of payment methods for council tax	31%
More choice of subjects at GCSE	27%
Choice of ways for residents to contact the council	27%
Council tenants' choice on which property they live in	16%
Council tenants' choice on housing service management	14%

Generally, respondents in social classes D and E were most in favour of choice as 'absolutely essential' in all of the service areas tested. These people have the least spending power to secure choice options outside of the public sector at present and depend on council services to a greater degree than other social classes.

The picture in social classes C1 and C2 was more mixed; the 'absolutely essential' choices seem to depend on the service area and on the respondents' personal circumstances. Generally, middle income earners rated fewer choices 'absolutely essential' than either the lower or higher income groups.

Fewer respondents from the highest socio-economic groups rated the choices as 'absolutely essential'—this may be because they already have the buying power to secure alternatives in the marketplace.

More respondents from the north and the midlands rated choice as 'absolutely essential' than those from the south of England, whilst women consistently rated choice more important than did men. Unsurprisingly, council tenants were much keener on choice of who manages the housing service, and which property they live in, than either owner occupiers or those renting privately.

This skew towards respondents in lower social classes is reversed when people are asked about other specific services, particularly in the health arena. For example, a survey of London patients' willingness to consider an alternative hospital found significant correlations between patients' willingness to consider choosing and characteristics including educational status (educated beyond statutory school leaving age), household income (above average earnings) and health status (rated as 'good' by respondents) (Coulter, Le Maistre et al. 2005).

Meanwhile, a MORI survey for Birmingham and the Black Country Strategic Health Authority (2003) found that while most respondents in the area welcomed the idea of choice of hospital, older people and people from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to prefer to delegate their choice entirely to their GP.

It is hard to weave this picture together coherently, but a plausible explanation is that:

- People from lower social classes value choice over public services more highly than people in higher social classes, particularly services offered by local government;
- This is because they are more likely to rely on those services, so have more to gain from choice being introduced;
- However, when it comes to actually making use of choices that are on offer, they tend to be less able to use choice mechanisms due to a combination of factors related to access to information and confidence in decision making.

This argument underlies the importance of advice and support when offering choice mechanisms, including advocacy where appropriate.

# CASE STUDIES

## Choice and exit

### 'Choice Based Lettings' for residents of the London Borough of Newham

<b>Objectives:</b>	To enable social housing applicants to choose their homes. In addition to this main objective, to nurture a sustainable community and a shared sense of responsibility, and to improve efficiency in the housing allocation process
<b>Involvement:</b>	People who require social housing; London Borough of Newham
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>Properties are advertised fortnightly on a website, East London Lettings Company (<a href="http://www.elcchoicehomes.org.uk">www.elcchoicehomes.org.uk</a>). Adverts include property images and information, as well as details of the local area.</p> <p>Customers apply for property through touch-screen computer terminals in libraries and local advice centres, or through a telephone hotline. The racially diverse nature of the borough is catered for via a 'talking head' online multi-lingual video, which explains the service in 11 languages and British Sign Language.</p> <p>Eligible applicants can apply for up to two properties per fortnight. They are advised of their position in the waiting list for each property, and can move their applications if they wish to optimise their chances of being housed.</p> <p>Applications are ranked based upon the length of time households have been registered on the housing list. Disabled applicants are given priority for disability adapted properties and victims of domestic violence or racial abuse are fast-tracked.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Over 1,000 properties have been advertised since April 2002. Each property attracts around 90 bids. In a recent survey of almost 600 customers not yet housed, 50% thought the service is significantly better than the old allocations.</p> <p>Robin Newby, Business Development Manager at Newham, has praised the initiative: "<i>The new system commands a lot more respect. The idea of first-come first-served is universally accepted and more transparent</i>". He suggests the project could be widened to private sector housing and to offer the option of relocating to a different part of the country.</p>

# CASE STUDIES

## Choice and Exit

### School Choice in Denmark

<b>Objectives:</b>	To give parents a choice of schools for their children
<b>Involvement:</b>	Citizens in Denmark
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>The government funds private schools, so essentially there is a system of public funding of private choice. It has established a wide diversity of educational alternatives in Denmark.</p> <p>The idea of parental authority over education, rather than state control, is rooted in Danish tradition, and has been moulded to fit modern educational needs and standards. It is based around the belief that choice leads to greater initiative and industry in schools.</p> <p>Vouchers are allocated by the Ministry of Education to each school per pupil. The municipality pays the Ministry a certain amount in recognition that it has been relieved of much of its responsibility in this arena. Parents pay tuition fees, which involves them in the commitment to the education system, and competition between schools ensures that fees do not escalate.</p> <p>Schools are truly autonomous even though they are publicly funded; the only aspect they do not control is teachers' salaries which are standardised. They are free to determine their own enrolment criteria.</p> <p>To establish a school and receive public vouchers, it is only required that a parent or educator gathers a few willing families and establishes a board of governors.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>There is a diverse range of schools on offer. The requirement of parents to make a choice means that they are more likely to understand and support the educational methods of their chosen school, thereby increasing the likelihood that the child will succeed.</p> <p>The autonomy of schools encourages creative and visionary educators, enhancing the diversity on offer and raising standards. The relationship between the government, educators and parents is based upon trust and respect, which has been fostered by the government letting go of control to a great extent.</p> <p>The system has been praised for integrating minority groups into a majority culture. For example, many Danish parents send their children to German Minority schools in the area of the country where there is a historically recognised German minority population, indicating respect for the German population in these areas.</p> <p>There is no doubt that Denmark has developed a responsive school system. The only drawback is the lack of accountability and transparency over school performance. No formal mechanism for measuring or publicising school performance exists – parents use word of mouth to hear about different schools. Some suggest that this means that there is no check on performance and that failing schools cannot be formally held to account. However, surely user ability to reject a school in favour of another is the key mechanism for holding institutions to account.</p>
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/critical_issues/1999/school_choice/section_05.html">http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/critical_issues/1999/school_choice/section_05.html</a>

# CASE STUDIES

## Choice and Exit

### Cardio Heart Disease – Choice at Six Months

<b>Objectives:</b>	To offer patients who will wait more than six months for elective surgery the choice of moving to another hospital for faster treatment
<b>Involvement:</b>	Patients waiting for elective heart surgery
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	Patients who are expected to wait for longer than six months will be contacted at the earliest opportunity to offer them the choice of moving to a different hospital where they can receive faster treatment. Patient Care Advisors (PCAs) provide information about the available choices and offer support. Patients will be offered at least one, usually more, choices of alternative provider, including other NHS hospitals, DTCs or independent sector hospitals. The alternative offer will allow for a booked appointment, therefore ensuring certainty for the patient.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	PCAs were a popular innovation and helped to ensure that people got the information they wanted to choose an alternative hospital. However, there was still inequality in the extent to which PCAs met the information needs of all patients, with non-choosers less satisfied with the information provided. Some patients found PCAs in Greater Manchester confusing, more so amongst those who did not take up the offer of choice. The DoH and Prime Minister's Delivery Unit identified quality of information and PCA service as being important factors in ensuring patients are able to take up choice.
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/PatientChoice/Choice/ChoiceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4065544&amp;chk=Puc11A">http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/PatientChoice/Choice/ChoiceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4065544&amp;chk=Puc11A</a>



## **5. Direct Payments & Individual Budgets**

## 5. Direct Payments & Individual Budgets

### 5.1 What is the mechanism?

Two of the best examples of choice mechanisms are Direct Payments – which have been part of the social care system for almost a decade – and the emergent Individual Budget approaches. These can be defined as follows:

- **Direct Payments:** a cash payment to an individual in lieu of local authority social services. Individuals often use this money to employ a personal assistant. Direct Payments were introduced for adults of working age by the 1996 Community Care (Direct Payments) Act and extended to adults over 65 in 2000.
- **Individual Budgets:** an umbrella term which covers different ways of delivering services for all older people who are eligible for social care or other support. Under the Government's proposals for Individual Budgets, an individual would have control over the resources the state has allocated to meet their needs. Resources can be taken as a combination of cash (a direct payment); services brokered by an advisor; or council commissioned services (the current default). Individual Budgets are being piloted to bring together resources from social care, housing support and other funding streams (Department for Work and Pensions 2005).

Both Direct Payments and Individual Budgets are closely linked to choice. They are a mechanism that can allow individuals to make choices over the full spectrum of choice types identified by Le Grand: when, where, who and how.

Due to the length of time they have been running, there is more evidence available around Direct Payments than Individual Budgets, so much of the discussion below focuses on payment mechanisms.

### 5.2 What sort of empowerment can Direct Payments and Individual Budgets deliver?

Direct Payments and Individual Budgets can offer significant *de facto* and subjective empowerment, primarily at an individual level.

*De facto* empowerment comes as individuals have greater power to personalise and tailor the services they receive; instead of having to use a particular care provider in a standard way, they have the power to choose different providers or forms of care. Subjective empowerment comes as individuals feel a greater sense of control over intimate, frequent and significant aspects of their lives. For example, qualitative research amongst 41 users of Direct Payments for the Joseph Rowntree foundation found that receiving Direct Payments gave users “*more control of their lives.*” (Clark, Gough, et al. 2004).

However, whether these forms of empowerment are delivered or not depends on how the mechanism is implemented and the personality of the individual service user. The key issues for service users are that some people are unwilling to take on the responsibility for their care, and others are put off by the hassle of organising their own service provision. These issues are explored in more detail below under ‘who is empowered?’ in section 5.4.

The key issues around the way these mechanisms are implemented are similar to those associated with other choice mechanisms, namely:

- Advice and support are important catalysts for people making use of Direct Payments<sup>16</sup>.
- Direct Payments and Individual Budgets are only as good as the range of options available to purchase/choose. In locations with little varied service provision capacity, Direct Payments create incentives for entrepreneurship, but do not in themselves fill gaps in the market.
- The attitude of individual care managers is key to the take up of Direct Payments (Dawson 2000). A report in 2000 for the National Centre for Independent Living on a direct payment scheme in West Sussex argued that *“There are a handful of practitioners round the county who have logged on to Direct Payments with enthusiasm, and they tend to be the people who generate most referrals, most enquiries.”* (Evans 2000) The individual level attitudes of care managers are strongly influenced by the culture and leadership of the organisation in which they work.
- Social capital can have a significant impact on the level of de facto empowerment offered. People tend to prefer to use carers recruited as a result of recommendations made from within social networks rather than open adverts; those with smaller social networks are less able to recruit in this way (Clark & Spafford 2001).

### 5.3 What are the benefits and risks of Direct Payments/ Individual Budgets?

Direct Payments offer clear substantive and instrumental benefits. Disability rights advocates also argue that normative benefits are delivered.

The most clearly demonstrated substantive benefit is greater satisfaction with services provided (Clark, Gough et al. 2004). It has been reported that older people who use social services feel there is a mismatch between what services provide and what they prioritise as a need (Godfrey, Townsend et al. 2004). Arguments about similar levels of dissatisfaction are made in the context of mental health and physical disability (Barnes et al 1999). In contrast to this, users of Direct Payments and Individual Budgets tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with the services they have received<sup>17</sup>.

In addition, users of these mechanisms say they feel happier, more relaxed, able to do more for themselves physically and go out more often (Clark, Gough et al. 2004). These shifts in self-perceptions are arguably linked to better health outcomes.

In the context of services for disabled people, these benefits are unsurprising, as mainstream services are frequently still run on a 9-to-5 basis, in fixed settings, and in ways that are set up to suit the service provider more than the service user (The Strategy Unit, DWP, et al. 2005). However, it is not clear to what extent these benefits are created purely by having the ability to choose, rather than by the choices made. For example, many older people receiving Direct Payments use them to ensure that care is provided principally by a single named carer rather than a range of different carers (Patmore 2002). This sort of provision could be provided without using Individual Budget or Direct Payment mechanisms at all. If it were, it may well produce similar levels of benefit, albeit without providing any *de facto* empowerment over choice of carer. However, it would be wrong to think that the simple act of choice has no impact, as the following two quotations (from interviews carried out by the Scottish Executive

<sup>16</sup> Hasler, F. (2003) Clarifying the evidence on Direct Payments into practice, National Centre for Independent Living; Jolly, D. and Priestley, M. (2004) Working Paper on Direct Payment Patterns in the UK: Preliminary Analysis of Quantitative Mapping and Potential Research Issues.

<sup>17</sup> Zarb, G. and Naddash, P. (1994) Cashing in on independence: comparing the costs and benefits of cash and services, London: BCODP; Kestenbaum, A. (1993) Taking care in the market: a study of agency homecare. Nottingham: RADAR and Disablement Income Group.

with disabled people who use Direct Payments) make clear:

*"It's very important for me to be in control as much as possible: the biggest thing that helps me feel in control is being able to choose people who care for me."*

*"Things couldn't be better now. It's given me much more freedom and control and I play a more active role in family life. Choice, freedom and control sums it up for me. It has been amazing, my life has completely changed."*

Witcher, Stalker et al. 2000.

Direct Payments are argued by some to also deliver instrumental benefits: most interestingly, there is some evidence that they reduce the cost of service provision by up to 40%<sup>18</sup>, largely because of the additional overheads associated with centrally administering social care provision. However, this finding is based on a relatively small scale study from 1994 and so should be treated with caution. Halloran (2000) found a mixed response regarding the cost savings associated with Direct Payments – with costs generally not being significantly below the cost of alternative methods. Meanwhile, Lundsgaard (2005) finds that Direct Payments deliver better value for money provided they are appropriately targeted, but that spending does not necessarily fall. It is likely that overheads for Individual Budgets will be higher than those for Direct Payments as they involve more central administration.

In addition to possible instrumental benefits, some groups also argue that Direct Payments and Individual Budgets bring normative benefits (Pearson 2004), particularly Disability Rights campaigners. They argue that individuals have a right to autonomy and to care that meets their needs – which they believe is made real through Direct Payments and undermined through standard care provision.

Of course, Direct Payments and Individual Budgets bring risks despite all these benefits. The largest is that individuals may make 'bad' choices – though at the aggregate level the evidence cited so far suggests this is not often the case. When thinking about what constitutes 'bad' choices, it is important to remember the conclusions of the Prime Ministers Strategy Unit report cited above about the low quality of care provided by standard models. Whether choices are optimal or sub-optimal is arguably less important than whether they are for the better or for the worse, and whether an individual ought to have the right to make those decisions for themselves, or whether an institution ought to decide for them.

## **5.4 Who do Direct Payments/Individual Budgets tend to empower? Who do they tend to exclude?**

To date, the take up of Direct Payments has been low, especially amongst older people (it was introduced for older people in 2000). In 2004, only 6,300 older people were recipients of Direct Payments, although over 1 million receive relevant services (Department for Work and Pensions 2005). Of the 575,000 people in receipt of home care packages from the Department of Health, only 17,300 received Direct Payments in 2003/4 (an increase of 80% over the previous year) (Department of Health 2004). Of the 10.9 million people the 2001 Census suggests have a long term disability or illness, just 10,000 are in receipt of Direct Payments (Pearson, Barnes, et al. 2005). Of course, not everyone in these categories would be eligible for Direct Payments and, of those who are eligible, not everyone would want them, but the take-up is clearly low.

<sup>18</sup> Zarb, G. and Naddash, P. (1994) *Cashing in on independence: comparing the costs and benefits of cash and services*, London: BCODP; Kestenbaum, A. (1993) *Taking care in the market: a study of agency homecare*, Nottingham: RADAR and Disablement Income Group.

### 5.4.1 Possible reasons for low take-up

This low take-up appears to reflect some of the issues previously outlined about the importance of support in terms of advocacy and peer support for empowerment mechanisms over and above simply making them available. Where Direct Payments have taken off, it has been achieved through a combination of social work enthusiasm, voluntary sector advocacy and local government ambition. Local authorities who were supportive of Direct Payments for disabled adults of working age have also been at the forefront of developing Direct Payments for older people (Fernandez et al 2005).

However, in many authorities, Direct Payments are under-promoted and unknown to those who might benefit from them, despite the statutory duty which requires local authorities to offer all 'suitable' users a Direct Payment option (Carr 2004). Some social workers regard Direct Payments as an abrogation of their duty of care towards clients, although there is also evidence that social workers can and do change their minds when they see Direct Payments work in practice (Stainton 2002). As well as attitudinal barriers, there are wider institutional barriers to be overcome. There is some evidence to suggest a negative correlation between low take-up of Direct Payments and high levels of in-house provision (Fernandez et al 2005). This suggests that those authorities most resistant to developing Direct Payments were also least responsive to the changes introduced by the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, such as greater diversity of provision and a more developed commissioning role for local authorities.

Lack of institutional support appears to reduce take up, and the provision of support seems to accelerate it. All of the top 10 local authorities with the highest receipts of Direct Payment users have significant support schemes for users of Direct Payments, seven of which are user- rather than provider-led (Jolly & Priestley 2004). At the UK level, support schemes appear to have the potential to increase Direct Payment take-up by up to 80 percent (Jolly & Priestley 2004). Finally, scheme longevity also appears to be a factor: the two local authorities with the longest history of offering Direct Payments – cajoled into doing so in the 1980s by disabilities rights activists – have by far the highest level of take-up (625 users in Hampshire and 642 in Essex compared to a national average of 44.4) (Jolly & Priestley 2004).

A key criticism of Direct Payments is that administering them can prove burdensome for individuals. Many users of social care say they simply do not want to have to 'hire and fire' carers. This is particularly true of people with cognitive impairments – though it is important to emphasise that many people with mental illnesses also do want greater say over their care.<sup>19</sup> It is not yet clear to what extent low take-up is explained by a well-informed preference not to exercise the choice to take control over care arrangements, rather than poorly-informed concerns about how the mechanism would work.

The alternative, Individual Budget model, gives an individual control over the resources the state has allocated to meet their needs, operating in a similar way to a bank account. Resources can be taken as a combination of cash (a direct payment); services brokered by an adviser; or council commissioned services (the current default). There is little evidence on the effectiveness of Individual Budgets; however one very small scale study in Plymouth found that brokered services were particularly popular (Clark & Spafford 2001). They appear to meet the concerns about the burden on individuals of dealing with Direct Payments.

