LOCAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING—CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY: SOME EVIDENCE FROM KENYA AND UGANDA

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SUMMARY

The current fashion for decentralisation is built on the assumption that it will result in decisions that reflect local needs and priorities. Yet representative democracy, through periodic elections, is a crude mechanism for establishing these needs and priorities. Most local government systems offer few other opportunities for citizens to participate, particularly for the poor, and few mechanisms of accountability. This article reviews the literature relating local level decision-making, citizen participation and accountability. It then presents the findings of a study of decision-making about the use of resources in a sample of municipal governments in Kenya and Uganda. Local governments in Kenya have traditionally offered minimal scope for citizen participation or accountability, but this is beginning to change, mainly as a result of performance conditions applied through the recently introduced Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF), together with an increasingly active civil society. In Uganda, which has undergone a radical decentralisation, there is much greater scope for citizen participation at the local level but there are still many of the same problems of local accountability as in Kenya. The article reviews some of the examples of, and reasons for, good (and bad) practice. It concludes that factors like committed local leadership, central monitoring of performance, articulate civil society organisations and the availability of information are critical. But even with these, there is no guarantee that decentralised decision-making will be inclusive of the poor. Copyright © 2003 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world are reforming and strengthening their systems of local government and decentralising responsibilities and resources to sub-national levels at an unprecedented rate (Dillinger, 1994; Manor, 1999; World Bank, 2000; Smoke, 2003a). This has been driven by different factors in each country—political, economic and social. In some countries, it has been a response to demands from below, as in central/eastern Europe and Latin America. In others, like Uganda and Ghana, it has been part of a process of national reform and reconstruction. And in some cases, including several in Africa, it has been driven—to some extent at least—by pressure from donor agencies.

There are various arguments for decentralisation, but these generally boil down to the notion that decentralising responsibilities for service delivery to local governments will result in better use of resources, since decisions will reflect the needs and priorities of those most affected—local citizens. This belief is, however, based on an important assumption, namely, that local citizens have an influence on the decisions made by local governments concerning resource use and service delivery. Yet it is well known that representative democracy is a crude instrument for establishing local needs and preferences. Elections are infrequent and are often contested on the basis of personalities and ethnicity rather than on clear programmes or manifestos. Between elections, decisions are often made behind closed doors with minimal contact with voters. Mechanisms for holding elected representatives accountable for the use of resources or for the performance of service delivery are generally weak or non-existent.

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Such mechanisms of participation and accountability as do exist are often dominated by local elites to the exclusion of the poor.

This article examines the ways in which local governments in Kenya and Uganda make their decisions about the use of financial resources to deliver services to their citizens. It looks at the extent to which local citizens participate in those decisions, and the extent of local government accountability to citizens for the decisions made.

DECENTRALISATION, CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Decentralisation

Recent studies indicate that decentralisation programmes have had mixed results. Campbell et al. noted that the great wave of decentralisation in Latin America in the 1980s produced ‘a harvest of innovations’ (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 44), but that ‘political and administrative mechanisms to detect and verify demand and ensure accountability at the municipal level are woefully inadequate . . . ’ (ibid, v). Whatever the potential benefits of decentralisation, action was required to prevent negative effects on the macro-economies of the countries concerned. Fiszbein’s study of local government in Colombia found that democratisation at the local level had brought new capacity and initiative, and greater citizen participation (Fiszbein, 1997).

Crook and Manor’s study of decentralisation in four states in South Asia and West Africa found that, while decentralisation had increased participation in all cases and had improved the performance of government services in some cases, it had no discernible impact on the responsiveness to poor and vulnerable groups (Crook and Manor, 1995). Blair’s study of the impact of decentralisation in six countries concluded that ‘DLG [democratic local governance] initiatives have encouraged participation, and have increased representation, but they have provided little in the way of empowerment, and even less in making the distribution of benefits more equitable or reducing poverty’ (Blair, 2000, p. 25). Crook and Sverrisson’s analysis of 12 decentralisation programmes in the developing world concluded that whatever other possible justifications for decentralisation, there is no general link between decentralisation and the development of more pro-poor policies or poverty-alleviating outcomes (Crook and Sverrisson, 2002, p. 52).

