



*Address: Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland*

*Adresse: Palais des Nations,
CH-1211 Genève 10, Suisse*

Ref. No:

2003 Analytical Review of Community - Local Government Collaborations in Mumbai, Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, Ho Chi Minh City, East St. Louis and Lima.

The Follow-up Volunteer Action and Local Democracy (VALD+5)

By David G. Westendorff

Researchers in the UNRISD network on Volunteer Action and Local Democracy (VALD) conducted a series of some two dozen case studies of collaborations between local authorities and community-based and non-governmental organizations as one of its contribution to Habitat II in 1996. These collaborations were chosen because local researches felt that they represented promising efforts to redirect resources and or influence to vulnerable urban communities or neighbourhoods. The case studies explored these claims in detail and drew out lessons concerning the factors contributing to the efficacy or lack thereof of the collaborations.

Five years later, the original researchers were asked to resurvey the original collaborations to see how they had evolved and why. They then met in New York for two days of closed meetings on 3-4 June to discuss their findings and to present them in a public meeting at the United Nations in New York on 5 June as a parallel event during the Five-year review of Habitat II, also know as Istanbul+5.¹

By mid-2001, some of the collaborations between local authorities and community organizations had histories of more than a decade. Not all were successful or even functioning throughout the period, however. Indeed, the researchers' main observations confirmed many of the least optimistic findings emerging from the 1996 Habitat II case study reports. They also moved beyond the Habitat II studies in focussing more clearly on the changing role of local authorities as global forces in local economies take deeper roots than ever before. The main influence we perceived was the role of international finance in shaping the social policies and forms of residential segregation in the project cities. There were also a few encouraging surprises.

This brief report contains two sections after this introduction. The first summarizes the findings of the case studies and discussions among the researchers as of June 2001. The second highlights important elements contained in the reports revised or updated during 2002-2003. The list of papers submitted in June 2001 and those containing new research undertaken after June 2001 follows at the end of the report.

VALD+5, New York, 3-4 June 2001

¹ The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation provided funding for this set of meetings and for subsequent research described in this report. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.



The components of the collaborations addressing the core issues of interest to low-income or marginalized groups were not only fragile but in some cases ephemeral. In large measure this derived from the local authority's lack of will or ability to implement and/or maintain its contribution to the collaboration.

Given the almost universal rhetoric of 'partnership and participation of stakeholders' espoused by most of the local authorities in the study, this outcome appears paradoxical. On closer investigation, however, it is not. The understanding of collaboration/partnership with civil society held by the local authorities has rarely lived up to that held by community organization: a broad sharing of aims, responsibility for action and power. Participants felt that a strong definition of partnership/collaboration needed to be shared by all those involved, and that indicators of effectiveness need to be explicit. These should center on concrete improvements in the quality of life and livelihoods of low-income groups. More will be said about these criteria below.

Of the 22 collaborations in seven cities re-visited for VALD+5, one third had become defunct, despite the continuing existence of the problems they were meant to address and the desire of the community actors to continue working with the local authority. The rest had limited, sporadic interaction with the local authorities, who tended to instrumentalize the collaboration for short-term purposes.

About one in seven cases had a positive impact on income or asset distribution in the target communities. On the contrary, in a quarter of the cases, the community had experienced negative distributional outcomes over the period of the collaboration. (The collaboration itself was never deemed the culprit for such negative impacts. These were attributed to worsening economic conditions that the collaborations were powerless to reverse. The research did not answer whether the collaborations had lessened the negative impact of those worsening conditions.)

In about half of the cases where there had been collaborations, the physical conditions in the target area did improve, at least during the period of the most intense interaction between the local authorities and community groups.

Roughly half of the collaborations resulted in improved access to decision-making processes for target community members. Nearly two-fifths appeared to have influenced policy in one way or another.

Improvements in physical conditions, access to decision-making processes and policy impact do not appear to have been sustained or cumulative, i.e. spreading beyond the immediate vicinity of the experience during its most productive period. Indeed, the phenomenon of more micro-level participation -- evidenced by the growing number of neighborhood consultations with local authorities, community contributions to project implementation and improving legal and administrative frameworks governing relationships with civil society organizations -- appears to be confined to just that. Projects come and go. But none in the VALD project have become citywide practices receiving the full support of local authorities. Researchers repeatedly spoke of the tendency of authorities to accept small-scale collaborations as a form of lip service. But once collaboration began to challenge the status quo at city or regional level, those in power reacted strongly, forcing the experience 'back into the micro' and sometimes even threatening the gains made in those experiences.