<sup>19</sup> Rankin, J. (2005) A good choice for mental health. Mental Health in the Mainstream, London: ippr.

## **5.5 Who tends to favour/disfavour Direct Payments/ Individual Budgets?**

The authors of this report believe that the demand for Direct Payments models is set to grow in the future; we believe current generations expect to be able to have the kind of choice and flexibility that Direct Payments bring. A poll by MORI for the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) showed that three quarters of people in their 50s endorsed the concept of Direct Payments (CSCI 2004). Qualitative research with people in this age bracket shows that people expect a broader range of services than those that are currently on offer (Levenson, Jeyasingham et al. 2005).

Arguably, the introduction of Individual Budgets and Direct Payments marks a shift from what might be termed a 'municipal model' of service provision to a 'facilitator model' - from simple and rather flat service provision to complex individualised provision based upon principles of choice.

# CASE STUDIES

## Choice: individual budgets

### 'In Control' – national choice-based approach to provision of services to people with learning disabilities

<b>Objectives:</b>	To change the organisation of social care in the UK so that people who need support can take more control of their own lives and fulfil their role as citizens, rather than being excluded from citizenship as a result of their disability.
<b>Involvement:</b>	People with learning disabilities, local authorities
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>In Control is an initiative led by Mencap, and it has produced a model for Self-Directed Support. The idea is that the individual who requires support will be able to shape how they receive it, so it more accurately reflects their needs and interests.</p> <p>Assessment of the need for support is followed by planning for how this will be used, which is driven by the individual with help from the local authority. A structure is agreed upon by both parties. Support is therefore provided on an individual basis, through a one-stop assessment and allocation, so that all available resources are pulled together into a single process. It is argued that this will increase efficiency and will not require any extra funding.</p> <p>It differs from Direct Payments in that while individuals can choose to have funds paid directly to themselves, they can also request to have them paid to a third party, a Trust, an organisation such as an Individual Support Fund, or a combination of these.</p> <p>Both the individual and the local authority are accountable, and the former has the right to seek review at any time by an independent panel. The scheme has been piloted in six local authorities.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Over thirty local authorities had subscribed to In Control by the end of 2005.</p> <p>Wigan, one of the pilot areas, seems to have been a particular success, with the head of the council championing the initiative.</p>





## **6. Highly participative voice mechanisms**

## 6. Highly participative voice mechanisms

### 6.1 What are these mechanisms?

Participative approaches aimed at increasing user, citizen and consumer ‘voice’ in decision-making arose largely from international development work and commercial market research. They arose outside of a governmental context, as NGOs and community groups took action on the basis that communities had a legitimate right to have influence and control over the services they received, combined with the belief that engaging local communities and beneficiaries in conservation projects and aid work would improve the projects’ long-term success rates.

The use of such approaches increased in the public sector in the 1980s as a response to the top-down, expert-based framework that dominated until that time. In the 1990s, participation was taken up by grassroots organisations in Western nations as a way to reform and improve democracy in their own countries. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase of organisations and projects, as well as government-led initiatives, which promote deliberative democracy and seek to increase and deepen political participation. Examples include national scale programmes such as Your Health Your Say<sup>20</sup> or America Speaks<sup>21</sup>, and, more often, local and neighbourhood level programmes such as drawing up a community strategy. Further details on all these examples are provided in the case studies at the end of this chapter.

Like empowerment in general, ‘participation’ is a term used to describe a range of different approaches. For example, a monthly forum for neighbourhood residents to bring up issues with local councillors and government officers is very different from a one-off citizens’ jury on a specific planning application. A participatory budget process with the power to cap council tax levels delivers a very different sort of power to participants than a residents advisory group on neighbourhood policing. However, all these initiatives are considered participatory.

Given this complexity, it is useful to offer a further sub-classification of participatory approaches. We suggest thinking about participation in terms of three dimensions: depth of interaction, scale of participation and time frame. Each of these dimensions is discussed in more detail below:

#### 6.1.1 Depth of interaction

There are a number of different ways of analysing the depth of interaction offered by a participatory approach. Perhaps the most famous - and most criticised - is Arnstein’s ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969). A highly influential, and more recent, classification is provided by Pretty and Hine (1999). Rather than classify the form of participation that takes place, they look at the depth of interaction implicit in different forms of participatory approaches:

<sup>20</sup> ‘Your Health, Your Care, Your Say’ was a large-scale listening exercise that involved people in designing community health and social care services for the future, undertaken by the Department of Health in November 2005

<sup>21</sup> ‘America Speaks’ uses a town-hall approach to engage citizens in the public decisions that impact their lives

Typology	Characteristics
1. <i>Passive Participation</i>	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. Information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
2. <i>Participation by Consultation</i>	<p>People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. Process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views. It is important to be clear about what an 'obligation to take on board views' consists of.</p> <p>Arguably, guidance about consultation in the UK does compel government organisations to take on board views, but in practice even overwhelming negative consultation findings may not influence policy (often because they are, rightly, dismissed as representing sectional interests). An example would be the consultation in London around the Western Extension of the congestion charge.</p> <p>Of those taking part in the consultation, 70% of the members of the public, and 80% of business respondents expressed opposition to the proposed western extension, along with 61% of stakeholders and 84% of other organisations who responded (Transport For London 2005). Despite this resistance, the scheme came into effect in February, 2007. Recently Boris Johnson, the new Mayor of London, launched a repeat of the Western Extension consultation. He claimed that he would abide by the results of the consultation.</p>
3. <i>Bought Participation</i>	People participate in return for cash or other material incentives. They have no stake in ongoing interpretation, policy development or implementation. An example is the use of focus groups to probe opinions about local council services. However, providing financial incentives does not mean that participants cannot also be empowered at a higher level: e.g. while the Your Health Your Say event involved paying participants to attend a day long event in Birmingham, a panel from that day continue to be involved in the process and have reconvened with the Minister of State to discuss progress.
4. <i>Functional Participation</i>	Participation seen by external agencies or organisations as a means to achieve their goals, especially reduced costs.
5. <i>Interactive Participation</i>	<p>People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives; e.g. citizen assessor programmes in housing inspection.</p> <p>People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local groups or institutions. Learning methodologies used to seek multiple perspectives, and groups, determine how available resources are used; e.g. the involvement of CEN representatives on LSP Boards.</p>
6. <i>Self-Mobilisation and Connectedness</i>	People participate by taking initiatives independently to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used, e.g. TELCO <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> TELCO is the founding network of London Citizens, the capital's largest and most diverse alliance of active citizens and community leaders ([www.telcocitizens.org.uk](http://www.telcocitizens.org.uk))

This typology maps the depth of interaction that can occur in participative approaches. Participants in type 1 interact minimally as listeners and receivers of information, whereas participants in type 6 are actively interacting amongst themselves and with external bodies to make decisions and set agendas. It may be tempting to view the typology as a scale of empowerment, with 1 being the least and 6 being the most empowering form of participation. However, we feel this would be a mistake: as previously discussed, it can be empowering not to have to interact with others to secure good services, but to simply have them available.

### 6.1.2 Scale of participation

Some participative approaches involve very large numbers of people, reaching levels of participation that are representative of communities, not just in a democratic sense of 'representation' but also in a statistical sense. For example, Babergh district council visited every household as part of its efforts to improve the Anglia Estate (Rogers & Robinson 2004). Even in larger communities, significant proportions of the population have been involved. For example, in Porto Allegre – a city of 9.6 million people - up to 8% of the population are involved over a 5-year period in setting the municipal budget (Smith 2005). Closer to home, the Your Health Your Care Your Say event involved over 1,000 people and the New Deal for Communities Evaluation involves c. 500 residents for each NDC neighbourhood area (each averaging 10,000 residents), meaning an average of 5% of residents are consulted about their priorities for change and what impact it has had.

Alternatively, participatory approaches can involve far smaller numbers and still wield significant power. For example, a Citizens Jury in Halifax looking at the issue of nanotechnology involved just 25 people but has had a significant impact on science policy for the entire UK (Involve 2006).

Clearly, the way in which depth and scale interact with one another will have a significant impact on what type of empowerment is cultivated and its benefits, as discussed in greater detail below.

### 6.1.3 Time-frame

Finally, participation can consist of one-time decisions or meetings, such as citizens' juries, or can play out over a long period of time through regular meetings or forums, such as the Local Strategic Partnership Boards. Time-frame is, therefore, a third important factor in understanding differences across participative schemes, as well as being a useful indicator for determining the level of commitment policy-makers have to participative methods (Pretty & Hine 1999).

## 6.2 What sort of empowerment can participative voice mechanisms deliver?

Participatory mechanisms of types 3 and above, and especially types 4, 5 and 6, are considered deeply empowering because of the amount of control they can provide to participating individuals and communities. As such, **subjective** empowerment tends to be extremely high in participatory schemes: including people in the decision-making process creates a stronger sense of control and authority for participants. It also increases feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, since individuals are made to feel their opinions are important (Simmons & Birchall 2004). This sense of empowerment is key to keeping people involved once they have started, as this quote from a community activist suggests:

*“If people take part in something then find it was a complete waste of time, they aren’t going to do it again, are they? They are not stupid”*

Morris 2006

**De facto** empowerment, achieved through actual influence over procedures and outcomes, also has the potential to be significantly strong with participative approaches. Participation can allow for a community to provide a broader range of input and exert a greater presence in decision-making than in other empowerment mechanisms, such as ballot initiatives. Properly executed participation can offer significant *de facto* power at both an individual and, with greater difficulty, as a collective level<sup>23</sup>. However, perhaps more than any other type of mechanism under discussion, the extent of *de facto* empowerment for participative mechanisms is strongly contingent on the *context* in which the mechanism operates.

The key points are that:

- The extent of popular participation is strongly influenced by the openness (or otherwise) of decision making institutions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people participate more if they believe they will genuinely be included in decision making.
- The extent of empowerment also depends on the nature of the organisational links between the participation mechanism and decision making processes.
- The theme of the approach is also key: again, anecdotal evidence suggests that people are more willing to participate in services that strongly affect their lives, particularly if that effect is negative.

**De jure** empowerment is typically minimal but will depend upon the degree to which the participatory scheme is integrated into formal decision-making structures.

### **6.3 What are the benefits and risks associated with participative voice mechanisms?**

It is generally agreed that participation leads to better all-around decisions – thereby having substantive benefits - by providing decision-makers with more direct access to a wider range of stakeholders’ needs and preferences. At the same time, decision-makers are made more accountable by having to answer to participants and take their views into consideration, particularly when this is a legal requirement as in the planning system<sup>24</sup>. In terms of substantive benefits to the participant, research shows that those directly involved in well planned consultative exercises, that have a clear impact on decision making, find the experience very useful and undergo an increase in their interest in and understanding of policy and politics (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2001).

However, whilst studies have shown substantive benefits from participative approaches, the extent and nature of these vary, particularly when looking at instrumental benefits. For example, as shown below, there is evidence that community policing increases trust in the police, at least in the USA:

<sup>23</sup> Sirianni, C. and Friedland, L. (2001) *Civic Innovation in America. Community empowerment, public policy and the movement for civic renewal*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Taylor, M. (2003) *Public Policy in the Community: Public policy and politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Gaffney, M. (2005) *Civic Pioneers - local people, local government, working together to make life better*. London: Home Office.

<sup>24</sup> Through the requirement to produce Statements of Community Involvement as part of the Local Development Framework process

*“In the eyes of the public, police became more responsive, they more often treated residents well, and more Chicagoans felt they did a good job at their core tasks... A comparison of the attitudes of Whites, African- Americans and Latinos revealed that these were across the board improvements”*

The Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium 2000

However, there is limited evidence that community policing directly influences crime levels. This may be because cause and effect is particularly hard to measure here, as crime has been falling consistently in most places where community policing has been introduced, so any additional causal effect is hard to gauge. Studies of individual NDC areas has shown that participation can have some impact on satisfaction with the area, but the overall NDC Evaluation has not, so far, identified a specific impact on service quality that is discernibly the result of increased participation rather than the provision of additional resources and other policy developments.

Again, however, this may well be a result of the co-linearity between the introduction of participative mechanisms and the other changes brought about by NDCs. In health, while there is strong evidence that individual level participation in the management of health problems through, for example, Direct Payments, does have a positive effect on health outcomes, there is very little evidence that collective-level participation, such as Public Patient Involvement Forums or foundation hospital Boards with community members, have had an influence on health outcomes.

This poses a problem for evidence-based policy: case studies suggest that participative approaches to decision making and policy implementation can have significant substantive effects. Aggregate level data, however, neither support nor refute this claim in terms of instrumental benefits. So what is really going on? There appear to be two key factors:

- The impact of participation itself is hard to dis-aggregate from the impact of other measures introduced at the same time, meaning causality is very difficult to measure; and
- The actual impact of users/citizens in participatory approaches is highly variable. For example, a recent evaluation of Foundation Trusts found that governors drawn from local and patient communities had had little influence on strategy (Healthcare Commission 2005). Similarly, evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships demonstrated that Community Empowerment Network representatives have had too little influence on LSP Boards (National Audit Office 2004).
- Although residents have been increasingly involved in regeneration processes, the extent to which they have been able to influence policy and practice has often been limited (Taylor 2003). A study on LSPs and Neighbourhood Renewal projects found that while local authorities were good at coordinating mainstream services for renewal, they did not follow through on promises for co-governance. Rather, the conclusion was that local authorities' goals *“constitute a pre-set agenda that has the capacity to undermine the possibility for local solutions of a more individual and perhaps even creative nature.”* (Johnson & Osborne 2005).

As the case studies show, this lack of influence is not universal. But what we find is a patchy pattern that makes it hard to assess aggregate level data sets. Where citizens do not actually wield power (either *de facto* or subjective), partnership with citizens will struggle to deliver substantive impacts *for participants*, though it may well still deliver for organisations. It is clear that the nature of the mechanism is not the deciding factor in determining how much power participants actually wield.

Finally, because it is well-suited for instilling subjective empowerment, participation produces strong **normative** benefits such as a strengthening of social capital. Furthermore, directly involving citizens and service users in upstream strategic development embodies the values of self-governance and liberty that are intrinsic to democracy.

### **6.3.1 What risks are associated with participative voice mechanisms?**

In terms of empowerment, the key risk is that, where applied inappropriately, these mechanisms can have the opposite impact to that intended. Participants can be worn down and frustrated by processes that are described as being collaborative but in fact are not. As Marilyn Taylor argues:

*“partnership has generally developed within existing structures, processes and frameworks of power: new rhetoric poured into old bottles. Public sector cultures are so deeply engrained that power holders are often unaware of the way in which they perpetuate existing power relations through the use of language and procedures that outsiders find impenetrable.”*  
(Taylor 2003)

These sorts of issues can be partially addressed by involving participants in the design of processes themselves. However, some issues, for example those around recalcitrant local authorities or councillors, may on occasion require concerted action at the centre. An example of this concerted action is setting performance frameworks, associated targets and funding change management programmes to allow citizens to engage with authorities on an appropriate basis.

## **6.4 Who do participative voice mechanisms tend to empower? Who do they tend to exclude?**

### **6.4.1 Who is likely to take part?**

There is a great deal of disagreement about what sorts of people tend to participate in these voice mechanisms, and it varies from mechanism to mechanism. For example, whilst school governors tend to be middle class<sup>25</sup> and men are more heavily represented<sup>26</sup>, purposively recruited mechanisms such as citizens' juries, are as representative of the population as the sample scale and frame permits.

In addition to these geo-demographic characteristics, evidence seems to suggest that participants in these types of mechanisms tend to have:

- high levels of interest in the policy area at hand
- confidence that their views are worthy of attention
- a belief that participating will make a difference
- been asked to participate, often in person by someone they know and trust; and
- the time and resources necessary to take part.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis, A. (2003). Barriers to participation for under-represented groups in school governance, London: Institute for Volunteering Research; DFTE (2005) School Governance and Improvement in Wales: Executive Summary, DFTE Information, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly.

<sup>26</sup> For example, NDC Board members tend to be male (the split is 60:40), but the gender balance is far more equal than amongst councillors (in Scotland, just 22% of councillors are women, in England and Wales it is 29%).

In addition, they tend to be more motivated by 'internal' benefits such as a 'chance to have their say' or a 'valuable learning experience' than external benefits, such as 'my own problems being solved' (Simmons & Birchall 2004).

#### **6.4.2 How can people be excluded?**

It is not just the characteristics of participants that affect the make-up of participant groups: the recruitment or appointment system for different participative approaches also has a significant impact. For example:

A market or social research recruitment approach which uses quotas based on geo-demographic, attitudinal and behavioural characteristics, or that takes a purely random sample, allows policy makers to pre-determine the class, age, ethnic and gender profile of participants and to be assured that they are 'representative' of all users. However, even within this framework, there are still issues with ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate; e.g. some may be housebound, there may be language or comprehension difficulties, some may not be able to spare the time even if offered a financial incentive and so on.

Participants in 'representative' positions, for example CEN reps on LSP Boards, are appointed in a variety of ways including co-option by council officers or politicians, self-selection, elections, or their position within third sector organisations (Gaventa 2004). The choice of approach strongly influences the type and attitude of participants.

Ultimately, both approaches rely on self-selection: people being persuaded of the value of the exercise and agreeing to take part. This leaves such approaches open to concerns about 'non-response bias', as the characteristics and views of people who agree to get involved may not be typical of all users.

Following on from this, it is important to think about when participatory mechanisms empower community groups, and when they empower communities directly. Mechanisms such as community policing meetings theoretically give all community members the opportunity to influence and engage in decision making; mechanisms such as the inclusion of CEN representatives on LSP Boards limit participation to individuals engaging on behalf of community groups. Clearly, community groups do not always represent the community – in either the democratic or statistical sense of 'represent'. Empowerment efforts directed towards the 'community' can overlook the tensions and heterogeneity that exist within the group of people that policy-makers seek to empower. Ignoring such tensions can result in an empowerment process that serves to reproduce the ethnic, gender, socio-economic or other inequities that exist in the community.