Several writers (Wunsch, 2001; Ouedraogo, 2003; Smoke, 2003b) note how the impact of decentralisation depends greatly on the particular national and local context, both institutional and political. Factors like the extent of political commitment, the sequencing of reforms, the design of intergovernmental transfers, the capacity of local governments to manage their finances, and the power of local elites, all influence the outcome of decentralisation programmes.

Decision-making in decentralised governments

The traditional model of local government, in which representatives are elected to make decisions on behalf of citizens with little or no input from those citizens between elections, is still the one that prevails in many countries. The choices presented to citizens at periodic elections are crude, bearing little relationship to the detailed policy and budgetary decisions that have to be made during the succeeding years. Those elected are assumed to be able to assess the detailed needs and priorities on behalf of those they represent in order to make those choices. Yet electoral systems often marginalise women, minorities and vulnerable groups. Of course, diligent elected councillors may consult their constituents in a variety of ways, but such consultations may be haphazard and biased. Less diligent councillors may make no attempt to consult anyone, and may in any case be more interested in pursuing personal gains.

Ideally, systems of local government supplement periodic elections with space for consultation of, and participation by, citizens on a systematic and inclusive basis. That is necessary in order that decisions can be taken by those elected in an informed and representative manner. There must, however, be a balance. Consultation and participation reveal widely differing and often irreconcilable views and priorities. In the end, those elected are responsible for making the decisions. But they need to do so on the basis of sufficient knowledge of the range of views of their citizens. Periodic elections alone are insufficient for that.

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Good local government also requires mechanisms for accountability to local citizens beyond the opportunity of once every 4 or 5 years to vote one's representative out of office. Accountability requires publicly accessible information about resource availability and use, and about the ways in which services are being provided. It also requires the institutionalisation of mechanisms for checking by those who have the required skills, such as auditors and inspectors, so that citizens can have confidence in the information they receive. Such elements are missing in local government systems in many developing countries.

Accountability can be strengthened through enhanced citizen participation. Accountability is identified by Crook and Sverrisson (2002) as being key to increasing the responsiveness of local government to the poor, and to making development more pro-poor. Other key factors they identify include: the strength of the relationship between central and local governments such that local governments are monitored for financial probity and held accountable for implementation of pro-poor policies; the existence of secure and adequate systems for allocating both administrative and financial resources; and the length of time that reforms have been in place (Crook and Sverrisson, 2002).

Whether decentralisation actually results in decisions that are in the interests of the poor is more doubtful. In principle, decentralisation brings decision-making closer to where the poor are, thereby potentially giving them greater opportunities to have their voice heard. However, the institutional obstacles to the voice of the poor are at least as great, and possibly greater, at the local level than at the national level (Schneider, 2002). There is no inherent reason why local governments should automatically be more pro-poor than national governments. Manor notes the absence of evidence that local elites are more benevolent than those at higher levels (Manor, 1999, p. 91).1 Decentralisation demands a reassessment of the role of government and its relationship with its citizens, with the formal and informal organisations of civil society and with popular participation, in ensuring the accountability of government (Mishra, 1994). However, there are significant institutional and political obstacles to this at the local level, in particular the dominant position of local elites and their links to national elites (Crook, 2003).

**Participation**

Citizen participation is about the ways in which citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them. There is widespread dissatisfaction about the lack of responsiveness of public institutions to citizens, particularly the poor, and their lack of 'voice' in service delivery (Narayan, 2000). The concept of citizen 'voice' implies an engagement with the state that moves beyond consultation to more direct forms of influence over spending and policy decisions (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001).