One opinion that received general support among the researchers is that perhaps collaborations at this the micro level, while important as tools for communities to begin building their own organizational and personal capacities, should not be over-emphasized as a



strategy for change. Rather, collaborations must be accompanied with broader networking across the city or metropolitan area and become part of the still rare participatory process of decision-making along the lines of the Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

This discussion led to questions for further research. Three categories of research needs were identified.

First, what kinds of institutionalisation will enhance the effectiveness of collaborations? In which specific contexts are different kinds of institutionalization effective? Must governments be formally directed by law to collaborate with civil society organizations? Must collaborations involving civil society organizations and local authorities become formal structures/entities? Must community initiatives, including informal alliances and networks, become formalized? The cases provided many pros and cons and nuanced situations for each of these questions, but could provide no definitive guidance.

Second, what are the impacts of the integration of local economies into the international economy in the following three dimensions:

- securitization of debt on municipal and submunicipal financing of infrastructure, services and housing;
- new forms of financing on the ‘political stance’ of municipal governments vis a vis low-income groups,
- more broadly, different kinds of global corporations in determining wages and working conditions of workers and larger distributional trends. [The different entities being those that move money (financial TNCs), move products (marketers), contract out production (outsourcers) and producers (footloose manufacturers).]

Third, to what extent are the leaders of community organizations handicapped by their understanding of themselves, their relations with community organizations and the role of community organizations in a larger ‘political scenario’? In other words, what kind of training and empowerment will help they go beyond mere organization of survival strategies and poverty alleviation to a vision of integral development?

Highlights of individual studies conducted after Istanbul+5

Sao Paulo. In Sao Paulo new research highlighted the national importance of three cases of collaboration pioneered during the first Worker’s Party administration between 1989 and 1992: the participatory budget, the Apuana housing cooperative and the Coopamare solid waste recycling cooperative. Despite their demonstrated potential for redirecting municipal resource flows in a socially more progressive manner, these initiatives failed to gain support of the local government for the remainder of the decade.

However, with the consistent assistance of civil society groups and dogged persistence of their members, the cooperatives managed to survive, functioning with minimal official support until a new Worker’s Party mayor was elected in 2000. In the interim the cooperatives developed and promulgated technical and organizational methods that became references for similar initiatives in many cities throughout the country. Cooperative members also participated actively in, and sometimes lead, efforts to establish an enabling legal framework for replicating and scaling up such efforts elsewhere in the country. Similarly, the Participatory Budget, discontinued in



Sao Paulo, is now world famous, having been successfully implemented over more than a decade in Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte and several other medium-sized Brazilian cities. Today hundreds of Brazilian cities have adopted this practice, not to mention other cities in Latin America and Europe. And since 2000, a Worker's Party administration has been implementing the Participatory Budget again in Sao Paulo.

Still, the authors of the report noted that on the whole, even after a Worker's Party Mayor was elected in 2000, the local government had few resources and tools with which to effect real change for the city's growing 'peripheral' population. The innovative experiences described above remained isolated examples of micro-level success but wholly inadequate to effectively redistribute power within the municipality. The election of a Worker's Party member to the presidency of Brazil is seen as a final test. If a positive national political context combined with the same at the municipal level does not result in significant improvements for the city's disenfranchised, what will it take?

Johannesburg. In Johannesburg, the transition from apartheid in 1993 and the first democratic local elections at the end of 1995 marked the beginning of an intensive process of restructuring the mechanisms of national and local government. The election of local councillors of African or mixed race descent in the city's low-income townships, failed to usher in drastically better urban conditions. Newly elected councillors were inexperienced, understaffed and under-resourced, and often faced the resistance of entrenched apartheid-era civil servants. At the same time the metropolitan government began the first in a series of complex internal reorganizations, which appear to have complicated if not delayed more far-reaching democratisation of local government. The composition and capacity of civil society organizations in each of the three distinct settings re-surveyed has clearly affected the nature local residents interactions with local authorities and the benefits they derive from them.