Examples of this are prevalent in development projects, where 'community decisions' by so-called 'community leaders' led to women and the very poor being excluded from the decision-making process and resource management (Goebel 1998). This can also occur in the facilitation of forums or Partnership Boards, where one type of voice—e.g. white, male, middle-class—is allowed to dominate discussion and thereby shape what is taken to be the 'community's' interests.<sup>27</sup>

27 Pratchett, L. (2004) Local Autonomy, Local Democracy and the 'New Localism', *Political Studies* Vol52 Iss2 June 2004, p358; Mosse, D. (2001) People's knowledge, participation and patronage: operations and representations in rural development, In: Cooke, Bill and Kothari, Uma. (eds.) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books, 2001. pp16-35; Fahmy, E. (2003) Civic Capacity, Social Exclusion & Political Participation in Britain: Evidence from the 1999 Poverty & Social Exclusion Survey, Paper presented at the Political Studies Association Annual Conference. University of Leicester, UK. 15-17 April 2003.



Of course, there is a maximum number of people who can take part in Partnership Boards – partly because those groups will not work with large memberships and partly because the appetite and opportunity to take part is limited<sup>28</sup>. The point is not that individuals cannot represent wider communities, but that there needs to be clarity as to whether they are supposed to be doing so, and what form that representation takes.

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<sup>28</sup> For example, because of access inequities, i.e. lower income groups have to spend more time at work and do not have as much free time for community involvement

# CASE STUDIES

## Participative Voice

### 'America Speaks' – New York city residents deliberate on rebuilding the World Trade Centre

<b>Objectives:</b>	To use public deliberation to discuss how best to rebuild the World Trade Centre site after the terrorist attacks of 11 <sup>th</sup> September 2001. The two regional agencies charged with leading the effort faced multiple and conflicting goals and visions about how best to proceed with the controversial project, so routine channels were not sufficient.
<b>Involvement:</b>	A representative sample of participants from New York City, including participants from all 50 states
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>The two development agencies in charge of rebuilding the site joined with several civic organisations to sponsor open public deliberations about the future of Manhattan. They brought the Washington DC organisation, AmericaSpeaks, to organise a one day electronic town hall meeting with over 4,300 participants.</p> <p>The meeting was publicised and aimed to attract a diverse and representative sample of New York citizens, as well as people from all over the country.</p> <p>Innovative techniques were used to create a vast forum for deliberation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-500 tables of 10 people each had discussions, which were relayed by a computer at each table to a central bank of computers where a 'theme team' organised the feedback from each table into general perspectives and themes</li> <li>-Each participant had their own 'polling keypad' through which votes and straw polls were recorded throughout the day</li> </ul> <p>As such, the benefits of small deliberative process were combined with large-scale engagement. Traditionally a choice has been made between depth and width; informed and considered discussions among a few or superficial engagement with a large, statistically representative group. Using technology such as wireless laptops and voting pads AmericaSpeaks has merged small group deliberation with large scale voting and identification of key themes across groups.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Wide media coverage meant that officials had no choice but to respond to suggestions and criticisms. New plans that were produced did not address all of the concerns raised, but they undoubtedly resulted from the deliberation in the most part, and were to a great extent legitimised by them.</p> <p>AmericaSpeaks is a good example of how empowerment can be embedded within existing administrative processes. In this instance, there was a need for a different way of tackling a particularly problematic and controversial issue, so the struggling administrative structure provided fertile ground for public participation. In the right context, therefore, civic administration can be a promising site for empowerment.</p>

# CASE STUDIES

## Participative Voice

### Suffolk Waste Management Community Discussion Day

<b>Objectives:</b>	To meaningfully involve a cross section of residents at an early stage in the preparation of Suffolk County Councils statutory Waste Local Plan - to help them learn about waste disposal issues, explore attitudes and awareness and ensure that the Council met the needs of local people
<b>Involvement:</b>	A Saturday discussion day, hosted by the Council and MORI, with a broad cross section of 25 residents
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>The Council hosted this event, as part of a wider programme of consultation and research. The event included residents, specialists in the field, as well as representatives from the Council who were present throughout the day to answer technical or policy questions.</p> <p>MORI utilised the Suffolk Speaks Citizen's Panel to recruit the workshop participants. The exercise included active involvement in discussions, a tour round a local landfill/recovery facility, as well as briefings by a number of key speakers (e.g. representative from Friends of the Earth).</p> <p>Short self-completion questionnaires were also given to participants at the start and finish of the day.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>A number of key issues arose which might not have been identified in more traditional quantitative forms of consultation, e.g. confusion over the separation of responsibilities between waste collection and waste disposal.</p> <p>The briefings and exit questionnaires allowed any changes in awareness, attitudes towards waste issues and future priorities to be tracked.</p>

# CASE STUDIES

## Participative Voice

**Your health, your care, your say**

<b>Objectives:</b>	To offer people the chance to have their say on what they want from services in their everyday lives.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Members of the public, particularly those who do not often have a voice in consultation exercises, e.g. teenagers, the homeless and people with learning difficulties.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	Four regional deliberative events and a national event. Other events were also run by local authorities, the NHS and voluntary organisations locally. An online survey ran in parallel with the events.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	Too early for full evaluation. Feedback from the events fed into the White Paper on community health and care services. The consultation particularly targeted those traditionally without a voice in public consultations, and was probably, as with such events, very empowering for those who attended. However, the extent to which this will be acted upon by central government is yet to be seen.
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://www.dh.gov.uk/NewsHome/YourHealthYourCareYourSay/fs/en">http://www.dh.gov.uk/NewsHome/YourHealthYourCareYourSay/fs/en</a>

# **7. Participatory budgeting**

## 7. Participatory budgeting

### 7.1 What is this mechanism?

One of the most topical participatory voice mechanisms at the moment is participatory budgeting, which has become a key area of focus for CLG. As such, this chapter focuses exclusively on this approach.

The government's commitment to participatory budgeting is expressed in the Community Empowerment Action Plan (2007), the Communities in Control White Paper (2008) and the recent National Strategy on Participatory Budgeting (2008).

On the ground there has also been growing interest in the approach. The past year has seen a rapid growth in the number of pilot projects to 22 in local authorities across England. CLG's stated aim is for all local authority areas to have some form of participatory budgeting by 2012. The interest in participatory budgeting has also been extended to local spending on policing outlined in the recent Green Policing Green Paper (2008).

Participatory budgeting itself is a contested concept. While there is consensus around the budgetary focus, there are many different views on what else needs to be in place for the process to be described as participatory. This is partly a consequence of the iterative and complex development of participatory budgeting across the world. For some, 'participatory budgeting' is a term reserved for the particular methodology developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil where

*"the city is divided into regions, which have assemblies to which citizens and community groups are invited. These regions elect members to a city-wide body (...) [which] processes the decisions into the city budget"*

Anderson, 2003<sup>29</sup>

Thus combining input to economic decision making at the neighbourhood and city wide level. For others it is a more generic term describing

*"a mechanism (or process) through which the population decides on, or contributes to decisions made on, the use of all or part of the available public resources."<sup>30</sup>*

We have chosen to view 'participatory budgeting' as a generic term for **mechanisms set-up to delegate power or influence over local budgets, investment priorities and economic spending to citizens.**

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, J. (2003) Decentralization, local powers and local development, Geneva: ILO Universitas, 74-75.

<sup>30</sup> UNHABITAT (2004) 72 Frequently Asked Questions about Participatory Budgeting, Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, p20

CLG's official definition is:

*'Participatory budgeting engages people in taking decisions on the spending priorities for a defined public budget in their local area. This means engaging residents and community groups to discuss spending priorities, make spending proposals, and vote on them, as well giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process.'*

Participatory Budgeting: a draft national strategy (2008: 8)

### 7.1.1 International Experiences

While earlier limited experiments took place elsewhere in Brazil, the first full use of participatory budgeting (and the most well known case) started in Porto Alegre in 1989.<sup>31</sup> Since then, participatory budgeting concepts and mechanisms have spread in Brazil and Latin America, and by 2003 more than 200 municipalities across Brazil were estimated to have been experimenting with participatory budgeting.<sup>32</sup> Independently, similar methods have been developed in other countries, with Kerala, India being another important and frequently cited example. Processes inspired by these developments have spread to Europe and North America.

The experiences in Kerala and Porto Alegre have tended to dominate the academic debate on participatory budgeting, with a disproportionate amount of research and publicity linked to these projects. A further problem with the existing evidence is that it has often been aimed at promoting or explaining the practice of participatory budgeting rather than providing an objective assessment of its pros and cons. A normative approach to participative budgeting has seemed to be prevalent, with available evidence seeming to demonstrate that not only have citizens decided on practical and relevant development projects, but they have also developed a new level of consciousness of further possibilities for bettering their lives and futures.<sup>33</sup>

Both Kerala and Porto Alegre are examples where the parties in power are on the left of the political spectrum are those who instigated participatory budgeting. However, in Brazil at least, participatory budgeting now seems to be popular regardless of the political leanings of the local administration.<sup>34</sup>

These examples directly involve citizens in making policy decisions, with regular forums set-up to allow citizens the opportunity to allocate resources, prioritise broad social policies, and monitor public spending.<sup>35</sup> In practice, the power delegated to the citizens in the decision processes varies, from providing decision makers with information about citizen preferences to processes that place parts of the budget under direct citizen control. It is useful to remember that while in Porto Alegre the city assembly has the final say on the budget, and thus is able to veto the participatory budget, this has never happened in practice (despite the assembly often being dominated by parties opposed to the leftist mayor).<sup>36</sup>

31 Abers, Rebecca Neaera (2000) *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO.

32 Wampler, B. (2000) *A Guide to Participatory Budgeting*, Paper presented at the conference on the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

33 Goldsmith, W. *Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil*. *Planners Network Online*, no. 140. March/April, 2000; Baiocchi, G. (2001) *Participation, Activism and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory*, *Politics and Society*, vol. 29, no. 1, March, 43-72

34 Avritzer, L. (2002) *New Public Spheres in Brazil: Local Democracy and Deliberative Politics*, Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, p11

35 Wampler (2000), as above

36 Avritzer, L. (2002) *New Public Spheres in Brazil: Local Democracy and Deliberative Politics*, Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, p11

Clearly, pressure on politicians from constituents to carry through the recommendations can be a powerful factor in participatory budgeting, even in the absence of formal structures. Indeed these external popular pressures on elected assemblies are not unique to Brazil; it has been suggested that participatory budgeting across Europe has been used by directly appointed mayors to build a power base independent of local and regional authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Participatory Budgeting, like many civic participation mechanisms, takes on several forms, which can be organised by theme, size, government level of the budget, or number of interactions. There is also a difference between models that use direct participation and those that use representative participation; combinations of the two are also possible. The scale of citizen participation has ranged from a single neighbourhood to an entire state (for example, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, with a population of 10 million)<sup>38</sup>.

Discussions are often limited to new investment rather than discussing spending as a whole. The amount of the public budget apportioned by participatory budgeting varies, but it typically begins at around 1-3% of the annual revenue budget for a particular neighbourhood or city and then rises. In some places it has risen to 17% per cent of the city budget over a period of 15 years.<sup>39</sup> It can also run as a one-off process, but the consensus suggests that to gain long-term benefits from the method, such as social capital and ownership, it should be a reoccurring, cyclical process.

### 7.1.2 UK Experiences

Participatory budgeting is still relatively new to the UK. Most of the UK experiences have been pilots and have often focused on discrete pots of money, rather than the mainstream budget.<sup>40</sup> Others, such as the Harrow Open Budget (see the case studies at the end of this chapter), have started at a larger scale, such as a local authority budget, but in return have allowed much less control on behalf of the participants. There is a current government aspiration to see participatory budgeting extended to cover mainstream budget decisions in Local Strategic Partnerships.

There is also work underway on theme based budgets that deliberately introduce a filter into the budget appropriations process in order to focus attention on particular spending patterns, such as 'Gender budgeting' which focuses on the need for an understanding of the role of gender and power in public spending.<sup>41</sup> The gender budget exposes systematic biases in financial decision-making, but the empowering effects depend upon the results being acted upon. Theme based budgets can also be applied for ethnicity, disability, poverty and the environment.

However, so far there has been no attempt to implement the "classic" Porto Alegre model combining deliberations on the local neighbourhood level with citywide forums of area representatives in the UK.

37 Sintomer, Y., Herzberg, Carsten and Röcke, Anja (Eds.) (2005) Participatory Budgets in a European Comparative Approach Perspectives and Chances of the Cooperative State at the Municipal Level in Germany and Europe: Volume ii, Berlin: Centre Marc Bloch, Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, Humboldt-Universität.

38 Harvard University Center for Urban Development Studies (2003), Assessment of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil, Washington: Inter-American Development Bank.

39 Hall, J. (2005) Bringing Budgets Alive: Participatory Budgeting in Practice, Oxford: Oxfam GB UK Poverty Programme.

40 Hall, J. (2005), As above

41 Rake, K. (2002) Gender Budgets: The Experience of the UK's Women's Budget Group, Paper prepared for the conference 'Gender Balance – Equal Finance' Basel, Switzerland.



## 7.2 What sort of empowerment and benefits does participatory budgeting deliver?

In today's developed and developing world, rapid growth in urban areas often leads to a division of the population between those who live in wealthy areas, and those who are crowded into poorer parts of towns. This strains the capacity of local and national governments to provide basic services to different localities. Participatory budgeting has been hailed as an innovative way to manage and pay for the services on which people depend, improving the quality of the services provided and delivering them in a cost-effective way.

In the context of the developing world, participatory budgeting has been linked to the eradication of corruption and clientalism, therefore producing strong **normative benefits**. The benefits of scrutiny and transparency are not highlighted quite as often in the UK or other northern democratic countries with functions for overview and scrutiny already firmly in place at both the local and regional levels. Instead participatory budgeting is seen as a way of re-establishing legitimacy for government structures, along with building participant skills. It is argued that the open and deliberative process can build citizen communication skills, whilst the act of debating negotiations within issues and tradeoffs during the allocation process of creating a budget provides better knowledge of the internal workings of government.

Participatory budgeting has also emerged as a response to certain trends within the political sphere. In the UK, for example, participatory budgeting clearly reflects the government's agenda to 'modernise' local government by encouraging strong and active communities to drive forward service improvements at the local level, a job that has, in the past, been undertaken by local authorities. Participatory budgeting can therefore be used as a way for local authorities and communities to plan services together, thereby delivering **instrumental benefits**.<sup>42</sup>

It can also emphasise a government's commitment to devolution and decentralisation as well as improving local democracy, by encouraging 'active citizenship' with a view to building stronger and more cohesive communities. There is some evidence that participatory budgeting has facilitated the mobilisation of citizens and associations, particularly in poorer areas.<sup>43</sup> An additional benefit could be that a participatory budgeting process could lessen the need for consultation at other times, thereby reducing the time requirements on the community and voluntary sector.

Therefore, there seems to be a mix of assumed benefits behind the current interest in participatory budgeting, including normative (the right to have a say), instrumental (providing legitimacy/active citizenship agenda) and substantive (budget decisions closer to citizen preferences). When well executed, participatory budgeting appears to be able to deliver both *de facto* empowerment, through better targeted resources and transparency, and subjective empowerment, through increased legitimacy and budget literacy.

In a review of international democratic innovations, the Power Inquiry<sup>44</sup> found participatory budgeting to be an "exceptional innovation" which would be useful in the UK, offering:

*"a sophisticated engagement strategy that shows that high levels of participation can be sustained, particularly amongst some of the poorer social groups."*

Smith, 2005

<sup>42</sup> Hall, J. (2005) *Bringing Budgets Alive: Participatory Budgeting in Practice*, Oxford: Oxfam GB UK Poverty Programme.

<sup>43</sup> Baiocchi, 'Participation, Activism and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment', 59. Full reference needed

<sup>44</sup> The Power Inquiry was an 18 month inquiry into the state of Britain's democracy, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Trust as part of its centennial celebrations.

## 7.3 What are the risks of participatory budgeting?

Whilst most commentators are positive about the empowerment opportunities and benefits that are offered by participatory budgeting, there are also a number of risks associated with the methodology. We have summarised the main ones below:

- **Level of power and expectation management:** Participatory budgeting tends to be on a limited section of the budget and this needs to be communicated clearly to participants. Where participatory budgeting exercises have failed in the past this has often been linked to an over ambitious initial agenda which the institutions failed to live up to.<sup>45</sup>
- Participatory budgeting is almost never about all public spending in an area; commonly it looks at the spending administered by a certain government structure, like a local council. However, research shows that service users are, for the most part, unaware and uninterested in departmental responsibilities and boundaries (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2001). People commonly view their problems as interlinked. In a participatory budget it is likely that participants will voice concerns about issues and priorities that fall under the jurisdiction of a variety of agencies, including the NHS, the council and the police. The participatory budgeting process would benefit if these issues could be dealt with in one process rather than each institution running parallel processes.
- **Centrally determined budgets can undermine participatory budgeting:** following on from this, participatory budgeting has been criticised in cases where most of the budget is non-negotiable and determined by outside forces. There is a danger that participatory budgeting is seen as merely a government marketing scheme or populism unless it deals with a significant amount of the annual budget. Popular participation requires the citizens to feel that it is worthwhile being involved in decision-making.<sup>46</sup>
- **Political context is important for success:** the most famous examples of participatory budgeting tend to be in areas with strong social capital and a strong, dynamic political party in power that has been driving the issue of public participation.<sup>47</sup> This brings into question whether or not these examples are transferable; to what degree is pre-existing social capital and strong political will required for successful implementation? Evidence would seem to indicate that the benefits and outcomes of participatory budgeting vary depending on the local political and social context. It is also possible that one political actor (such as a directly elected mayor) will try to use participatory budgeting as a way of gaining leverage over other political bodies (such as local councils).