In many countries, new laws on democratic decentralisation have opened up new opportunities for participation in local governance, but specific attention needs to be placed on ensuring a poverty focus (Moore and Putzel, 1999; Moore et al., 1999). Participation can be inhibited by social dynamics of exclusion and inclusion at the 'community level'. Guitj and Shah (1998) identify a complex of community differences including age, income, religion, caste, ethnicity and gender. Some people are more inhibited in meetings, will not ask for clarifications and leave confused and frustrated, or are pressured into acquiescence, and yet their attendance is still classified as 'participation'. Goloba-Mutebi (1999) observes the importance of traditional structures of authority in Uganda which inhibit free exchange of ideas and render people unwilling to demand accountability from those in authority. Thus ‘participation’, rather than necessarily being fair and democratic, is often manipulated from the top, with powerful individuals imposing decisions on others.

Civil society is often identified as the ‘institutional solution to people-centred, participatory and inclusive development’ (Devas et al., 2001, p. 19). It can offer—and there are many examples of where it does offer—an organised force with which local governments can engage in a variety of ways, including participation in poverty programmes, problem identification, prioritisation and solution finding, as well as providing labour and financial contributions. However, there is no guarantee that the interests of the poor will be represented, and formal organisations often

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1 Whether or not decision-makers at either level are benevolent, it may be easier for central governments to impose pro-poor conditions on local governments through intergovernmental transfers than it would be for them to redistribute central government’s own expenditures in favour of the poor.
act to reinforce patterns of inequality and social exclusion (Beall, 2001). Similarly, it is easier for local government policy makers to access the more visible community elites rather than to engage with the poor. It takes greater resources, time and effort to identify and work with the poorer sections of a community. In turn, local leaders are often accused of commandeering participatory initiatives to further their own connections with local elites for political gains rather than promoting any active engagement with the poor (Hulme and Siddique, 1997).

Despite the limitations of citizen participation and civil society engagement, they provide a necessary counterweight to the limitations of representative democracy at the local level. However, newly decentralised local governments are often unfamiliar with and lack the skills to make use of new instruments of citizen participation. Local history, politics, tradition and skills/capacity, all influence local governments' response to changes in rules and procedures (Porter and Onyach-Olaa, 2001). These conditions also affect the ways in which local governments interact with community organisations, informal leaders, contractors and so on. Local leaders' political skills are easily overstretched and resources are lacking. Initiatives can also be undermined by local government resistance: participation increases transparency, exposing the weaknesses in horizontal and vertical accountability within government and between government and citizens (Crook and Manor, 1995; Porter and Onyach-Olaa, 2001).

Accountability

Three aspects of accountability need to be considered:

- horizontal accountability of local government officials to elected representatives;
- downward accountability of elected representatives (and officials) to local citizens; and
- upward accountability of local governments to central government.

All three depend on the availability of information—something which is in seriously short supply in many countries. Lack of transparency in budgetary procedures and outcomes makes it hard for the electorate to judge government spending records (Healey and Tordoff, 1995; Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). As Blair notes, each of the different mechanisms of official accountability to the public—elections, political parties, civil society, the media, public meetings, formal grievance procedures and opinion surveys—has its own problems (Blair, 2000, p. 32). Often vertical (downward) accountability, from elected representatives to citizens, relies solely on electoral choice. However, the strength of this citizen power is dependent on the structure of the electoral system, the regularity of elections and the extent of genuine voter choice (Rakodi, 2001). Vote buying and vote bargaining are common features of local level electoral practices. The latter may offer some scope for the poor to influence outcomes, albeit usually in a clientelistic way (Devas et al., 2001), but the former excludes those who cannot afford such political purchases.

Proportional representation and reserved seats may give better representation to women and minorities but raise questions about accountability of those so elected or appointed to those whom they are supposed to represent (Blair, 2000). In Uganda, female councillors acknowledge that while men have become more aware of women and children issues as a result of statutory requirements for women to be represented on all local councils, this does not mean that their decisions are more gender sensitive. In addition, female councillors are found to be more hesitant and less vocal higher up the local political system: whereas discussions at the village or ward level (LC1) are effectively with neighbours, at district level (LC5) the issues are more complex and female councillors are intimidated about speaking out (Saito, 2000).

