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## **Innovations in Participation: Citizen Engagement in Deliberative Democracy**

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### **Setting the Context**

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Since the 19th century, the dominant model of a just and effective state has been that of a representative government populated by professional politicians and civil servants. This is an ideal of government that is *by the people* in the sense that representatives must stand for popular election, and *for the people*, when as public servants, they devise and implement laws and policies that advance the public interest. However, it is not yet government *of the people* in the sense that in this image, the political role of most individuals, most of the time, is relegated to the occasional and minimal role of voting for representatives.

Several trends, however, have conspired to cause public sector and civil society innovators to rethink this division between government and citizens, and to find ways to thicken the engagement of citizens in reflecting upon public problems and policies, in making collective decisions, and in carrying out various kinds of public action.

The first of these trends is the growing social gap between citizens on one hand, and politicians, political parties, and government, on the other. Without speculating on the causes of this gap, its manifestations include declining citizen trust in government agencies, declining party membership in many countries, low rates of voting turnout in many countries, and the sense of powerlessness and alienation of citizens with respect to their “democratic” governments. A second trend is the evident incapacity of government, relying only upon its own resources and authority, to accomplish many public objectives such as elementary education, public safety, environmental stewardship, and economic development. Third, a large number of new initiatives, a few of them very well known, such as the Participatory Budgeting program of the Workers Party in Porto Alegre, Brazil. But, many more obscure initiatives have demonstrated the possibility and power of citizen engagement, participation, and even deliberation.

The potential of innovations that increase the quantity and depth of citizen participation hold out enormous promise to enhance and harness what some have called the “wisdom of the crowds.” When citizens engage in deliberation with one another, and with public officials, about thorny social problems and public priorities, they transform ill-

informed and sometimes contradictory gut reactions into better informed judgements (in the language of Daniel Yankelovich). In situations where the law and policy making process have been captured by some set of powerful interests, perhaps politicians themselves, organized citizens can demand accountability and justice. Where state capacities are insufficient to serve the public interest, the energies, resources, and ingenuity of citizens can augment and amplify.

However, efforts to enhance and deepen citizen participation face many perils. Nonprofessional, part-time citizens may be unable to grasp the complexities of many social problems. When government opens avenues of engagement, those who utilize these opportunities may be a select and unrepresentative group; those who are educated, highly interested, assertive, and members of dominant groups may be more inclined to participate than the least advantaged. When participation is associated with profitable stakes, citizens may assert their own narrow interests rather than taking broader and more other-regarding perspectives. Professional politicians and public managers frequently resist sharing power and authority in citizen participation initiatives.

This panel explores three particularly ambitious, and by many measures, successful innovations that engage citizens in the business of government. In one initiative, the US city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, devolved control of \$400 million over 20 years to neighborhood associations throughout the city. An initiative in Durban, South Africa, engaged informal sector vendors and workers in the redesign, revitalization, and management of a central city transit district. Finally, an effort from the United Kingdom sought to enlarge the opportunities for empowered citizen participation across a variety of government departments and community institutions.

**Archon Fung** is Professor of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. His research examines the impacts of civic participation, public deliberation, and transparency upon public and private governance. His book, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy*, examines two participatory-democratic reform efforts in low-income Chicago, Illinois, neighborhoods. Current projects also examine initiatives in ecosystem management, toxics reduction, endangered species protection, local governance, and international labor standards. Dr. Fung's recent books and edited collections include *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*; *Can We Put an End to Sweatshops?*; *Working Capital: The Power of Labor's Pensions*; and, *Beyond Backyard Environmentalism*. His articles on regulation, rights, and participation appear in *Political Theory*; *Journal of Political Philosophy*; *Politics and Society*; *Governance*; *Environmental Management*; *American Behavioral Scientist*; and, the *Boston Review*. Dr. Fung received two bachelor's degrees in Science and a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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Citizen Engagement in Deliberative Democracy  
**Incorporating the Informal Sector into Urban Planning**

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**What was the problem?**

The context was a blighted South African inner city district, Warwick Junction, Durban. Apartheid and its legacy had left the area and commuting citizens without a quality and responsive urban environment. Urban management had not been prioritized, resulting in an underserved and decaying municipal infrastructure. Warwick Junction was at the heart of the metropolitan rail, taxi, and bus transport systems, with more than 450,000 commuters, and was an ideal location for informal street vendors whose businesses thrived on the high numbers of pedestrians.