<sup>45</sup> Abers, R. (2003) Reflections on What Makes Empowered Participatory Governance Happen, in Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, ed. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wrigh, London: Verso, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Avritzer, L. (2002) New Public Spheres in Brazil: Local Democracy and Deliberative Politics, Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, p11

<sup>47</sup> Robinson, M. (2003) Participation, Local Governance and Decentralised Service Delivery, Paper for Workshop on New Approaches to Decentralized Service Delivery, Santiago, Chile 16-20 March 2003. p8.

- **Complex decisions and capacity:** few can deny that economic decision-making and budgeting are difficult tasks. Complex trade offs have to be made, often with long-term implications. A common fear is that ordinary participants are unable to get acquainted with these complexities and may make bad decisions. A related fear is that the majority will cut back on services and spending that helps a vulnerable minority. However, the experience from Porto Alegre and other long-term participatory budgeting processes indicates that these fears have been overstated<sup>48</sup> and that repeated interactions with communities build capacity and confidence within the community. As members help to create and improve the process, they gain a sense of ownership and investment. Without separate demographic based meetings of 'hard-to-reach' participants such as young people, however, the process could lead to an entrenchment of the same perspectives allocating funding amongst themselves and further dispossessing groups who could not be present or are less able to be heard in the settings in which participatory budgeting occurs. On the other hand, as communities come to expect the annual consultation, it provides more opportunity for participation. The repeated scheme also allows for year-to-year knowledge accumulation. The communities are able to apply their experiences from the first year to the next year which ought to improve their skills and understanding of the process, making their participation more effective as time goes on.
- Finally, there is the issue of uptake by policymakers. For example, the Women's Budget Group (WBG)<sup>49</sup> has been issuing reports for five years and the first formal scheme to incorporate their work only started in 2003. This highlights the tension between a feel-good policy that looks nice in the newspaper and one that really adopts and implements the recommendations from the community group. If policy does not agree with the preference ordering or recommendations, what are the systems for redress by the group? For the WBG, it has taken large amounts of lobbying and patience and all they have achieved is a study on the value of gender budgeting tactics. While the government accepts their advice, it has not yet acted on many of the suggestions in their Pre-Budget reports.

## 7.4 Who does participatory budgeting tend to empower? Who does it tend to exclude?

Most participatory budgeting exercises aim to engage a geographical community (although some cases, like Porto Alegre, have thematic assemblies as well as geographical ones). In Brazil, the geographical region has commonly been divided according to a strict three-tier system to facilitate decision-making and service delivery. For example, in Recife, the city is divided into 6 'political-administrative regions', and each of these is further divided into three 'micro-regions'. Each micro-region is further divided and contains a number of neighbourhoods.<sup>50</sup> Citizens in an area or neighbourhood are invited to take part in forums and discussions on thematic issues (e.g. transport, education etc.) in order to decide strategic priorities and develop plans. In 1995, 14,000 participated in neighbourhood meetings. 8.4% of the adult population in Porto Alegre claimed to have participated in some way in the late 1990s.<sup>51</sup>

48 Abers, R. (2003) Reflections on What Makes Empowered Participatory Governance Happen, in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wrigh, London: Verso, 202; Avritzer (2002), As above

49 The Women's Budget Group is an independent organisation that brings together individuals from academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and trade unions to promote gender equality through appropriate economic policy ([www.wbg.org.uk](http://www.wbg.org.uk))

50 Avritzer, L. (2000) *Civil Society, Public Space and Local Power: A Study of the Participatory Budget in Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre*. IDS-Ford Web Site [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/index.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/index.html)

51 Abers, R. (1998) *Learning Democratic Practice: Distributing Government Resources through Popular Participation in Porto Alegre, Brazil*, in *Cities for Citizens*, ed. Mike Douglass and John Friedmann, Wiley, Chichester and New York, 47-9.

In most processes, meetings are open to all, creating the risk of certain groups dominating the proceedings. However, research into participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre shows that those living in the poorest neighbourhoods have actually been the more active citizens.<sup>52</sup> This is possibly because those in the poorer neighbourhoods feel a more pressing need for improved services (see section 4 on 'choice' for more on this).

In large-scale processes, citywide decisions are often made through community representatives appointed at neighbourhood or area forums. Some kind of accountability structure is often in place to ensure that the authorities carry through the decisions made. This is usually in the form of a network of local support agencies, designed to build local capacity, communication and transparency, through the promotion of policy information and practice.<sup>53</sup> Efforts to improve budget literacy can play a key part in building citizens' ability to take part and contribute and can avoid equity issues.<sup>54</sup>

One issue that affects who takes up the empowerment opportunities offered through participatory budgeting is the format in which the consultation takes place. A key question is whose norms are honoured and provided for? Is community cohesion a shared assumption, with the consequence that a discussion of funding can be constructive, or is there the possibility that the discussion will end up with fractionalised cliques? This becomes an issue in splintered communities. Because of the nature of the work, some level of community co-operation is required.

This analysis begs the question of what to do with communities who do not necessarily qualify as cohesive. For example, if only 100 seats are made available in the Sunderland NDC programme, who will they be issued to and what parts of the community will they represent if it is a setting comfortable to some and not to others?

The ability for policy makers to achieve an accurate representation of community priorities based on the participants is an eternal quandary within participatory schemes. Participatory budgeting is no different. It also requires a level of economic literacy to be effective. This happens as part of the process, but initial orientation of basic fiscal policy realities can ensure a £24 million disbursement recommendation is grounded in reality. The participants who step forward to join these initiatives have an internal sense of capacity in assuming their participation may be useful. Facilitators and representatives must ask the question, "*what about the preferences of those who did not come forward?*"

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<sup>52</sup> Harvard University Center for Urban Development Studies (2003), *Assessment of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*, Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 10

<sup>53</sup> Baiocchi, G. (2001), *Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory*. *Politics and Society* 29 (1): 43-72

<sup>54</sup> Hall, J. (2005) *Bringing Budgets Alive: Participatory Budgeting in Practice*, Oxford: Oxfam GB UK Poverty Programme.

## 7.5 Who tends to favour/disfavour participatory budgeting?

Participatory Budgeting is currently the focus of much attention amongst civil society and government in the UK. It is seen as a real opportunity to re-engage local citizens with government and give them a real say. Interested parties include CLG, Audit Commission, Local Government Authority (LGA) and other bodies.

Critical voices are, at present, scarce. During presentations around participatory budgeting some local councillors have expressed concerns about the capability and willingness of local people to play such an active role.<sup>55</sup> There might also be some resistance to the method on the basis of its use elsewhere by directly elected local politicians to build an independent power base.

It is important to remember that any budgeting process leads to winners and losers; certain groups may, therefore, resist participatory budgeting when it is used in practice. However initial results from the Harrow Open Budget seem to indicate that the process has increased the legitimacy of the decisions, even among those who saw their services reduced.

There is also a critique from the left that disputes the empowering aspects of participatory budgeting. Some far-left sources have described participatory budgeting as the co-option of communities in the "organisation of poverty", leaving civil society unable to contest service cutbacks caused by structural adjustment policies.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Comments made at "Spending Power: Participatory budgeting and the devolution agenda." Conference organised by the Young Foundation and ODPM, London 4 April 2006, London.

<sup>56</sup> Forgue, F. and Turra, J. (2004) The Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil: The World Bank's "Best Alternative", Socialist Organizer, San Francisco, available online at [http://www.theorganizer.org/Globalization/PARTICIPATORY\\_BUDGETING.html](http://www.theorganizer.org/Globalization/PARTICIPATORY_BUDGETING.html)

# CASE STUDIES

## Participatory Budgeting

### 'Participation in Fiscal Spaces and Municipal Planning' in Vallegrande, Bolivia

<b>Objectives:</b>	<p>Implementing the processes of participation in the Plan de Desarrollo Municipal (PDM)</p> <p>To increase knowledge on citizen engagement in fiscal processes at the local government level, in an effort to improve government, aid donors, and civil society actors' performance with respect to participation's potential as a means to bring about better living conditions and democratic governance.</p> <p>To strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations and local government actors to influence and participate in fiscal processes, through research, advocacy and campaigns.</p>
<b>Involvement:</b>	<p>Participants: Citizens of Vallegrande</p> <p>Run by GNTP - a Bolivian network and learning community of NGOs and professionals specialized in participatory methods 23 local Institutions comprising of local government, academic and non-governmental organisations.</p>
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>Informational and Consciousness raising Campaign - seen as a key means of promoting greater civil society participation. Was done by training 16 university students to raise awareness and conduct 16 workshops in rural areas.</p> <p>Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to obtain information to develop the new PDM. This also included an inter-institutional fair where a brief document on the PDM was disseminated to civil society. This document discussed all the fiscal resources received by municipal government and how they would be invested.</p> <p>Participatory Budgeting Exercise – information and workshops to promote reflection and analysis on issues e.g. how public and private actors needed to share responsibility for implementation of budget priorities; transparency and governance; social accountability; and the methodology and planning activities.</p> <p>Consolidation, Publication and Dissemination of PDM – the booklet was approved by the municipal government and distributed to civil society.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Improvement in social indicators and level of poverty – a remarkable achievement for the poor. Between 1994 and 2001 the Human Development Index in Vallegrande improved from .581 to .673</p> <p>In terms of revenue raising - between 1994 and 1997 the amount of revenues raised increased from zero to US\$ 187,500. This level of revenues was maintained up to 2000 and evidence suggests even up to 2003.</p> <p><i>"The Vallegrande case has demonstrated that key factors that enable people's participation include: government openness to participatory processes, access to information, organizational capacity within civil society, that NGOs have a real commitment to participatory processes and the existence of learning communities."</i></p> <p>Interesting because it shows how different levels of engagement can be combined to create engagement throughout the budget cycle (i.e. starting of with information provision, moving on to information gathering, on to participatory budgeting and finally back to information provision for dissemination).</p>

# CASE STUDIES

## Participatory Budgeting

### Allocating LSP environmental improvement funding in Bradford Metropolitan District

<b>Objectives:</b>	Using intra-community allocation to allocate £600,000 of funding for environmental improvements.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Individuals and community groups with proposals based in the poorest 10% of wards in the city.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>Community groups had already created Neighbourhood Action Plans with the goal of strengthening communities' and neighbourhoods' abilities to meet their own needs, improving public services, and shaping budgetary plans for police, health and Council expenditures, and other partnerships. Qualifying projects came from these plans and were pre-selected through Neighbourhood Action Partnerships each of which entered two projects. Each Partnership also sent two representatives to the session.</p> <p>During each three-hour session, participants were given three minutes to present their ideas to the other representatives. There were a total of 30 projects and the assembly voted after sets of ten projects were presented. The votes were pooled at the end of the session and results were displayed on a big screen. Those who were not chosen were given assistance in the search for alternative funding and improvement of the proposal itself.</p> <p>The two sessions distributed £150,000 per session with a project budget range of £1,000- £10,000.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	This example allocates a set amount of funding and allows potential beneficiaries to decide how money will be used specifically. There is a difference between the hands on peer led distributions scheme versus soliciting a series of priorities within a group and making the allocations through a third party. This was also a repeated process.
<b>Further information:</b>	Community Pride Initiative/Oxfam UK (2005) Breathing life into Democracy: The Power of Participatory Budgeting, Community Pride Initiative/Oxfam UK, Manchester/Oxford. See also Zipfel, Tricia (2006) Participatory Budgeting: Background Paper for seminar, paper prepared for "Spending Power: Participatory budgeting and the devolution agenda." Conference organised by the Young Foundation and ODPM, London 4 <sup>th</sup> April 2006, London.

# CASE STUDIES

## Participatory Budgeting

### Sunderland NDC

<b>Objectives:</b>	Involving citizens in allocating the NDC budget for Sunderland
<b>Involvement:</b>	Sunderland citizens
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>With a sizable amount of money to allocate and 100 places reserved for citizens in the events, a complex structure is required to manage the increase in scale after the first year. The participatory budgeting Unit is therefore developing a budget matrix for the NDC Partnership Board.</p> <p>The <i>budget matrix</i> is a system to clarify preferences across geographical units and the citizens who represent them into suggestions for dedicated apportionment. Through a series of tables, preferences across themes are ordered for local area (sub-municipal areas) priorities and then reordered for the whole city. The next step is to balance the two and make adjustments and compromises to ensure each area receives some of the funding.</p> <p>The participatory budgeting Unit reports how this can be seen as “ a pooling of local and city wide knowledge” which helps identify issues people external from the situation may not have seen or connections that may not have been obvious. Once levelling of city and local area priorities has been done, weighting adjustments are made for population and deprivation. The matrix sums together the various totals and generates a table of allocation preferences from across the city. The agency responsible for the particular theme can then craft a plan that will be presented to the council.</p> <p>The budget matrix also includes performance measurement with a view to constant improvement of the process. Performance monitoring updates variables and their particular weights will be updated and redefined as the process continues.</p> <p>Once the preferences have been submitted, contracts and procurement methods incorporate the listings through presentations from bidding organizations to the public gatherings as a normal step in the process.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	Sunderland New Deal for Communities set aside £15,000 for their first participatory budgeting Community Chest. The success of the initiative generated support for a second round, which took place in the autumn of 2005, this time for £35,000. The NDC director and the participants from the first round were satisfied enough to consider increasing the fund amount to cover the whole NDC budget of £24 million.
<b>Further information:</b>	Hills, Lauren (2005) 'Participatory Budgeting: regenerating local democracy' Neighbourhood Management National Network Newsletter, (10), pp. 3-5 See also Zipfel, Tricia (2006) Participatory Budgeting: Background Paper for seminar, paper prepared for “Spending Power: Participatory budgeting and the devolution agenda.” Conference organised by the Young Foundation and ODPM, London 4 <sup>th</sup> April 2006, London.



# CASE STUDIES

## Participatory Budgeting

### Salford City-Wide Budget Consultation

<b>Objectives:</b>	Mainstreaming participatory budgeting into a consistent policy tool. Salford has created ways to link neighbourhood priorities with the official budget to incorporate the involvement of a variety of actors who have responded positively to participatory budgeting. These include as diverse range such as the police and fire services, the voluntary sector and the Primary Care Trust.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Citizens
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>The city-wide budget consultation is actually a series of steps that capture public preferences in different ways. Salford began devolving small budgets to local area groups in 1999. In 2004/05, they £1 million was given over to nine neighbourhoods to rank preferences for on seven themes. While all demographics were invited, the program held separate meetings for youth and elderly citizens. In 2005/6, £500,000 was allotted for eight neighbourhoods, the amounts per neighbourhood ranged from £43,000 to £77,000. The allotments function as a "local budget" and are tied to a Community Action Plan designed around the specified seven themes.</p> <p>Each year in April, delivery partners decide the feasibility of the plans requests and decide what can and cannot be met through the council. The local budget is discussed by the local budget team and parcelled out into smaller grants per issue within the CAP.</p> <p>A procedural infrastructure supports the deliberations and decision-making. There is also a specified role for central government working to support and scrutinize the process. The system in place consists of neighbourhood managers and staff, ward councillors who represent local priorities to the greater city council and then an executive group. This group meets quarterly and includes senior officers from partner agencies, local councillors and community representatives. The purpose of this tier is to ensure services and resources correspond to community priorities.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	The response from the public on the second round of consultations was less than the initial levels of participation in the first round. Because of this, the council has attempted new and other forms of consultation. The 2006/7 scheme creates citizen's panel, inviting 850 citizens to an event called the Big Listen. The city council will ask a series of questions regarding the "quality and use of council services, council spending, council tax, and the means of conducting the budget consultation."
<b>Further information:</b>	Community Pride Initiative (2002) <i>The Salford Budget Matrix 2002-2003: A Step by Step Guide</i> , Community Pride Initiative: Manchester; Community Pride Initiative (2001) <i>Salford Community Committees and Budget Preparation</i> , Community Pride Initiative: Manchester; see also Zipfel, Tricia (2006) <i>Participatory Budgeting: Background Paper for seminar, paper prepared for "Spending Power: Participatory budgeting and the devolution agenda."</i> Conference organised by the Young Foundation and ODPM, London 4 <sup>th</sup> April 2006, London. SQW <i>Neighbourhood Perspectives</i> "Briefing Note 1: Participatory Budgeting" March 2006

# CASE STUDIES

## Participatory Budgeting

### Women's Budget Group

<b>Objectives:</b>	The goal is to provide a gender disaggregated view of expenditure. Gender Budgets are meant to expose implicit bias in policy tools commonly considered gender neutral. Similar processes can be utilized for ethnicity and other diversity issues. The UK Women's Budget Group also has ties with the Scottish Women's Budget Group and the Welsh Gender Budgets Group.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Most gender budgets incorporate policy makers, academics, and civil society groups to have the widest view possible as the priorities for investing in women.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>This methodology is based on the knowledge accumulated from the 40 countries that have done gender budgeting around the world since the first in Australia in 1984.</p> <p>Since 1998, the Treasury has conducted small gender impact analysis on their budgets. In 2003, the first formal research was undertaken in 2003 through a project piloted by the Women's Equality Unit. Titled the Gender Analysis of Expenditure Project, the objectives were to test analysis tools, identify the value these tools add, and also to create an action learning exercise within the pilot departments to assist in capacity building as they incorporate gender analysis in their expenditure planning.</p> <p>The teams conduct not only a measure of priorities but also a true picture of the governments' expenditures matched against their policy promises. This example tends to be a more complicated version of participatory budgeting in that the process does not stop at allocation as it performs an ex post analysis of previous allocations.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Participation takes on a different description for gender budgets. In the UK especially, it has not been done by popular participants as it have been in places like Ecuador or South Africa. The Expenditure Analysis was focused on the participation of civil servants and other top stakeholders within government. The presence of academics and trade unions is more of an advisory role during the ex post analysis. Unlike the examples from the South the UK experiments have fewer directly empowering effects.</p> <p>While concrete projects similar to the case studies above have been less common within the UK, since 2001 the Women's Budget Group has issued a response to HM Treasury's Pre-Budget Report detailing priorities listed by groups of academics, trade unionists and non-governmental organizations. The reports focus on social programs and economic policy that promote or inhibit women's labour force participation, social mobility and inclusion, and public service provision. These Pre-Budget Reports are informal budget matrices that could assist in the design of the national budget given more buy in from stakeholders from within government.</p>
<b>Further information:</b>	<p><a href="http://www.wbg.org.uk/GBA_UK.htm">http://www.wbg.org.uk/GBA_UK.htm</a>; Final Report of the Gender Analysis of Expenditure Project, pg 7; Elson , Diane (2003) Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Budgeting, paper prepared for 'Gender Equality and Europe's Future', Conference at the European Commission, DG Education and Culture and Jean Monnet Project, Brussels , 4 March 2003; Rake, Katherine (2002) Gender Budgets: The Experience of the UK's Women's Budget Group, Paper prepared for the conference 'Gender Balance – Equal Finance' Basel, Switzerland, March 2002</p>

# **8. Ballots, referenda and empowered petitions**

## 8. Ballots, referenda and empowered petitions

### 8.1 What are these mechanisms?

At the opposite end of the 'depth of empowerment' scale for participatory voice mechanisms, as we outlined in chapter 6, are ballots, referenda and empowered petitions. These mechanisms allow the public to signal preferences by choosing between discrete options.