Goetz and Gaventa (2001) identify numerous initiatives that attempt to engage citizens more intimately in the process of downward accountability. Public meetings are useful when carefully facilitated. However, councillors who fear public questioning can manipulate them by, for example, holding meetings at odd times or in obscure locations (Blair, 2000). Most governments have some form of public complaints system, suggestion boxes for example, but this does not necessarily mean that citizens use them or that governments take any notice of what is put into them. Other mechanisms such as opinion surveys and polls are used in some places to measure citizen satisfaction with government services.

Accountability requires that both citizens and central government have accurate and accessible information about local government: about available resources, performance, service levels, budgets, accounts and other financial indicators. Folscher et al. (1999) argue that only when civil society is armed with such information can there be
informed public debate on the allocation of limited resources and public acceptance of trade offs. Local media are important for spreading political news and public information, but often do not have resources to undertake investigative journalism. Radio can be a key medium at the local level, providing local news, talk shows and question and answer programmes to literate and illiterate, rich and poor citizens alike.

Horizontal accountability from officials to locally elected representatives is often weak. Many studies (Blair, 2000; Golooba-Mutebi, 1999; Kullenberg and Porter, 2001) identify factors that contribute to this deficiency, including weak capacity of local government staff, particularly in accounting and record-keeping, and incomplete decentralisation in which local government staff remain under the control of central government. Other factors include: overstaffing at the lower end of the employment scales, often reflecting the political interests of councilors; and skill differentials between senior officials and councilors, which create tensions and render elected representatives unable to make the necessary decisions or to monitor and enforce accountability from officials.

Accountability is more likely to be achieved where there is committed political will on the part of central government (Tendler, 1997; Minogue et al., 1998; Blair, 2000). Golooba-Mutebi (1999) even suggests that good leadership and effective supervisory mechanisms are more essential to accountability than participation in public affairs. For example, incentives can be used to combat corrupt practices through scrutiny of accounts and ensuring that minimal standards are met before funds are released. However, inconsistencies in central government such as shortfalls in central fund transfers, cuts in unconditional grants and approval of unrealistic local budgets often undermine the potential of this approach. Whatever the limitations though, central government instruments such as auditing, inspection and performance monitoring can play a crucial role in maintaining the trust that is essential for local accountability.

In the following sections, we will look at how these issues play out in local governments in Uganda and Kenya.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT IN UGANDA AND KENYA

At independence, both Uganda and Kenya inherited a colonial system of local government based on the British model of elected district and municipal councils, adapted to a greater or lesser extent to local circumstances. Since then, the two systems have evolved in rather different ways.

_Uganda_

In Uganda, the colonial system of local government largely disintegrated, along with much else, under the rule of Idi Amin in the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government under Yoweri Museveni sought to re-establish the governance of the country from the bottom up, through a five-tier system of Resistance Councils (subsequently re-named Local Councils). This system starts from the village or ward level (LC1), through the parish (LC2), sub-county (rural) or division (urban) (LC3), county (rural) or municipality (urban) (LC4) to the district (LC5). At the village level (LC1), all adult citizens are members of the local council and they elect a chairperson and committee. The LC2 is made up of the elected chairs and committees of the constituent LC1s. LC3 and LC5, plus LC4 in the case of municipalities, are corporate local government bodies with elected chairpersons (or mayors) and councilors (LC4 in rural areas is only an administrative unit). There are currently 53 districts and the total number of councils runs into several thousands.