At the end of 2002, the picture of collaborations in three of the four areas surveyed in 1996 reflects continuing upheaval and uncertainty.² In Tladi-Moletsane, a neighborhood in Soweto comprising both consolidated and informal (squatter) settlements, physical and social conditions in the informal settlement have barely improved. Its local community organizations and Ward Committee remain weak and ignored by both the civic organizations and the local elected councillor serving the consolidated areas of Tladi-Moletsane. Among those interviewed in the informal, there was no clear impression of how this might change for the better, nor did it seem to be an important concern for the councillor.

In the center city, which includes the former central business district (CBD) and a large stock of multi-story apartment buildings, many promising civil society initiatives from 1995/6 have fallen apart or continue to exist as moribund entities. One of the largest and most promising of these, the Seven Buildings Project, affecting 2000 families living in some 446 residential units, has been liquidated for failure to repay capital it borrowed from the Municipality. More generally, community-local authority collaborations founded in the mid-1990s to improve access to decent

² Ivory Park, a recently settled peripheral community in 1996, was not resurveyed in 2002.



housing for low-income families, urban service delivery and the security and cleanliness of the CBD have more recently given way to government-designed projects in which NGOs act as the implementing agency.

A parallel phenomenon in and around the CBD is the explosion of spontaneous action in which individuals or small groups take up a plethora of activities, often denominated as 'social' concerns. But these are generally geared to income generation, often competing directly with similar groups or individuals, none of which register officially or seek out government agencies as collaborators. The reason for this degree of clandestine behaviour, according to the author, is that many of the principals are either illegal immigrants or members of criminal groups or both. Indeed, it is the rapid and uncontrolled influx of both international and internal migrants into the CBD and surrounding neighborhoods that driven insecurity and rates of physical deterioration of the urban fabric to historic highs. As a result, traditional CBD functions have fled to safer locations in the suburbs, with corresponding catastrophic drops in real estate values in the old CBD. As of the end of 2002, the municipal government had yet to offer a plan to reconstruct the urban fabric of the original CBD, while at the same time ignoring one that had been developed for the CBD's densest residential areas, at the behest of the city. Ironically, that plan had been constructed through a highly participatory process involving both government agencies and civil society groups in 2001/2.

In, Alexandra, the third community resurveyed in 2001/2, conditions are both similar and different to those of the inner-city. In-migration has continued to increase pressure on the existing housing stock and essential services, both of which are much worse than in the CBD and comparable to those found in Tladi-Moletsane. However, Alexandra's population density is already among the highest in the world, estimated at 350,000 persons in a single square kilometre. The vast majority of housing is low scale and for each formal dwelling there are up to three or four families living in 'shacks' in the yards.

Alexandra's advantage has been its long history of community mobilization and struggle for self-rule. With the metropolitan-wide reorganization of government, this level of political sophistication has given local organizations better contact with the newly-formed agencies and service entities than community organizations in the other two locations have had. These include 'multi-stakeholder' consultative processes such as the Greater Alexandra Development Forum (defunct as of end-2001) and now the Alexandra Development Forum have attracted promises of significant central government financing for new urban housing and redevelopment through the Alexandra Renewal Program. But delivery on the promises made in these fora has been slow and disappointing to the neediest members of the community, who have seen little change in crowding and access to clean water, proper sanitation and employment.

Ho Chi Minh City. The focus of work in Ho Chi Minh City during 2002 was to collect additional information on an NGO-assisted site and services project where the government wanted squatters relocated into a one-square hectare site within the larger eleven-hectare site they were occupying. The government intended to expand services to the remaining 10-hectare site and eventually settle there other city



residents currently living in environmentally degraded or vulnerable sites. The additional information was collected to facilitate a comparison with the experience of the community-local authority collaboration in the Swiss-assisted community upgrading project described in separate papers for both Habitat II and VALD+5.

The reports from both the HCMC projects largely agreed on the main aspects of collaborations between local authorities and community organizations:

Planning and execution of urban resettlement projects have been and continue to be predominantly top-down.

Autonomous community organizations did not exist in either project; however, neighboring families were organized under a unit head, whose function was to channel information between government and party apparatuses and individual families.