They can cover any issue, though in practice the majority of ballots are elections for positions as community or group representatives. Empowered petitions or "citizens' ballots" or "citizens' initiatives" differ from standard ballots in that they are triggered by citizens rather than governments or the standard working of the constitution.

A typical citizens' ballot process is as follows:

- Legislators determine which policy areas are open to citizens' ballots;
- A group of citizens decide they want to change policy within a suitable area. They inform the relevant authority of their intention to start collecting signatures ; and
- The citizens have a restricted length of time to collect the signatures. If the previously determined requisite numbers of signatures are collected, some action is triggered. This is often a referendum, but may be a debate in the legislature, negotiation with organisers, acceptance of their proposals, or a referendum with a counter-option as well as that suggested in the citizens' ballot. These latter options prevent the mechanism bypassing elected legislators.
- Citizens ballots on local issues are found in 26 US states, Switzerland, Catalonia in Spain, Germany (especially in Baden-Wurttemberg), Finland, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Hungary and the Czech Republic, amongst others. In England and Wales there is an existing right, at a parish level, to trigger a referendum: if 5 local people call a meeting, and 10 attend it, they can decide that the parish council should hold a referendum, which needs to be carried out in 14-25 days.

Both sorts of mechanism can be embedded in broader processes. For example, the British Columbia Citizens Assembly involved a citizens' assembly that developed recommendations on electoral reform. These recommendations were then put to a state-wide referendum.

### 8.2 What sort of empowerment can ballots et al deliver?

Citizens' ballot mechanisms provide **de jure** empowerment in that they give citizens the formal right to elect representatives or even to be directly involved in decision making.

Their **de facto** impact is more contested, particularly at the individual level. As the discussion of 'who is empowered' below in section 8.4 shows, in practice participation tends to be heavily socially skewed. Moreover, participating in ballots with large electorates provides only a small amount of power at an individual level. The effect of each individual signature or vote is conditional upon the rules of the voting system and the preferences of all the other participants. Ironically, reduced turn-out increases the power of individual votes.

Beyond the individual level, *de facto* impacts are as significant as the issue under consideration in the ballot. Ballots could be held on issues as significant as the level of council tax or as relatively minor as the renewal of a contract for a local bus company. However, it is unclear whether the existence of ballots does systematically change or lead to better policy decisions.

Some, such as Matsuoka (1998), have argued for a link between US state-wide ballots and the fiscal behaviour of local government. For example, he finds that ballots “*seem to lead regularly to devolution of spending authority from state to local governments.*” Gamble (1997), on the other hand, finds that direct democracy measures, such as direct citizens’ ballots, are more likely to pass measures that harm minority interests. However, this claim is hotly contested, and depends significantly on the dataset being examined and the size of the polity: larger and more heterogeneous populations are argued to be less likely to have this effect.

The impact on **subjective** empowerment is also unclear. We have not found any evidence to confirm the argument that higher levels of access to ballots increases perceptions that citizens can influence the state, although there is evidence that they are more satisfied with their lives, as discussed below.

Non-empowered (standard) petitions do not offer *de jure* empowerment. However, they may offer *de facto* empowerment where they are responded to. For example, the Make Poverty History campaign argue that their petition activity was important in demonstrating public support for their cause.

Standard petitions are also linked to subjective empowerment. For example, the 2005 political engagement audit conducted for the Electoral Commission found that people who signed petitions were disproportionately likely to take part in other forms of political engagement (Ipsos MORI 2006). It is not clear whether familiarity with petitions brings subjective empowerment or those who have a stronger sense of empowerment tend to sign petitions more. The relationship may well be iterative, with political engagement building confidence and further engagement.

### 8.3 What are the benefits and risks of ballots et al?

Whilst it is unclear whether the existence of ballots does systematically change policy decisions, there is evidence that access to ballots and petitions increases people’s overall life satisfaction. For example, research in different cantons of Switzerland (Frey & Stutzer 2000) has found that a one percentage point increase in an index of direct democracy (which combines factors such as frequency of referenda, number of signatures needed to prompt a referendum, and so on) increases the share of people reporting that they are very satisfied with life by 2.8%. This is a statistically significant effect that needs to be supported by further studies, however, before real cause and effect can be confidently asserted.

Interestingly, the link between canton-level life satisfaction and canton-level democratic process is far weaker for foreign nationals living in the canton (who are not able to participate in referenda and ballots). The evidence suggests that two thirds of the benefit comes from being able to take part in the process, rather than the ‘better’ outcomes to which the process leads. We have not found evidence around the difference in impact level between those who actually participate and those who are able to, but choose not to. Of course, the Swiss context is very different from the British context; however it is interesting to note this impact of referenda on something as fundamental as life satisfaction, which points to some **normative** benefits.

Arguably, ballot initiatives may have significant instrumental benefits – they secure buy-in to the political process. Voting systems are a well established and widely accepted way of making decisions in the UK, and so it may be that decisions made through open-elections are more likely to win public support. The most obvious example of this is at the national level, where the electoral process plays a key role in securing broad acceptance of the legitimacy of government, even amongst people who disagree with its policies.

However, turnout (and particularly differential turnout amongst different social groups) is a key challenge to the instrumental effectiveness of voting, as are concerns about gerrymandering, electoral boundaries and first-past-the-post electoral systems. Where people lose faith that the electoral system is 'fair' (however they subjectively define that term) their willingness to accept ballots as a way of making decisions is likely to fall.

## 8.4 Who do ballots et al tend to empower? Who do they tend to exclude?

Ballot initiatives and petitions have the potential to affect a broad cross-section of society but, in practice, participation in them tends to be heavily skewed by area, class and other factors. This section discusses these factors, beginning by looking at the more heavily researched area of electoral participation, then moving on to discuss ballots. The research on elections is not directly translatable to ballot initiatives, but it does strongly suggest that participation is likely to be skewed by class and locality.

### 8.4.1 Elections and referenda

In practice, voting behaviour in elections and referenda is heavily skewed, as shown in this analysis of the turnout for the 2005 General Election by the Electoral Commission<sup>57</sup>:

- Areas with the highest levels of unemployment and income deprivation have the highest levels of non-registration for general and local elections; and
- Interest in politics is markedly lower in areas with greater deprivation: only 35% of residents in the most deprived 10% of areas in the country say that they are interested in politics, compared with 69% in the most affluent 10% of areas. This is not purely the result of individual-level class effects. While it is true that individuals in classes C2DE are, in general, less likely to be interested in politics than ABC1s, there is a very strong influence exerted at a local community level as well. In very deprived areas only 26% of C2DEs are interested in politics, while in very affluent areas the number is 64%. C2DEs in very affluent areas are more likely to be interested in politics than ABC1s in very deprived areas.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> (The Electoral Commission 2005) Election 2005 turnout: how many, who and why?, London: The Electoral Commission.

<sup>58</sup> Social grade is determined by social status and occupation. Social grade A is typically an individual who is upper middle class whose occupation is a higher managerial or professional level; Social grade B is typically a middle class individual who works in an intermediate managerial, administrative or professional role; Social grade C1 is typically a lower middle class individual who works in a supervisory capacity; Social grade C2 is typically a skilled manual worker; Social grade D are those who are working class individuals who are semi or unskilled manual workers; Social grade E are typically unemployed and/or living on the lowest level of subsistence.

As well as class effects, convenience of voting also has some influence on participation in elections, though the effect appears to be small. MORI's survey for the Electoral Commission in June 2001 found that 57% of non-voters spontaneously gave circumstantial reasons for not voting, the most common of which was that they could not get to the polling station because it was too inconvenient<sup>59</sup>. However, it is important to remember that voting was not more convenient 30 years ago when turnout was far higher – if anything it was less convenient as fewer people owned cars. More convenient forms of voting, such as postal and electronic voting, have had only a limited positive effect on turnout<sup>60</sup>. We therefore need to be cautious about the Electoral Commission's research: it may show that convenience is the most accessible post-rationalisation of non-voting; not that it is a cause of non-voting.

A stronger case can be made for the claim that non-voting – and wider non-participation in political activity – is caused by the belief that participation will make no difference to what happens. The Power Inquiry has drawn on a range of evidence sources to conclude that:

*“We are in no doubt that the sense that citizens can have little influence over political decisions, even if they do get involved in formal democracy, is a fundamental cause of disengagement and alienation.”*

The Power Inquiry (2006)

Evidence they cite includes:

- The proportion of those who strongly believe that ‘people have no say in what government does’ doubled to 30% between 1973 and 1994;
- Over 90% feel that ‘ordinary voters’ should have influence over government policies, but only 33% felt they actually did; and
- Their survey of non-voters found that 49% of non-voters would be very likely or more likely to vote if their preferred party had a real chance of winning.

#### **8.4.2 Risks of citizens' initiatives and ballots**

There is a great deal of debate in the USA around the nature of participants in citizens' initiatives. There is increasing concern that the process of securing signatures from a significant proportion of a state's population is excessively burdensome on many citizen groups, compared with corporate interest groups or the interests of the very wealthy who can put more resources into the endeavour. This has led to a fear that citizens' initiatives are being incorporated into more mainstream party politics and lobbyist politics.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

## 8.5 Who tends to favour/disfavour ballots et al?

The Power Inquiry found that empowered ballots were strongly supported in the UK, even amongst non-voters. Their survey of over 1000 non-voters found more than 70% were 'likely' or 'very likely' to take part in referenda or citizens' initiatives (The Power Inquiry 2006). Clearly, intention and action are not necessarily linked, particularly in this area. However, the positive response amongst *non-voters* suggests that this sort of mechanism tackles some concerns non-voters have about standard elections.

There is also reason to think that ballots and referenda have broader appeal, beyond non-voters; 72% of people say they would be willing to sign a petition to "*influence or protest against a decision by a local or national governing body*", and 50% of people have done so (The Electoral Commission 2006). Given this, it would be surprising if that number went down if these petitions had more direct links with, and influence over, decision making.

Another interesting line of argument, here, is around personalisation and the rise of single issue campaigns. Ballot initiatives allow individuals to support a particular policy position without feeling that they have to sign up to a party's full range of policies.

However, ballots and referenda can be seen, particularly by councillors and party activists, as a threat to representative democracy and the role of elected representatives. Whether these concerns are legitimate depends on both the intention behind the use of these mechanisms and the theory of democracy guiding policy. Where representatives are seen as a sort of necessary evil - used because it is impractical for citizens to be constantly making decisions - then bypassing them where citizens want to take the power back has to be seen as a good thing.

These concerns are more valid for those who see representatives as a professional group able to deliberate in ways that citizens, living busy lives, could not. However, so far, we have found little quantitative or qualitative evidence on the attitude of party activists or politicians to these ideas in the UK.



# CASE STUDIES

## Ballots and referenda

### Scottish Parliament e-petitions

<b>Objectives:</b>	To enable citizens to submit petitions online, thereby widening participation in the legislative process
<b>Involvement:</b>	Scottish citizens
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	Citizens can submit petitions to the Scottish parliament on matters subject to the parliament's jurisdiction. These are held online for an agreed period of time then the parliamentary Public Petitions Committee assesses the petition, taking the number of signatories into account.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Petitions have led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ changes in the law: a petition by a local action group prompted a change in legislation to outlaw the spreading of untreated organic waste</li> <li>○ action from the Scottish Executive and other public bodies: a petition led to the establishment of a fast track court to speed up the compensation process for asbestosis victims.</li> <li>○ changes to regulations and guidance: petitions prompted the Scottish Executive to introduce regulations to extend planning controls to all new mobile phone and other telecommunications masts.</li> </ul>
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/default.asp">http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/default.asp</a>

# CASE STUDIES

## Ballots and Referenda

### Grammar School Ballot

<b>Objectives:</b>	To enable parents to decide the future of selective admission at a local school.
<b>Involvement:</b>	All parents whose children attend 'feeder' preparatory and primary schools were eligible to vote in the ballot. Feeder schools defined as schools which send five or more pupils to the grammar school, and who must have sent children there in the last two years.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	Two stage process: 20% of parents eligible to vote have to sign a petition calling for the ballot. Once this threshold is reached, a ballot is automatically triggered. This ballot was held and overseen by Electoral Reform Ballot Services to ensure independence.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	The ballot – the first and only one to be held thus far on the future of a grammar school – was won by those parents wanting to maintain selection, by 1,493 votes to 747 on a 74.8% turnout. This meant that 67% of parents backed selection and the school continues to select its pupils. However, there have been claims that this system is too complex and weighted in favour of grammar schools (see notes on mechanisms)
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/673218.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/673218.stm</a> <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3906667.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3906667.stm</a>

# 9. Triggers

## 9. Triggers

### 9.1 What is the mechanism?

Triggers are regulatory controls within a system that elicit automatic responses from government officials when certain standards or conditions are met. These can be both positive and negative: achieving a certain high level of performance might automatically lead to greater flexibility and lighter monitoring; failing to achieve set standards might trigger a performance improvement programme, re-tendering for that service or closure of a service provider. Triggers can be used to create a system of incentives for public service delivery bodies. Like floor targets, they can be used to specify minimum service levels. Like targets and thresholds associated with the principle of earned autonomy, they can be used to reward good performance.

These sorts of automatic triggers act as an auto-pilot for accountability regimes: instead of relying on citizens' organising and putting pressure on authorities to deliver a certain quality of service or manage services in a certain way, an automatic mechanism does the job instead. This use of triggers is more of a substitute for empowerment than a form of empowerment in itself, unless at least one of the following two conditions are met:

- Citizens are involved in setting trigger levels and determining the consequences of failing/exceeding trigger levels and/or
- A measure of citizen experience/attitude is the variable that triggers action

This chapter focuses on triggers that meet one or both of these criteria to a high degree.

As with empowered ballots and referenda, it should be borne in mind that triggers can lead to other empowerment mechanisms, for example low satisfaction with an elected representative might trigger a referendum on whether they should remain in post. This section only discusses the trigger part of that equation.

### 9.2 What kind of empowerment do trigger mechanisms provide?

This section further develops the two ways in which triggers can deliver empowerment: through setting trigger levels, and through the measure that is used to trigger action.

#### 9.2.1 Setting trigger levels

Where communities are involved in setting trigger levels, there can be both subjective and *de facto* empowerment effects. However, the nature of these effects depends on the mechanism used to reach a decision on trigger levels. For example:

- A **citizens' jury** could be convened, empowering a small number of people to have a significant impact and delivering some form of subjective empowerment (or possibly disempowerment if they are not satisfied with the process). Similarly, an **open meeting** could be held, having the characteristics set out around highly participatory voice mechanisms as mentioned previously. This would enable a larger number of people to have some form of subjective empowerment;

- A **public opinion survey** could be commissioned using a technique like conjoint analysis to determine floor-levels for service quality. This would provide **de facto** empowerment to participants in the survey, but is unlikely to have any subjective impact unless they are told how their responses have been used.

As such, there are few general conclusions to be drawn about empowerment effects of involving people in setting trigger levels. The mechanism used to determine trigger levels could potentially have *de facto*, subjective or even *de jure* effects; but it may not. It depends on the choice made. However, there are two general points that are worth emphasising:

- The level of *de facto* empowerment is contingent on the trigger level and the extent to which, when operated, the trigger genuinely impacts the management and outcome of services.
- Subjective empowerment is also contingent on these factors. If the trigger does not operate because the trigger level is never reached/undershot, it will be hard to demonstrate that the mechanism gives more power to communities. This case will also be harder to make if, once operated, the trigger does not lead to substantive improvements in service quality.

### 9.2.2 Satisfaction triggers – citizens' views triggering action

Using citizens' views to trigger actions can deliver significant *de facto* empowerment – though the level of empowerment depends on what happens once the trigger is tripped, and what the trigger level is. For example, in the context of a care home, it would be possible for 'low' satisfaction scores in a survey of residents to trigger a range of responses from automatic change in management to a residents' meeting. Which of the possible responses actually occurs, and how that impacts on service outcomes, determines the level of *de facto* empowerment delivered.

A significant challenge here is around the scale of empowerment effects. Where satisfaction is measured through public opinion surveys, only relatively small numbers of people are involved. Those who are not involved may well enjoy any benefits that stem from improvements in services, but they are not directly empowered. However, they do have indirect power in that they have an equal chance of taking part in a well-recruited, well-sampled survey. Still, the *de facto* impact outside the research sample is small.