This system was initially established both to help maintain security and to give citizens at each level a voice in decisions about the matters affecting them. Since then, local councils have evolved in response to changing political and socio-economic demands. Under the Local Governments Act of 1997, a wide range of responsibilities was transferred to local councils, together with greatly increased resources. Much of the funding for local councils is in the form of specified grants to finance basic services and infrastructure. As a result of the recent Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt-reduction initiative, substantial additional resources are now flowing through the Poverty Action Fund to local councils. This raises questions about how decisions are made about the use of these resources, and how far the poor are really benefiting.
Kenya

In Kenya, the basic system of local government remains much as it was at independence, although many of the powers and functions were removed from them and centralised during the 1970s. During the 1980s, the government adopted the District Focus programme, which emphasised the deconcentrated system of district administration at the expenses of the elected local governments. The Kenyan system has a single tier of 174 local authorities (LAs): city, municipality, county or town council, depending on the situation. These range from Nairobi with over two million people to small town councils with less than 20,000 people. Most LAs are now in a very weak financial position, not least because of the absence—until recently—of any system of intergovernmental grants.

Since the mid-1990s, under the Kenya Local Government Reform Programme, efforts have been made to strengthen the local government system, to enable LAs to deliver services and to increase local accountability. In 1999, the Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF) was established to transfer 5% of national income tax to LAs under a published formula. LATF allocations are a general grant but with certain performance conditions. Thus, for the first time in decades, some limited resources are flowing from the centre to LAs. But here again there are concerns about how decisions are made about the use of these resources, and whether they are being used in the interests of the majority of local citizens, particularly the poor.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING, CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY: EVIDENCE FROM UGANDA AND KENYA

The study examined local level decision-making, citizen participation and local accountability, through a series of seven case studies in each country. Cases were selected to represent a range of types and sizes of local government, although focusing mainly on urban areas. In addition to key informant interviews and focus group discussions with low income groups, analyses were made of budgeted and actual expenditures of the local governments concerned.

Uganda

The local council system in Uganda was designed to create opportunities for participatory decision-making at all levels. It has been quite successful in this. There are multiple opportunities for citizens, including the poor, to participate in public meetings and elections, from the village level up to the district. Gender and minority interests are protected (in principle at least) through reserved seats for women, youth and disabled at each level. There is a system of annual budget conferences at each level, giving citizens some opportunity to have a voice in the choice of priorities for the coming year.

The very substantial increase in resources flowing through local governments has enabled local councils to deliver improved services and undertake new investment. While much of the resources transferred is in the form of specified grants over which there is relatively little local choice, some transfers—notably the Local Government Development Programme (LGDP)—offer real choices from within a menu of types of local infrastructure which match national priority areas (education, health, roads, water, production). This process applies at all levels, with each tier having a specified amount of LGDP resources to allocate for projects appropriate to their scale of operation. Thus, citizens are able to participate at various levels in real choices about real resources. Although at LC1 and LC2 the amounts involved are quite small, the programme has produced a great deal of new infrastructure serving the poor. Projects are implemented by LC3, LC4 or LC5, depending on the nature of the project, with local Project Management Committees drawn from LC1 and LC2 monitoring the implementation of their projects.

Local councils and institutions (schools, clinics) are required to display information about the grants received, so that citizens can question those responsible about the use of the money. The media, particularly local radio stations, have helped to build local accountability. Local radio stations—of which there are many—hold phone-in programmes in which mayors and chairpersons of councils are invited to respond to people’s questions and complaints. Upward accountability to the centre has also been strengthened through quite an elaborate system of reporting and monitoring on the use of resources and other performance measures, which then feeds through into future grant allocations (Onyach-Olao, 2003).
Nevertheless, the system has its weaknesses. The level of participation is much less than is suggested by the legislation. Meetings at village level do not happen as frequently as they should; budget conferences are attended by relatively few, and the language and style of these effectively exclude many; and voter turnout at local elections appears to be declining. However, there are examples of local councils which have attempted to make the budget conference into an inclusive process with proper discussion of budgetary choices. In one municipality, Entebbe, the mayor undertakes a major ‘budget outreach’ exercise each year, visiting each village to discuss priorities with residents, accompanied by municipal officials, councillors and civil society organisations (Grant, 2002).

The reservation of seats for women, youth and disabled does not seem to have had much impact on outcomes, partly because of the limited skills and effectiveness of those occupying such seats. However, there are now NGO-led attempts to develop the skills of these representatives (Rakodi, 2002, p. 12). Although the better off and better educated still dominate the decision-making at all levels, ordinary people are increasingly willing to speak out and challenge those in authority.