Public participation has been limited to:

- information meetings with public officials in which issues such as timing of relocation, compensation, kinds and costs of services to be provided to the new site, rights and obligations of beneficiaries, terms of loans, etc are explained and discussed.
- Comment/complaint mechanisms during the planning and relocation process are found in resident discussions with cadres of the Social Work Centre of the Vietnam Youth Federation;
- In the NGO-assisted scheme, the Social Work Centre took on roles that elsewhere might have been played by a local NGO. These included environmental education, instituting a savings scheme, maintaining institutional relationships, carrying out a socio-economic survey, listening to the residents concerns and offering advice and conveying relocated families wishes to the authorities.
- The international NGO's technical advisory role, which helped the government come to the decision to legalize 'squatters' that were to be moved into the relocation site, made it possible for squatters to receive both compensation for removal and full tenancy and other government assistance once settled in the relocation site.

One of the principal conclusions of both projects was that outside intervention in the form of scientific cooperation with a Swiss university in one case and in the form funding and technical assistance from a European NGO in the other case, helped increase the awareness and possible advantages of greater community participation in decision making in complex urban upgrading projects.

Mumbai. The final report on the Mumbai collaborations highlights the failure to implement the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in the State of Maharashtra. This Amendment passed into force in 1993, heralding local government reform as soon as state governments could establish their own implementing legislation. One of the crucial stipulations of the Amendment was that NGOs/CBOs were to have seats on urban Ward Committees, thereby passing real decision-making powers to local civil



society groups. It took until 1999 and two public interests law-suits before the Maharashtra was forced to enact its own implementing legislation. In the words of the report, “The opportunities held out by the Act have been lost on the larger population for almost a decade, arguably because no one, within or outside the system, owns its vision or has played the roles of the catalyst, educator, mediator and facilitator....” Now that the Amendment Act has been formally implemented, civil society organizations sitting on Ward Committies are stymied by the dearth of information they receive on the development funds of elected officials, the priorities of local government and the distribution of subsidies across the cities. At the same time, another important trend noted by the report is that despite mandated decentralization, local authorities are divesting themselves of traditional responsibilities for providing basic services and welfare functions for vulnerable urban groups. Instead, municipal governments are redefining their area of concern to extend only to ‘citizens’ – those ‘having access to formal housing and employment’ – and not to the ‘encroachers’ who have no such access.

Titles and authors of papers presented at VALD+5 Meeting, United Nations, New York, June 3-4, 2001

Partnerships between Government and Community Organizations in the Johannesburg Inner City, Graeme Gotz

Community Based Organizations in Lima Five Years On: Old actors – new tasks
Jaime Joseph

South Africa's Enduring Local Crisis: Change and Continuity in Relations between Municipal Government and Community Organizations in Alexandra from Late Apartheid to Democracy
Mzwanele Mayekiso

Chicago's Near South Side: Five Years Later
David C. Ranney and Patricia A. Wright

Communities and local government: a case study in São Paulo
Housing construction by self-managed community work ‘Apuanã’ – Update
Raquel Rolnik and Renato Cymbalista

Initiatives for improving housing and infrastructure in poor communities in Ho Chi Minh City – Vietnam. Sebastien Wust, Bolay Jean-Claude, Thai Thi Ngoc Du.

Status of Collaborations between Community Organizations and Local Authorities in Mumabai, India. YUVA (Youth for Unity and Volunteer Action)

Expanded Case Study Reports based on new research carried out between 09/01 and 02/03.

Communities and local government: three case studies in São Paulo, Brazil. Raquel Rolnik and Renato Cymbalista. UNRISD Mimeo, January 2003.



Initiatives for improving housing and infrastructure in poor communities in Ho Chi Minh City – Vietnam Sebastien Wust, Bolay Jean-Claude, Thai Thi Ngoc Du, with additional contributions from Ludovic Dewaele, Villes en Transition and Thai Thi Ngoc Du. UNRISD Mimeo, May 2002.

‘Living for the sake of living’ Partnerships between the poor and local government in Johannesburg. David Everatt, Graeme Gotz, Ross Jennings, Jowie Mulaudzi and Katiso Lengane. UNRISD Mimeo, December 2002.

Status of Collaborations between Community Organizations and Local Authorities in Mumabai, India. YUVA (Youth for Unity and Volunteer Action). UNRISD Mimeo, February, 2003.

South Africa's Enduring Local Crisis: Change and Continuity in Relations between Municipal Government and Community Organizations in Alexandra from Late Apartheid to Democracy. Mzwanele Mayekiso. UNRISD Memo, February 2003.