There is little evidence of the impact of user satisfaction measures in current audit systems: we have not found an example of a satisfaction trigger currently at work. Instead, satisfaction measures at present tend to be just one element amongst many within inspection/audit approaches – for example user-focus is but one part of the Community Performance Assessment (CPA) and Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) programme. In the context of numerous other measures of performance, we have not been able to disentangle the distinctive impact of satisfaction scores.

The discussion above has shown that trigger mechanisms can have significant *de facto* effects. However, most standard ways of measuring satisfaction are unlikely to have **subjective empowerment** effects. There is no evidence that taking part in a survey has any long term impact in terms of an individual's sense of power.

Of course, satisfaction could be measured in other ways which do provide a greater sense of subjective empowerment. Focus groups arguably have a strong empowerment impact for those who take part – though as with surveys, the sample is designed externally so individuals cannot choose to take part. Other options might be to include opt-in forms of assessment such as online message boards. However, this raises significant challenges in terms of the representativeness of the sample (see discussion below on ‘who is empowered’ in section 9.4).

### 9.3 What benefits and risks of trigger mechanisms?

There is a clear benefit of using subjective satisfaction scores to assess service quality, rather than centrally set performance measures: subjective measures avoid politicians and policy makers having to second guess what sorts of things citizens/electors value. Instead of trying to measure the things that politicians believe contribute to (life) satisfaction and trying to find measures that apply across society, each individual performs their own internal calculation and expresses their view on the basis of whatever it is that is important to them. The measure is therefore more nuanced.

Anecdotally, it is argued that this will lead to **substantive improvements** in services, but we have not found any hard evidence to support or refute this contention. As the discussion of choice shows, the fact that a system in theory ought to create a certain pattern of incentives, and that the pattern should, in theory, lead to service improvements, does not always mean that the mechanism delivers in practice. It depends heavily on the detail of execution and the context in which it operates.

A plausible, but we believe ultimately flawed, objection to using satisfaction triggers is that they might breed populist politics that undermine equality and, for example, minority rights. Things that cause high levels of satisfaction at an aggregate level may cause focused dissatisfaction. Certain decisions might impact negatively on a minority, whilst having the support of the majority of citizens in a locality. Therefore, it could be argued that a council might improve aggregate satisfaction levels in some circumstances by implementing policies which negatively affect minority groups. This argument highlights the need to balance overall satisfaction with minority rights. This argument is acceptable, but can be challenged in two ways.

Firstly, it is no more plausible than the charge that having elections breeds populism. We accept the risk of populism in elections and have legal mechanisms such as the Human Rights Act to counter its worst excesses. Secondly, it probably overplays the extent to which socially divisive attitudes are strong motivators of satisfaction scores. A parent’s view of their child’s school is more likely to be affected by their interactions with the school and their child’s account than an assessment of the race of pupils; particularly where the question is asked in terms of satisfaction with their child’s education rather than the school.

There may also be **instrumental** benefits in that the nuances of satisfaction data might lead to better focused services. It may also help secure buy-in to a service, if service users know that their satisfaction is the measure by which the service is judged. However, both of these arguments are conjecture: we have not found evidence of instrumental benefits, because we have not found evidence of satisfaction triggers in operation.

## 9.4 Who do trigger mechanisms tend to empower/exclude?

The key issue here is how satisfaction is measured. Where the sample is designed to ensure representativeness for a particular geography or community, empowerment ought to reflect local opinion and avoid the biases often found with the make-up of participants in opt-in mechanisms. Satisfaction triggers could therefore avoid replicating existing power differentials and so disproportionately empower the less well off and those less likely to use opt-in voice mechanisms.

There is an important caveat here: adaptation (Donovan & Halpern 2002). Improving experience tends to lead people to change their expectations – the bar constantly moves up. Whilst this is probably a good thing as it provides a constant pressure to improve service quality, the flipside is that poor experience of services tend to lead people to lower their expectations, meaning service users who systematically receive a poor quality of public services are likely to have lower expectations of those services, so may be satisfied with a lower level of service. This may then lead to satisfaction surveys leading to systematically lower quality services for these groups as lower quality services are needed for achieving the same satisfaction score.

However, while this is a significant concern, it is not insurmountable. It is important to think about the ways in which individuals and communities can shape services at present and assess the mechanism in terms of whether or not it is a step in the right direction, rather than whether or not it is perfect. At present, the most excluded are unlikely to have any method for influencing services. They are less likely to vote, and often lack the self-confidence and access to resources necessary to take part in highly-participative voice mechanisms (see above). So, ensuring some level of representation through a carefully designed and recruited satisfaction survey is, most probably, a step in the right direction.

An alternative model of identifying satisfaction scores is to use opt-in mechanisms. However, these have greater issues in terms of social exclusion. Opt-in mechanisms are more likely to approximate either highly participative voice mechanisms or citizens' initiatives, in that individuals will probably need to have a sense of self confidence and confidence in the system to be motivated to take part.

Participants are also likely to need high stocks of social capital to be able to find out about opportunities to express their views, and thus these approaches are more vulnerable to exclusion for reasons of accessibility. As such, opt-in approaches are less likely to represent the full breadth of views than properly recruited and designed samples. If opt-in approaches to recruitment manage to avoid problems of selection bias, the adaptation problem remains.

# CASE STUDIES

## Satisfaction Trigger

### DiGi\* Satisfaction Survey of customers

<b>Objectives:</b>	Customer satisfaction is embodied in the company's vision and values and is a primary measure of their success. The call centre is at the frontline when it comes to building and maintaining their customer relationships. With more than 250 call centre staff, DiGi needed a way to track call centre performance that was fast and cost effective; and that enabled management to identify mistakes quickly and make immediate improvements.
<b>Involvement:</b>	A sample of customers
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	<p>At the end of their interaction with the DiGi Call Centre, customers are invited to participate in an automated survey using Customer Satisfaction Measurement (CSM) technology, which lets customers respond to recorded voice-prompted questions by pushing a button on their telephone keypad.</p> <p>The survey gathers customer feedback on call centre performance, friendliness, knowledge, ability to resolve issues and overall satisfaction, as well as proving voice comments.</p> <p>The feedback is analysed automatically and made available instantly via a dedicated Internet site. This enables call centre managers to evaluate overall service performance, call centre functions and individual staff every day.</p>
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	<p>Overall customer experience has improved at all Customer Service interaction points tracked.</p> <p>The company has been able to identify more quickly areas that require improvement and stimulate 'healthy competition' between the internal teams involved to get the best results.</p> <p>Pn. Halimah Binti Abdullah, Senior Manager Quality and People Development, Customer Service, Marketing Division, explains:</p> <p><i>"When we started using [the CSM software] we realised the results could be even more powerful if they were integrated into the way we report to management and create key performance indicators for our staff.</i></p> <p><i>The employee incentive scheme is now based on the results and a monthly reward programme has been introduced for the staff. Reward is now directly linked to customer satisfaction and employee performance and our performance continues to improve as a result</i></p>

\* Malaysian mobile operator



# **10. Citizen Assessment**

## 10. Citizen Assessment

### 10.1 What is the mechanism?

This mechanism involves citizens taking part in assessment, audit and inspection programmes to help deliver better quality services. The most common use in the UK is in housing and social care. Examples are as follows:

- The Audit Commission involves tenants as “Tenant Inspection Advisers” on all Housing Association inspections, all local authority housing management service inspections, homelessness and housing advice inspections and supporting people inspections. They do not (yet) involve tenants in inspecting housing strategy and private sector housing. However, some councils have made this move. For example, in West Lothian Council, tenants carry out an evaluation of officer practice, including interviews and site visits and make recommendations to the local authority based on their findings (Flint 2004);
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection’s “Experts by Experience” scheme involves users of social care in inspecting providers in parts of the country other than where they live;
- Worcestershire Social Services have recruited and trained older people to inspect residential homes, stating that, by such involvement, older people are making “*valuable contributions to their community*” (Age Concern 2005)

We have not found any UK examples of ‘citizen assessors’ actually being involved in their capacity as citizens rather than service-users, meaning their focus is largely on ensuring better quality service delivery rather than engaging in wider, more strategic discussions about budget allocation and so on.

### 10.2 What sort of empowerment can citizen assessment deliver?

Any service delivery improvements that result from these assessments can affect the whole community. But in practice, significant *de facto* empowerment is enjoyed only by those who take part in the assessment process, either as assessors or service users.

This empowerment can be significant – as discussed below under ‘benefits of empowerment’ in section 10.3 - tenant assessment has been shown to have a significant impact on service quality in certain instances. Whether it does actually have the sorts of benefits described depends on the extent to which the inspection process is genuinely linked into the decision making process and the extent to which tenant/citizen assessors are taken seriously by other inspectors within an inspection team.

**Subjective** empowerment is also concentrated on participants in the inspection process. Where inspection processes work well, the effect can be significant, as the two quotes from tenant inspectors below indicate:

*“It’s gone very well so far for me personally. I am treated as an equal by the other members of the inspection team. My role is to make sure that the tenants are receiving the best possible service. Some places have a lot less tenant involvement than others, so I am sure my input was welcome.”*

*“The officers I worked with were very professional indeed. I certainly felt a part of the team. There is no way I was just a token tenant.”*

Blake, 2001

However, where the process does not run smoothly, the experience can be disempowering, as this interview with a tenant inspector reveals:

*“It was very negative...I was totally sidelined. No one was rude to me, but meetings were booked behind my back and I often had to physically demand to be involved. I just didn’t feel like I was included. Maybe no one thought my role was important... I read the report and it wasn’t very full. I was so unhappy with the way I was treated. I refused to take any payment from the commission. I told them they could keep it.”*

Blake, 2001

It is not clear what the balance is between positive and negative experiences for assessors, but the work of the Tenant Participation Agency suggests that the positives outweigh the negatives in the context of housing. We have not found any evidence of a link between the existence of citizen assessors and any effect on subjective empowerment at a community or aggregate level, nor have we found any evidence to refute the plausible hypothesis that citizens appreciate knowing that other ‘ordinary people’ are involved in assessment.

The *de jure* empowerment effects of this mechanism are at a collective as well as an individual level, but depend on the process used to select assessors and cover the assessor’s cost. For example, mechanisms that rely on word of mouth are affected by an individual’s social capital. Where people choose to give up their time and expertise then, by definition, they are foregoing the opportunity to do something else instead. TPAS<sup>61</sup> argue that in the context of involvement in housing (including but not limited to citizen assessors) “this choice has a clear social value, which any rewards systems should address.” (Hembrow & Wadhams 2003). This is reflected in the practice of the Audit Commission, where Tenant Inspectors receive £108 per day (£118 in London)<sup>62</sup>. In return, they are required to undergo specific training, and are accountable for their performance to the lead Auditors for each inspection.

61 Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

62 These are 2003 payment levels.

### **10.3 What are the benefits and risks of citizen assessment?**

As discussed above, involving citizens in assessment teams can help citizens feel a greater sense of control over the services they use. However, a second claim can be made for citizen assessors: that they improve the quality of inspections and so, ultimately, improve the quality of services. We have not found any quantitative studies that confirm or deny this. However, the consortium's experience of interviews with local government officials and citizen assessors provides some anecdotal qualitative evidence that this process of assessment does bring improvements to services.

### **10.4 Who does citizen assessment tend to empower? Who does it tend to exclude?**

We have not found any specific research on the demographic or other segmentation of citizen assessors. However, as this is a subset of highly participative voice mechanisms discussed above, it seems likely that the profile of participants identified there is true of participatory appraisal.

# CASE STUDIES

## Citizen Assessment

### The Wrekin Housing Trust, Tenant Auditors Project

<b>Objectives:</b>	To improve services based on the experience of people using them. Tenant auditor teams look closely at different services offered by the Trust and make recommendations on how these services can be improved. Last year three teams of tenant auditors each looked at a different service area.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Tenants are given a hands on role in monitoring Trust services. It widens the base of tenant involvement to reach those not engaged in formal structures. In order to recruit new tenants to train as auditors those tenants who had already expressed an interest in the project used techniques including writing an article for the tenants' newsletter; running a stand in the town centre; interviews on local radio; and running a taster session.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	A steering group of four tenants and three employees manages the project. There is a coordinator responsible for supporting the tenant auditors. The tenants chose which areas to audit. The methods used include to undertake the audits include work shadowing, interviewing employees, telephone call monitoring, satisfaction surveys, inspecting properties and mystery shopping. Tenants signing up to take part in the scheme are given 6 days training at a time they can easily make. They can then choose how much or little of the work they want to do.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	The auditors produce reports and make presentations to Trust board meetings. The managers of the audited services provided written responses on how the findings will make a difference to the service they provide. Changes include advance notification for neighbours if a property is to become empty, encouraging call centre staff to speak more slowly to tenants when dealing with problems and a more efficient system of letting tenants know when repairs will be completed. Other managers have asked the auditors to audit their own service areas. The project has broadened the base of tenant involvement in the area. Some of the auditors have subsequently gone on to successfully stand in Tenants' Panel elections. One has been elected to take up one of the five tenant places on the Trust's management board.

# CASE STUDIES

## Citizen Assessment

### 'Our PART Project' – Wansbeck Council for Voluntary Service's Participative Action Research Team

<b>Objectives:</b>	To create a local Participative Action Research Team. To develop skills within the local community as a means for conducting consultation and involving people in shaping services.
<b>Involvement:</b>	Volunteer community researchers. 30 people from different backgrounds (including lone parents, travellers and BME groups) aged from 7 to 60 have been trained.
<b>Methods and techniques:</b>	The team members have been recruited through a variety of local training activities and projects. They are supported through accredited training programmes. This involves 10 days of training on research skills, surveying and analysing findings. The eventual aim is to create a Community Research and Training Unit run by its members and creating employment for local people as researchers and trainers. The members of the team investigate and document the experience, opinions of people like themselves to inform and strengthen the input of the public into policy making.
<b>Outputs/outcomes:</b>	It has created a lasting resource for public involvement within the community. Two substantial reports that have had an impact on development plans and the allocation of resources for the Ashington Sure Start programme and Northumberland Children's Fund. Project members have been involved in direct talks with programme managers and stakeholders about translating their recommendations into action. Each work programme which the programme undertakes is timetabled to have an impact on the relevant bodies at the most appropriate point. The project has received several more commissions to carry out research to inform service delivery. Local people provided with useful skills and training. <i>'Without this work we would be in danger of being a group of professionals sat in the middle of a community not talking to us</i> Local Service Provider

# 11. Contextual factors

## 11. Contextual factors

As the discussion in the previous chapters makes clear, there are a wide range of mechanisms in use that aim to facilitate greater user and citizen empowerment in service delivery. These mechanisms deliver different results in terms of the type, scale and benefits of empowerment achieved.

However, it is not just the *nature* of the mechanism that determines the sort of empowerment it delivers in practice. We believe that of equal important is the context in which the mechanism operates.

This interaction can be understood through a simple analogy with horticulture, based around the interaction between soil and seeds. In our analogy, the 'seeds' are the mechanisms themselves. As we know, there are many varieties of seeds – from participative fora to satisfaction surveys. These different seeds bloom into different sorts of plant. Some produce tall 'plants' characterised by high levels of subjective empowerment for a few individuals and little impact elsewhere. Others produce broader societal effects, though they may not offer as deep subjective empowerment. Some tend to produce high levels of *de facto* empowerment, others may be better at building social capital. And so on.

However, the extent to which a seed blooms is determined by both the precise nature of the seed, i.e. the way the mechanism is implemented; and by the soil in which it is planted<sup>63</sup>. Soil factors are those contextual factors which determine whether or not a mechanism blooms successfully.

The illustration below identifies some of the key soil factors we have identified in this project. These soil factors are loosely ordered by the ease with which policy measures can influence them; the more stable, harder to change factors are aligned with the bedrock of the soil. Whilst this ordering is rough and speculative and will be refined in the second phase of this research, we think it is useful when thinking about where interventions can be most easily made, but also which contextual factors are more fundamental in creating the conditions for empowerment. For example, there is little that can be done to address the innate 'interestingness' of a service type: all things being equal, our experience as research practitioners shows us that people are more interested in being involved in decisions about their healthcare than their refuse collection. This impacts on decisions about the sort of mechanism a council should employ; high involvement ongoing participation mechanisms may be appropriate in healthcare but are unlikely to secure significant participation in the context of refuse collection.

### What is the soil of empowerment made of?

	<b>Central inputs</b>	Investment eg NRF Targets, CPA
	<b>Structures</b>	LSPs neighbourhood charters, etc
	<b>Institutional culture</b>	Leadership Role perception
	<b>Political culture</b>	Electoral competition Councilor role
	<b>Social capital</b>	Associational activity System navigation skills
	<b>Service type</b>	Quality Interest
	<b>Geography</b>	Transport Topography

<sup>63</sup> The analogy uses a simplified horticultural model that does not run to issues of sunlight and shade, air quality and so on.



## 11.1 Importance of the soil

It is the interaction between soil and seed that determines whether empowerment policy delivers. Identical seeds (mechanisms) can produce very different results in different soils, as is illustrated in the three detailed case studies below. Each of these consist of two identical mechanisms and shows how the interaction of seed and soil determined the success of the mechanism.

### 11.1.1 Soil and seed detailed case study 1: NDC Ballots

The table overleaf shows the impact of soil factors on turnout in NDC ballots to elect local Board members in two different NDC areas. Clearly, this is not a perfect measure of empowerment: specifically, it is not a measure of *de jure* empowerment as, provided the ballot is run fairly, everyone has an equal right to vote. It is also not a strong measure of subjective empowerment, although there is strong evidence that an individual's assessment of the potential impact of their vote is a good predictor of whether they vote or not (The Electoral Commission 2005) alongside other factors such as socio-economic group, age, and party identification. Finally, it does not necessarily say much about *de facto* empowerment – the extent of the *de facto* power over decisions depends on the power wielded by the elected representative and, at the individual level, on the weight of each vote.

However, for all these flaws, it is a relevant measure of empowerment, particularly at a community level. Indeed, it is hard to see how a ballot mechanism could possibly be considered empowering at a local community level unless a significant proportion of the local community take part in that mechanism.