The transfer system has become complex, with multiple grants each with its own conditions, often allowing local councils limited scope for choice in relation to local circumstances. One particular problem is that local revenue collection has deteriorated, partly because of the rapid growth of transfers and partly because of politicisation of the main local tax, graduated personal tax, which is unpopular. As a result, some councils are in serious financial difficulties. There are still problems of lack of transparency, with publicly displayed information often being out of date and inaccessible to the majority because of the location of display or the language used. There continue to be major problems over corruption, rent seeking, abuse of tender procedures and poor relationships between paid officials and elected councillors. In addition, the multiplicity of levels, particularly the proximity of LC3 (division) and LC4 (municipality) in urban areas, produces undue conflict over limited political space and financial resources.

Some of these issues are being addressed through rationalisation of the grant system, more appropriate grant conditions and improved performance monitoring and inspection as well as training of officers and elected representatives (Government of Uganda, 2001). But there remains a huge task of building local level accountability. Ironically, the centre’s tight control over the use of intergovernmental transfers may have impeded, in some ways, the development of local accountability as officials and elected representatives have focused their attention on meeting grant conditions.

Kenya

The process of reform in Kenya has been much less radical than in Uganda. It has been a process of limited reform of the existing system rather than any decentralisation of powers and resources.² LAs have remained very traditional in their approach, offering few opportunities for citizen participation. Most LAs are also overwhelmed by financial problems, especially since they were entirely reliant on their local own revenues until 1999–2000. They are also mostly overstaffed and laden with debts, with the result that they have minimal resources with which to deliver services or improve local infrastructure.

However, there have been some pressures for improvement. Firstly, there has been a conspicuous development of civil society in Kenya, and a growing capacity of community organisations (often assisted by local authorities’ own community development staff) to organise not only for mutual self-help but also to demand more from their LAs. In several of the case studies of LAs, it was clear that there had been a significant upsurge in civil society interaction with the council in recent years, with the LAs concerned beginning to regard community organisations as partners rather than opponents. In one case, a local organisation had, through demonstrations and then court action, forced the LA to enter into a dialogue with it, which proved to be constructive and was subsequently endorsed by the (new) mayor (Devas, 2002).

Secondly, external assistance, notably from the German technical assistance organisation, GTZ, through its promotion of Local Authority Development Plans and other initiatives, has started to create a dialogue between LAs and stakeholder groups within their jurisdictions. In one case, an NGO used its funding leverage to check on all council

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²However, the newly elected Government is now proposing quite a radical decentralisation.
projects and to oblige councillors to participate in meetings with residents about projects as well as taking councillors to see examples of good practice elsewhere.

Thirdly, the establishment of the LATF means that money is now flowing to local authorities. This is money over which LAs can make real choices about service improvements and local infrastructure, although all too often it is used for things which are of much less value to residents, like increasing councillor allowances, paying salary arrears and buying vehicles. The performance conditions attached to LATF resources have been a significant stimulus to LAs to deliver on the basic requirements for accountability: production of budgets and accounts, information about debtors and creditors, and display of information about resource availability and use.

Since 2001, one of the LATF conditions has been that LAs prepare a Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) through a process of citizen participation. Whilst preparation of these plans has been variable, it has dramatically increased the extent of public consultation at the local level. Between September 2001 and February 2002, 1300 public meetings were held which were attended by some 30,000 people across the country. The projects prioritised by this process (wells, clinics, road repairs) appear to reflect the interests of ordinary citizens better than those formerly prioritised by the LAs themselves (vehicles, offices, equipment). The LASDAP process also requires LAs to publicly display information about the resources available for local service delivery; this is starting to build a degree of public awareness and demands for greater accountability for resource use.