In this example, identical mechanisms (ballots) are used for identical purposes (to elect NDC Board members) in different contexts. The outcome is that turnout ranges between below 13% to over 57%. Given that the mechanisms are identical, this variation can only be explained by variations in context. The table below draws on the 2003 NDC evaluation and, in particular, a paper by Rallings and Thrasher (2002) to pick out the salient differences in context.

	Low turnout NDC	High turnout NDC
<b>Aim</b>	Representative legitimacy for NDC Board decisions	
<b>Method</b>	Elections for NDC Board members	
<b>Context</b>	Little publicity Fewer candidates Weak organisation by candidates	Active publicity More candidates Strong organisation by candidates
<b>Impact</b>	Turnout: <13% Half local election turnout	Turnout: >57% Double local election turnout

Rallings and Thrasher found that turnout was significantly lower in NDC areas where there were fewer candidates, weak candidate organisation and little publicity for the NDC. Areas with the opposite characteristics showed turnouts up to three times greater than the level of turnout found in the worst performing area. Whilst Rallings and Thrasher do not suggest an explanation for why some areas had the positive features and others had the negative features, they must be contextual because the mechanisms are identical.

It is plausible that these characteristics can be explained by different levels of associational activity and social capital in the two types of locality. Clearly, factors other than social capital can also have a role. For example, the evidence on turnout cited above might suggest that the low turnout areas have younger populations. It is possible that different political cultures result in different levels of belief that voting will make a difference. The key point is that context has determined the outcome of this mechanism, not variations in the mechanism itself.

### 11.1.2 Soil and seed detailed case study 2: participative mechanisms

This second case study picks out two participative mechanisms (Morris 2006). Unlike the NDC ballot case which draws on a systematic research report, it draws on two specific case-study examples of participative mechanisms in action – representatives from Community Empowerment Networks dealing with a planning committee and an LSP Board. The cases are based on accounts from community members.

See the table below:

	Lewisham CEN	A CEN in northern England
Aim	Community members seek to influence council policy	
Method	Formal engagement with councillors	
Context	Sale of tower on the Pepys Estate to Berkely Homes agreed subject to contract	CEN prepare policy paper for discussion at LSP meeting. Tabled as per agreed procedures
	Community feared planning meeting was a rubber stamp	Leader of council is Chair of Board. Strikes paper from agenda
	Well organised CEN	No other LSP Board members intervene
	Councillors and Berkely homes open to input	Legal advice that Chair acted illegally
Impact	Significant <i>de facto</i> empowerment and strong subjective empowerment: “We do not consider ourselves ‘objectors’ we have been able to become influencers”	Negative impact on subjective empowerment as community members withdraw from CEN
	A 999 year lease on the ground floor given to the community trust.	No <i>de facto</i> empowerment.
	A ‘capucionno podium’ removed from the plans	

Both mechanisms (the LSP Board and the planning committee) are designed to allow community members to influence elected representatives and government offices over decisions that have significant impacts on the lives of community members. In both cases, there are active participants in the schemes. In the Lewisham case, the community advocates seek a decision to be changed; in the

LSP Board case, all that the community seek is the inclusion of an item on the agenda. As the table makes clear, the most salient difference between the cases is the openness of statutory bodies to challenge by community groups. Unlike the NDC ballot case study, while the two mechanisms are of the same sort they are not identical in execution. However, as in the NDC example, the key factor which determines the outcome of the mechanism is contextual rather than any property of the mechanism itself.

### 11.1.3 Soil and seed Case study 3: the nano-jury<sup>64</sup>

The final example is that of a nano-jury, an exercise run by the University of Cambridge, Greenpeace UK, the Guardian and the University of Newcastle:

	NanoJury Phase I	NanoJury Phase II
<b>Aim</b>	Familiarise participants with a citizens' jury process	Inform new area of science policy on the basis of considered public opinion
<b>Method</b>	Dual processes involving same 25 participants in 2x5 week citizens' juries	
<b>Context</b>	Jury members determined subject themselves; chose 'crime and safety' Local service providers not directly involved in process	Topic 'Nanotechnology' determined by funders Difficult topic that participants at times found difficult to relate to Government formally committed to responding to recommendations
<b>Impact</b>	High subjective empowerment Low <i>de facto</i> empowerment	Low subjective empowerment High <i>de facto</i> empowerment

As in the NDC case, the mechanism type is identical in both cases (a citizens' jury), however there is a salient difference between the two examples: in one case the participants were able to choose the topic they discussed, in the other case they had to talk about nano-technology. The same group of 25 citizens took part in both juries.

The outcome from the jury on crime was:

- A high level of subjective empowerment, due to the properties of the mechanism; in particular enabling the jurors to pick the topic they discussed;
- No *de facto* empowerment, due to a property of the context; the jury was not plugged into any decision making process.

The outcome of the jury on nanotechnology was the reverse:

- No subjective empowerment, partly because of the nature of the mechanism (particularly having the topic selected for them) and partly because of the nature of the participants. The participants had already taken part in a jury and so had higher expectations of the process, and in particular were used to being able to set their own agenda.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the jury see Involve (2006) The Nanotechnology Engagement Group: Policy Report 1, (London: Involve) and <http://www.nanojury.org>. This section is largely based on conversations with the lead facilitator of the jury about the experience of running the events.

- A high level of de facto empowerment, because of a property of the context; the mechanism was plugged directly into a policy making process.

This example clearly shows that there is no necessary connection between *de facto* and subjective empowerment.

The three case studies presented above have demonstrated that soil can over-power seeds. Receptive soils can lead to seeds flourishing (turnout in the NDC Boards was on occasion double turnout at local elections!). Poor soils can lead to wilted plants.

When thinking about mechanisms it is vital to think about the context in which they operate and how they impinge on a mechanism's ability to cultivate empowerment

We explore this in more detail below, discussing each soil factor in turn. However, our review of the evidence has revealed little in the way of systematic reviews of the impact of contextual factors so the evidence is largely drawn from case studies.

## **The Conditions of Empowerment: Soil and Seed**

Below, we run through each of the conditions listed and identify the sort of influence they can have on the success or otherwise of empowerment mechanisms. Clearly, different sorts of mechanism are impacted in different ways, so this is, at best, a sketch of the sorts of influence we believe that different soil factors can have.

### **11.2 Geography, mobility and place-identity**

The physical geography of an area can influence empowerment: for example, in rural areas where there are fewer schools within a short distance of an individual's home, choice of education provider is in practice far more limited than that offered by the same mechanism in an urban area. Even where there are several choices available locally, access to, cost and frequency of, transport can be a key barrier to being able to make use of choices. Potential solutions include providing free or subsidised transport, providing in-home or more local services and providing online services.

Geography and transport are also important in determining the effectiveness of collective and participatory mechanisms where these involve physically attending meetings and other fora. Distance from work can be important here. Seminar (2000) has estimated that every 10 minutes of commuting time cuts all forms of civic engagement by 10 per cent. Furthermore, Putnam argues that civic engagement tends to be higher in small towns (Putnam 2000).

The physical layout of an area can also be important. For example, research in the 1950s found that the layout of housing influenced attitudes to the local residents' association, with each courtyard having a remarkably uniform view towards the residents' association. The uniformity was explained largely by the nature of the relationship between residents, rather than an 'objective' feature of the courtyards (Festinger, Schachter et al 1950). Research on social capital has found that "*good fences make good neighbours*" (Bulmer 1986): people are more likely to interact where the environment gives them to option of doing so on their own terms without forcing them to engage with each other. This in turn has an impact on associational activity and thus on the civic structures that mediate many forms of collective empowerment (see discussion of structures below in section 11.6).

There is evidence that mobility, and possibly place-identity, has an impact on participation in collective empowerment mechanisms. For example, Glaeser et al (2002) found that the mere expectation of moving home led to reduced levels of civic and social engagement<sup>65</sup>.

### 11.3 Social capital and associational activity

Social capital is a complex and contested area. It is measured in a wide variety of ways, including measures of trust, norms and associational activity. Our discussion here will, as far as possible, use a minimally contested definition of social capital – taking it to be composed of networks of interpersonal associations, a cluster of norms, values and expectations and a set of sanctions (punishments and rewards that help maintain the networks and norms) (Halpern 2005).

It is clear that social capital is associated with empowerment in its broadest sense at both an individual and societal level – though there are disagreements about the direction of causation. High levels of social capital at a society level are associated with strong economic performance (Putnam 1993); and low levels of trust and inappropriate forms of social capital are associated with poor economic performance in transitional economies in central Europe and in Mexico (Neace 1999). Amongst other factors, at an individual level, high social capital is associated with:

- **High labour force participation** (Aguilera 2002): this is unsurprising given that many jobs are publicised by word of mouth – one study of low paid labour markets found that 60% of vacancies were filled using recommendations from existing employees. (Brown, Dickens et al. 2001).
- **Higher individual earnings**, even after controlling for other factors (this research is relatively small and carried out in the Netherlands). (Boxman, de Graaf, et al. 1991).
- **Better health status**: in general, individuals who are socially isolated have between two and five times the risk of dying early from all causes compared with those who have strong social ties (Berkman & Glass 2000). In one trial, women with metastatic breast cancer were randomly assigned either to a conventional medical care group or to an experimental group who were given the same treatment but encouraged to meet together for ninety minutes once a week for a year. The survival rate for the group that met was double that of the control group (Spiegel 1993).
- **Better educational outcomes**: Halpern (2005) argues that *“a human and financial capital of the parents helps to predict the education success or failure of children. But a significant amount of the remaining variance is explained by social capital, and social capital also helps explain the impact of the parents’ human and financial resources.”*

Of course, high social capital is not always good: e.g. in labour markets, high levels of social capital can quickly transmit negative views about an individual’s employability and so limit rather than improve their prospects of gaining employment.

Despite this, the discussion above suggests that, if thinking of empowerment broadly as the power to make use of opportunities, social capital is an important facilitating factor.

<sup>65</sup> Glaeser, E., Laibson, D. et al. (2002) An economic approach to social capital, *Economic Journal* 112 (483).

It also has a direct link on the effectiveness of different mechanisms. A study of the NHS choice project in Greater Manchester found that 51% of people who did not take up choice had had no opportunity to discuss this choice with others, for example friends, family or community networks (Barber, Gordon-Dseagu et al. 2004). As discussed in chapter 4, access to advice is key to enabling take-up of choice mechanisms especially for low socio-economic status groups – partly because this substitutes for higher social capital in high-SES groups.

There has been a great deal of research on the role of social capital in the context of participatory mechanisms. At the local and sub-local level, there is evidence to suggest that higher social capital increases communities' ability to organise and use power. For example, case study work on two very similar and controversial planning applications in the US found that social capital and political culture of communities in the local area was the most significant factor in explaining the success of planning objections. The community with higher social capital was better able to organise and lobby for the result they wanted (Burton & Williams 2001). Similarly, there is evidence that tenant management of housing is more effective where this is higher social capital (Saegert & Winkel 1998).

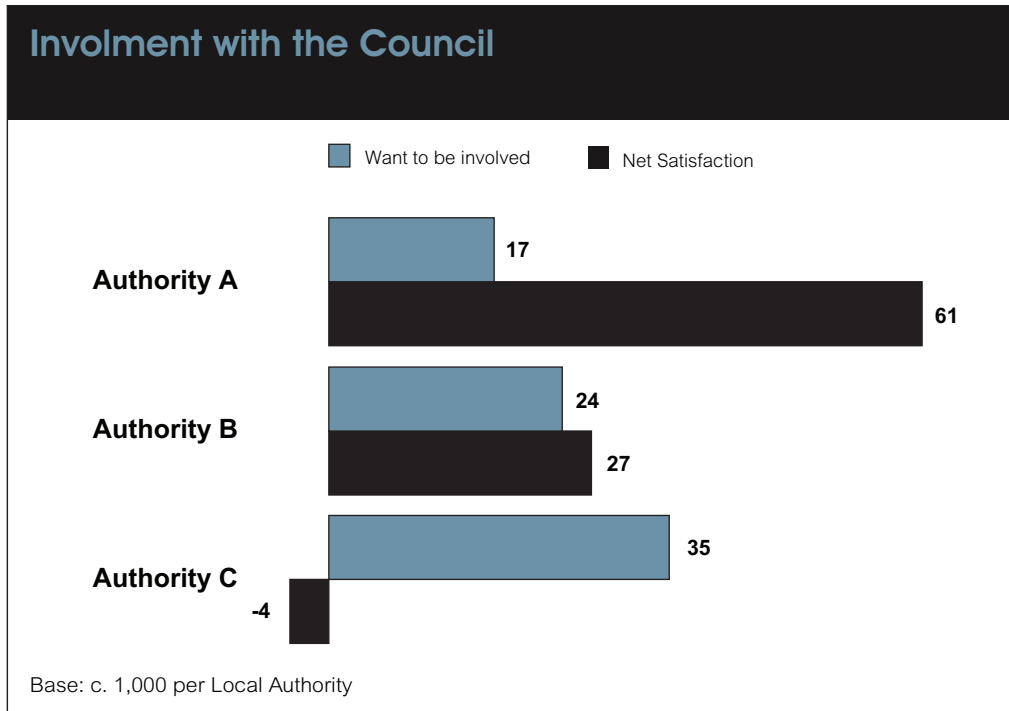
However, there are two important caveats to this argument: firstly, the measure used for social capital is key. In Putnam's seminal study of Italy, he included political participation as part of the social capital variable – clearly, this undermines the value of that variable when seeking to explain political participation (though it may be of use when explaining economic outcomes, health outcomes and so on). Secondly, certain forms of social capital can be destructive for empowerment. For example, high levels of bonding capital within identity-communities and low levels of bridging capital between communities can be a recipe for distrust and, if the political divisions are drawn along those community lines, also a recipe for disempowerment.

What does seem clear is that the type and scale of an individual's social capital impacts on their ability to make use of empowerment mechanisms under consideration. At a collective level, higher social capital seems to be associated with greater capacity to choose and participate – and therefore greater capacity to be empowered.

## **11.4 Service type and quality**

As previously alluded to, the nature of the service in question effects people's willingness/desire to be involved in making decisions related to it. Some services, such as waste-management, are seen as low-interest services where individuals generally have little desire to participate in decision making processes, or even to spend time making choices about service providers. An adequate level of service provision is all that is needed, and it can be argued that it is more empowering not to involve service users in designing, delivering or evaluating the service but simply to provide it efficiently. In contrast, people are generally more interested in being involved in choices and decisions around education and social care.

As well as service type, service quality is a key factor in influencing the extent to which the public wish to engage with empowerment mechanisms. Anecdotal evidence shows that people tend to be more prepared to be engaged in a service if there are problems with it that they want to put right. The chart below illustrates this point at an aggregate level<sup>66</sup>:



The chart shows an inverse link between net satisfaction with council performance and desire to be more involved with the council. Of course, desire to be involved does not necessarily translate into actual participation, but interviews with community activists and less-engaged participants suggest that they are often motivated by a desire to put things right. In the context of non-participatory mechanisms, failure can still be a spur for action: for example, people are more likely to actively choose to change their child's school if they are dissatisfied with it, or to choose different times for carers to attend if they are dissatisfied with current provision.

## 11.5 Political and institutional culture

*"For many decades government, staff and councillors have been trained to act for the community. Changing to act with the community requires new attitudes and behaviours."*

Gaventa, 2004

*"The way local leaders behave – their openness and responsiveness to citizen participation – makes a difference to levels of participation."*

Lowndes, Pratchett et al., 2006

<sup>66</sup> Anonymised data from resident surveys undertaken by MORI for three different Local Authorities from 2002- 2005.

Culture can have a great impact on most of the mechanisms under consideration. For example, the *de facto* success of participative approaches depends on those in power being prepared to accept and respond to the views of participants. Choice based mechanisms often depend, at least initially, on advisors such as social workers, being willing to accept that the preferences of the people they are working with are the first priority in determining the service delivered.

The role of culture has been researched most thoroughly in the context of participative mechanisms – particularly in the international development context<sup>67</sup>. More recently, there has been some research in the UK. A recent study (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2006) looked at the difference in participation levels across 6 councils in England. These councils (Hull, Middlesbrough, Merton, Sutton, East Hampshire and the Vale of White Horse) were selected to aid comparability: they were paired in terms of socio-economic status (low, medium and high) and geography (two large towns, two outer suburbs of London and two rural areas). Participation levels were measured in terms of whether individuals had:

- contacted a politician;
- contacted a public official;
- worn a campaign badge;
- signed a petition;
- donated money;
- formed a group;
- attended a demonstration; or
- taken part in a strike.

Subjective perceptions of political efficacy were measured by asking people whether they would do any of those actions. In addition, interviews were conducted with local politicians and elected officials. The research found that differences in levels of political participation could not be fully explained by measures of socio-economic status or social capital. Political culture was critical in explaining the extent of participation, particularly in the low and mid socio-economic status pairs. For example:

*“In Hull, unresponsive institutions within the political, managerial and civic domains are linked in a vicious cycle that militates against any new form of political participation... In Middlesbrough different approach has emerged in which... there are strong incentives for community activists to participate.”*

Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2006

This is a single study, but it reflects the consensus view of over 40 experts on community participation interviewed by the National Community Forum. The Forum found that the professional culture in many branches of England’s public services has a strong tendency to assume that professional opinion is always superior to non-professional opinion informed by local experience (Morris 2006).

<sup>67</sup> See [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)



### 11.5.1 Participation within local government services

Anecdotal evidence suggests that while terms like “participation” and “engagement” are more prevalent today than they were a few years ago, they are not yet as firmly embedded in local government culture as terms such as “best value”. Involve’s research for the Sustainable Development Commission (Engage for Change, 2007) shows that officers, councillors and communities often have an uphill struggle to ensure that community involvement is taken seriously.

*“In most councils, participation is still considered an ‘optional extra’. We start from the assumption that there is no need to really involve the community beyond a bit of consultation. Communities or officers who disagree with that assumption have to prove the value of participation in general before they can get into the way participation will happen.”*

Former local government officer (Morris 2006)

There is also evidence that institutional and political culture can be a major barrier or enabler of choice-based empowerment models. As discussed in chapter 5, the evidence around Direct Payments and Individual Budgets is that where Direct Payments have taken off it has been through a combination of social work enthusiasm, voluntary sector advocacy and local government ambition. The attitudes of individual social workers have a significant impact on whether or not individuals make use of these choice mechanisms (Stainton 2002).

Sapey (2001) argues that the culture of social care is a major barrier to Direct Payment type mechanisms: “the predominant attitude of social workers continues to be one of viewing disabled people as incompetent and therefore in need of having decisions made for them.” In turn, he suggests that Direct Payments are an important means of challenging this type of ‘culture of welfare’ across social service departments.

Political culture can be just as important as the culture of officials and professionals. This has come through strongly in research on participation in the development context. For example, in Karnataka in India, village councillors are legally obliged to hold biannual open meetings in the village to ensure accountability. However, research by Crooke and Manor (1998) found that in most places councillors soon found ways round such meetings, often using subterfuge – for example holding unannounced meetings at times when most people are at work.

It would be wrong to believe that such tactics are confined to the developing world. The experience of the North Eastern CEN presented in soil and seed case study 2 provides a similar example in the British context.

Party-political culture and the process of selection of councillors appears to be a key factor here, with the work of Lowndes et al (2006) providing some support for this view. For example, in the mid-socio-economic status pairing of Sutton and Merton in the experiment previously mentioned, they found that the higher participation rates in Sutton were explained by the openness of political and managerial institutions, in contrast to those in Merton where *“old-fashioned, inward looking politicians and officers do little to encourage it [participation]”*.

Lowndes et al specifically pick out the *“very different political and managerial culture”* in Sutton as key to encouraging participation. Similarly, in the low socio-economic status pair of Hull and Middlesbrough, the difference in participation levels is partially explained by the relatively higher level of openness in Middlesbrough. In both cases, this openness provides greater incentives for participation as there is a stronger belief that it will work – things will change and *de facto* empowerment will be achieved.

Arguably, these differences in culture can be partially explained by differences in the level of electoral competitiveness in the areas. While both Hull and Middlesbrough had long histories of one-party rule, in Middlesbrough the party had competing modernising and traditionalist factions and the modernisers had a culture which embraced empowerment and had developed systems to allow empowerment. By contrast, in Hull the party was more monolithic and more stable.

More generally, councillors in more competitive councils and wards have stronger electoral incentives to engage with the local community than councillors who are more vulnerable to de-selection at party meetings than in council elections. Party-politics is also highly relevant to the roll-out of choice based mechanisms, though arguably this is more a political dispute than a cultural one.

To conclude, it seems clear that empowerment is more likely to succeed where the institutional culture accepts that citizens are entitled to influence, and often participate in, decisions that affect their day to day lives - and sets about providing ways to encourage rather than limit such involvement in service delivery.

## 11.6 Linked structures and mechanisms

Any empowerment mechanism will operate within the context of other formal decision making and resource allocation structures and mechanisms. These links can be:

- **Vertical:** i.e. linking to structures and mechanisms operating at a greater (or lower) level of specificity. For example, a citizens' committee for a local park can feed into a council-wide committee deciding on parks policy and budgets;
- **Horizontal:** i.e. linking to structures operating at the same level of specificity. For example, the committee on a local park discussed above could link with the work of a neighbourhood watch committee or the committee of a tenants association for a block that borders the park.

Both of these types of link pose their own challenges. These challenges are generally more significant for collective level empowerment that seeks to influence policy for a whole area or community than they are for individual level empowerment.

### 11.6.1 Vertical links: embedding-in decision making processes

*De facto* empowerment is only furthered where empowerment mechanisms can influence decision making processes. Mere 'talking shops' can deliver subjective and *de jure* empowerment, but not *de facto* empowerment.

The *de facto* influence of communal decisions depends on the extent to which those decisions influence decision making processes within councils, PCTs, the police and so on. The strength of these links varies from place to place and, within places, from service to service. The example of the citizens' jury on crime cited above shows how a participative process that is not embedded in a decision making process can fail to provide any *de facto* empowerment whatsoever. There simply was no one with power over the relevant policy area that had any interest or requirement to listen to the output of the jury.

At the other extreme, the presence of CENs on LSP Boards plugs community voice into the heart of local decision making. Where CEN representatives are selected in an empowering way and engaged with by other Board members, communities are empowered (via their representatives) and have *de facto* influence over local strategic decisions. Examples like the Harrow Participatory Budget fall in between. The process was embedded in the budget setting process, but came towards the end of the budget planning cycle and so the actual options available to participants were limited.

Of course, while embedding in decision making structures is generally sufficient for *de jure* empowerment, it is not sufficient to achieve *de facto* empowerment. As argued above, the culture of professionals within those structures has a major impact on whether the formal right or opportunity to influence decisions turns into *de facto* changes in policy and practice. Equally, *de facto* empowerment does not require power to be handed over wholesale within decision making structures. Doing so would, arguably, be disempowering, particularly for community members who have turned out to vote for individuals to be accountable for decisions. However, it is important that the parameters of participative mechanisms are set out clearly upfront so that expectations are not artificially raised.

Vertical links are not as significant a challenge for individual level, consumerist empowerment mechanisms provided there is sufficient capacity to allow for choices to be followed through and sufficient advice and support available. For example, provided there are suitable carers available at the time of day an individual wants them, then an individual budget mechanism supported by advice where necessary, should empower a recipient of social care to choose the time of day that that care is provided.

However, it does become an issue where rationing is a real challenge; for example, in the context of school places. Successful schools are generally oversubscribed, so parent choice alone is not sufficient to allocate places; other criteria and systems are needed. These mechanisms could include schools picking pupils by aptitude, random assignment, de-prioritisation of pupils most at risk of academic failure and so on. Whichever mechanism is chosen, the link between the making of a decision and the power to have that decision enacted is weakened and some other *collective* mechanism is needed if citizens are to be empowered about all aspects of choice over their child's school.

### **11.6.2 Horizontal links: conflict or co-operation?**

The desire to empower citizens can lead to the creation of a multitude of mechanisms in a single area. This can bring problems for individuals seeking to participate in them. While, for most people, the challenge is in discovering mechanisms and summoning up the enthusiasm necessary to take part, for some participants understanding the structures within which the mechanisms operate can prove a barrier.

*"It's knackered just trying to work out how it's all supposed to work – let alone trying to change things."*

Community activist

Community members can be bewildered by the sheer range of participatory mechanisms that often already exist<sup>68</sup>. For example, a local resident in a deprived area who was concerned about anti-social behaviour and felt it was impacting on their mental health would do well to attend meetings with:

- the police to discuss how the neighbourhood was being policed;
- the council to discuss community safety plans;
- the tenants association to consider security for their home;
- the NDC to influence spending decisions, perhaps to create leisure opportunities for young people;
- local schools to discuss their approach to exclusions and truanting; and
- the public patient involvement forum to discuss mental health care.

Each of these mechanisms may well have its own rules about how to participate, and will work to its own schedule. Participants have to navigate this morass of structures to secure change.

*“People don’t live their lives in silos”*

## Community Activist

There are examples of approaches that avoid these problems. The role of CENs on LSPs ought to provide a route for community voice that does not have to navigate the range of structures. Equally, in some areas, more co-ordinated and joined up structures are in place. A good example of this approach is Estate Improvement Group on the Anglia Estate in Babergh. The estate faced high infant and adult mortality rates, significant crime, and substance misuse and vandalism problems. The district council consulted residents to develop an improvement plan by visiting each household.

This led to an Estate Improvement Group which brought together local residents, the police, parish councillors, local councillors and officers, housing associations, the primary care trust, a local wildlife trust and the health authority. The group developed a five-year estate environmental plan, which synthesised all these perspectives through a single process. This led to an integrated plan, which resulted in a healthier and safer environment for families to live in; improved community safety; better play; and a reduction in litter and abandoned cars on the estate. Residents remain involved in monitoring the progress.

## 11.7 Central Inputs

As in most policy areas, central government is not capable of delivering policy alone – local government and other service providers will ultimately make policy happen (or otherwise). However, the centre has two major roles related to providing a context for empowerment: providing funding (for example through the £70m ‘Communitybuilders fund’ announced in the ‘*Communities in Control*’ White Paper), and providing leadership (for example, through policy frameworks, legislation, specifying audit and evaluation processes and so on).

<sup>68</sup> Morris, J. (2006) *The barriers to community participation*, London: Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the National Community Forum; Mackie, E. (2002) *People at the Heart of the Urban Renaissance*, London: Black Training and Enterprise Group/Urban Forum; Kumar, S. And Nunan, K. (2002), *A Lighter Touch: An evaluation of the governance project*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

### 11.7.1 Funding

There are three important distinctions to be made about funding streams:

- Streams aimed at empowerment (for example, funding for CENs) versus ‘mainstream’ streams;
- Streams which communities have significant power over (e.g. NDC budgets) versus streams which communities are not specifically empowered to influence;
- Empowering capital funding (such as asset transfers of community buildings to community groups), versus empowering revenue funding (such as annual funding for health trainers in the NHS).

Mainstream funding streams are vastly larger than funding streams aimed specifically at empowerment, and funding streams over which communities are not specifically empowered are vastly larger than those over which communities have specific rights to influence. Mainstream, non-empowerment-related funding is, understandably, seldom assessed for its impact on empowerment, yet it undoubtedly has one. It is therefore hard to assess the impact of funding on empowerment outside of bespoke funding streams.

Looking at these specific funding streams, however, it is clear that funding makes a major difference to communities’ and individuals’ *de facto* power. Individuals who receive funding, for example through Direct Payment mechanisms, have more power to choose carers than those in similar situations who do not receive funding. Community groups that own their own meeting places and can rent space out to other users have a more secure existence than those who do not.

The amount of funding is often linked to the amount of power: an individual has more choices available to them with £100 to spend than with £10. However, as the discussion of mechanisms shows, the link is complex: there are many other factors at play than just the level and security of funding.

### 11.7.2 Leadership, policy frameworks and audit processes

*“Different departments could come from different planets.”*

LSP co-ordinator (Morris 2006)

The other major role for central government is in setting policy direction and developing frameworks and guidance that promote or hinder movement in that direction of travel. The success of individual mechanisms is affected by:

- **Leadership:** is the mechanism seen as important or an add-on? Is change pro-actively supported or assumed to be taking place?;
- **Coherence:** is the mechanism in line with policy coming from different departments or in tension with it?;
- **Evaluation:** is it clear how success is to be measured? Are those measures operating effectively?

As with funding, and as discussed in section 11.5 on political and institutional culture, it is clear that leadership, policy and evaluation impact on empowerment. However, the nature and scale of that impact varies from mechanism to mechanism and place to place.



# **12. Next Steps**

## 12. Next Steps

### 12.1 Implications for specific user groups

One of the central findings of this research is that most empowerment activity does explicitly set out to foster a subjective sense of empowerment, often in tandem with *de facto* or *de jure* power. While actual involvement and participation in civic or civil activities does not necessarily lead to feelings of empowerment, subjective empowerment (when a citizen feels empowered) is often a pre-condition for delivering *de facto* power (situations where citizens have the power to instigate change)

The extent to which hard-to-reach social groups are included in empowerment mechanisms and policymaking is an effective measure of citizen empowerment. If citizen empowerment initiatives established by government and public services are to benefit all in society, they need to facilitate subjective empowerment in those who are currently disempowered. A twin track approach to empowerment is therefore required; one that supports the *de facto* opportunities, combined with programmes to build the self-belief of excluded groups, so that they may also reap the benefits of the enabling state. Without this twin track approach there is a real risk that the empowerment agenda will lead to increased inequalities in agency and influence between groups.

This is especially pertinent for those social groups who are considered excluded or disempowered. It suggests that simply providing new opportunities for empowerment (e.g. a local authority using participatory budgeting for the first time) is in danger of increasing the empowerment gap (i.e. access to power that different social groups have). This is because those included/empowered groups (what some might call 'the usual suspects') will use the empowerment opportunity because they believe they have agency. Similarly, traditionally excluded/disempowered groups will not, because by definition they do not believe their actions can 'make a difference'.

As such, the findings of this report raise important questions for public service providers – local authorities in particular - seeking to empower the socially excluded. Providing opportunities for *de facto* empowerment, where local people have real, tangible influence over the decision-making processes and services that impact on their lives is vital if local democracy and civil society are to be reinvigorated. But it is equally clear that without processes in place to support people to believe in themselves and in the impact of their engagement with local government, citizen empowerment mechanisms will ultimately fail to extend beyond private opportunities for the already empowered to consolidate their influence.

This is separate from increasing trust in public sector institutions per se. As our research shows, many of the most successful approaches to delivering subjective empowerment occur outside institutional processes. Subjective empowerment requires a process which is highly responsive to the needs of citizens and service users and focuses on questions such as "What are you motivated by?", "What change would you like to see?" and "How would you like to achieve this change?"



## 12.2 Taking the Empowerment Agenda forward

Citizen empowerment is fast becoming a major policy area for all government departments and public service providers and has been increasingly championed by CLG over the last few years, culminating in the recent Community Empowerment White Paper '*Communities in Control*' (2008). Over the past decade, citizen empowerment has come to be seen as both an end in itself and an integral mechanism for delivering effective public services tailored to the needs of those who use them.

Our research has shown that there is a diversity of mechanisms for citizen empowerment being used across a wide-range of public services in the UK, empowering local people and service users in a multitude of ways. But we have also found that these empowerment mechanisms vary in terms of the level and type of citizen empowerment they deliver.

Below, we outline some suggested next steps and requirements for taking the 'empowerment agenda' forward.

### Action 1: Empowering the seldom heard and socially excluded

**A key test of the 'empowerment agenda' is developing strategy to involve the most seldom heard and socially excluded voices in policy decision-making.**

The past decade has witnessed unprecedented levels of public expenditure on citizen-focused public service reform. It is also clear that significantly increasing the participation of the seldom heard, socially excluded and disengaged citizens in empowerment initiatives remains a significant problem for service providers.

Equally clear is the need for new thinking and new policy solutions in this area if efforts to empower local people are to be more than talking shops or systems for those already involved and participating in local and national decision-making.

This will involve rigorous and experimental evaluation of the triggers and barriers facing the seldom heard and socially excluded.

## **Action 2: More direct empowerment**

**There needs to be greater focus on developing strategy to increase more direct forms of citizen and community empowerment.**

Much public policy and strategy for involving people in public service decision-making and delivery is still too focused on top-down forms of empowerment. Empowerment tends to be filtered downwards with government and other public services providing citizens with opportunities to discuss and inform policy. These can provide real empowerment to people and should remain an important method for democratising power.

But there needs to be greater experimentation with new ways of empowering citizens and communities to have more direct control over policy decision-making that impact on their lives if the full benefits of empowerment are to be realised. Recent government advocacy of individual budgets and participatory budgeting are good examples of more direct forms of empowerment. But they remain at the margins of public service delivery, not central to it.

Furthermore, more direct forms of empowerment will require a new model of dialogue and engagement between citizens, their communities and public services. This will mean more and more decision-making capabilities and responsibility devolved to local people, with public services increasingly functioning as 'enablers' (e.g. providing resources) and 'facilitators' (e.g. providing guidance and support) of civic engagement and decision-making rather than determining outcomes.

## **Action 3: Building social capacity and innovation**

**Empowerment is dependent on cultivating and harnessing social and organisational capacity. Future strategy and policy needs to better understand how this can be done.**

The benchmark for all public service providers is to deliver empowerment strategies that deliver both actual opportunities for citizens to influence decision-making (de facto empowerment) and that make citizens feel empowered (subjective empowerment). Without this, the very value and utility of existing and future empowerment mechanisms and strategy will be severely undermined.

Much of the existing research and policy we have reviewed as part of this research focuses on the participants and their reasons for engaging, or not engaging, in civic life. But there needs to be a more systematic understanding of which mechanisms of empowerment are more or less attractive to citizens and how they can be used to harness and cultivate social capacity.

This will require more detailed and action-orientated research that explores the institutional structures, conditions and contextual forces that foster or impede citizen empowerment and civic innovation.

These include sufficient investment, strong leadership, social capital and political culture, which all impact on the success of citizen empowerment initiatives and can either enhance or undermine their successful delivery.

### Action 4: Making empowerment real not abstract

But the real next step – the one that is necessary to ensure the legitimacy and future of citizen and community empowerment as a key public policy area – will be to ensure that empowerment becomes an everyday reality for citizens and communities across the UK who want more control over the direction of their lives.

This means making empowerment a cross-governmental strategy and essential to public service delivery as aptly described by Hazel Blears MP (2008):

*“Local people often know what the solutions to problems in their area are – but too often we don’t include them in the process. If we want the highest quality services that really meet people’s needs then we need to find better ways of hearing what they have to say and put communities in control of the services that affect their lives”*

### 12.3 What we need to know

To some extent, these actions are long-term goals that require immediate action. One that should be tackled next and which could offer immediate benefits to further existing knowledge of empowerment, is a systematic analysis of the political and institutional cultures that are key to creating a situation in which empowerment mechanisms can be used effectively. Other ‘soil factors’ are equally important, but less amenable to change at the local level.

However, we still do not know how to reach a situation in which the ideal conditions are in place in all local authorities. In other words, what needs to happen to ensure that the soil is fertile?

Our research questions therefore are:

- What are the most influential contextual factors in determining whether or not an empowerment initiative is successful or not?
- How can political and institutional culture in local authorities be changed to encourage empowerment?
- How can representative and participative democratic structures best interact and complement each other?
- How can the take up of *de facto* opportunities for empowerment be more evenly utilised across social groups?
- How can we ensure that *de facto* opportunities for empowerment translate into an increase in people’s subjective sense of empowerment?



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