There are, however, still major problems. Firstly, the financial situation of most LAs remains dire. Because of poor revenue collection and over-optimistic revenue projections, budgeted resources do not materialise. This undermines people’s confidence in the participatory process when prioritised projects cannot be implemented. It also means that decision-making about resource use becomes ad hoc, putting power into the hands of senior officials and politicians (e.g. the Treasurer, Clerk and Chairman/Mayor) to decide who or what will get the limited resources actually available. Although the LASDAP process is designed to be realistic (i.e. to allocate the resources which are actually available), budgets continue to be based on highly optimistic revenue forecasts.

Secondly, the extent of citizen participation remains narrow. Those civil society organisations with the greatest voice tend to be those of the business community, which readily resort to the courts to secure their interests (e.g. injunctions against increases in the business permit fee). In the first round of the LASDAP process, LAs were given considerable discretion about which community groups and NGOs to invite to the consultation meeting, enabling them to avoid those that might cause difficulties. There are, nevertheless, some positive examples. In one of the case studies, the county council made contact with more than 200 community organisations and held 56 local meetings to raise awareness of the process before holding meetings in each of its wards to prioritise projects (Devas, 2002).

In general though, decision-making in Kenyan LAs remains non-transparent, with most decisions still being made behind closed doors and a lack of publicly available information on budgets and accounts. There are major problems of corruption, improper accounting, abuse of tender procedures, over-employment of junior staff for political reasons and poor relationships between paid officials and elected councillors. Upward accountability is also weak, due to the limited capacity in the Ministry of Local Government to monitor the activities of LAs or take effective enforcement action. Inspections are often seen as rent-seeking opportunities by those involved. Whilst monitoring of grant conditions by the Local Government Reform Programme (KLGPRP) has been quite effective in changing LA behaviour, there are major questions about the sustainability of this arrangement.

**CONCLUSIONS**

From this and other studies, it is clear that the assumption that decentralisation of decision-making will automatically result in decisions that reflect the needs and priorities of local citizens is naïve. Periodic elections are insufficient to ensure this, yet rarely are opportunities offered between elections for citizens to have a voice on the specific priorities for the use of limited resources. Nor are there adequate mechanisms for holding those elected to account for outcomes in terms of the actual use of resources and delivery of services.

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3This objective was undermined in the very first year of LASDAP by a national agreement to increase the local government salaries by 30%, absorbing most if not all (or more) of the available resources which had been allocated under the LASDAP process.
In both Uganda and Kenya, there are signs of a greater awareness on the part of local governments of both the need for and the possibilities of widening citizen participation in decisions, including by the poor. There is also recognition of the need for greater accountability to citizens. In some cases, this does not go much beyond rhetoric—a response to the discourse of the donors. But there have been some small yet significant advances in recent years. Although the obstacles remain great, there are examples of good practice in each country, often associated with particular local circumstances at a particular point in time.

Key factors accounting for good practice include:

- committed and effective local leadership, and particularly, good working relationships between local officials and councillors;
- external pressure—from civil society organisations, from the media, especially local radio (in Uganda), from central government monitoring, and from donors; and
- increased availability of information.

For participation and accountability to work effectively, information needs to be shared widely and strategically, and this is not yet the case in most developing countries. The capacity of both local governments and civil society organisations needs to be strengthened if they are to be able to engage, in an inclusive manner, in real debate about resource use and service delivery.

Given the weakness of downward accountability to local citizens in most countries, upward accountability, through performance monitoring and grant conditionality, plays a crucial role. Indeed, the enforcement of performance conditions has probably had a greater impact on improving local government performance in Uganda and Kenya than has local accountability through the electoral system. However, there is also a risk that the emphasis on upward accountability impedes the development of downward accountability, as local officials and elected representatives devote their attention to meeting external performance conditions and can hide behind central government funding requirements as an excuse for failing to deliver to local citizens.

Finally, we can see from these country cases that there is no automatic progression from decentralisation to the inclusion of the poor. This will only happen if there are effective countervailing pressures to local elite interests, whether from central government, donors, the media or organisations representing the poor. Here again, the obstacles are substantial.

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