**What was the innovation?**

The innovation, the Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project, could best be described as “the communalization of the project” that used four process approaches.

1. **Collective learning:** the Project was based on the premise that the informal economy is an economic asset. Its goal was to create an urban infrastructure that supported this economy. In reality, neither the beneficiary community nor the project team had experience in this activity. As a result, all parties became very dependent on one another for research and design. This approach was a complete turnaround from the apartheid logic.
2. **Consultation:** the Project transcended culture, gender, language, and urban illiteracy to create a viable strategy for consultation that matured into a connectedness that secured the transfer of information and understanding to all partners.
3. **A Developmental Attitude:** it became apparent to local government that it had to respond in a new way to muster the full extent of resources—human and material—necessary for the project. The core project team included local government officials, supplemented with dedicated project leadership. This “task force” located itself in the district so it was accessible to colleagues and the community. The local government showed its support for the Project by using its public spaces, and providing sidewalk infrastructure, to accommodate the informal street vendors. The beneficiary community responded to the recognition of its preferences with participation and assimilation of the urbanized future.

4. Participative Implementation: since Warwick Junction is a working market and public transport node, the community had to be sympathetic to disruptions caused by infrastructure upgrading and implementation. As a result, parties had to agree on implementation phases.

**What were the obstacles?**

The Junction had suffered from years of neglect and stoic attempts by the street vendors to establish themselves. In addition, congestion, and a lack of urban literacy limited the community's ability to assimilate what they were experiencing. Equally, the project team had no appropriate national (or international) precedent to inform its intervention. They were unable to find models for informal street vending at this scale in an inner city location.

**What were the results?**

The project was successfully implemented. It is growing and providing new forms of entrepreneurship and income generating activities. The project has facilitated livelihoods for approximately 5,000 inner city vendors and their service providers, and the expectation of meaningful community participation has been entrenched. Work has begun to redress the cultural, social, and economic exclusion and an exciting inner city district and a unique urban experience has emerged. There is currently the promise of tourism; potential that could release its own phase of second generation energy. Finally, the Project is being replicated in other South African cities.

**Richard Dobson** qualified as an architect from the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in 1978. He immediately established his own private practice, working almost exclusively in the then Black townships surrounding Durban, South Africa. In 1981, he joined a long-established Kwa Zulu Natal firm, and the resultant four-person partnership continued for 15 years. During this time, the practice undertook a wide range of commissions, but was noted for its residential, commercial, and historic restoration work for which it received various local and national awards. Mr. Dobson's particular interest in low-energy construction included a patent and a national design award for a residential walling system utilizing stabilized earth. This went into limited commercial production. In 1996, upon the dissolution of the partnership, he joined the eThekweni Municipality in Durban as a contract consultant and commenced implementing the capital infrastructure within the Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project. This involvement progressively resulted in his leadership of the project from 2001, and eventually its successor—the Inner City Thekweni Regeneration and Urban Management Program—whose mandate specifically emphasizes the needs and opportunities of the inner city. In December 2006, Mr. Dobson resigned from the program and the municipality in order to return to private practice to found an NGO called Asiye Etafuleni.

Asiye Etafuleni means “bring it to the table” in Zulu, but figuratively, it means “let us negotiate.” The organization offers technical support to the informal economy, and will focus on street vendors and endemic urban poverty. He has also commenced with collaborating on a book documenting the 10 years of development in the Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project.

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Citizen Engagement in Deliberative Democracy

**Revitalizing Urban Cities through Resident Empowerment: The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP)**

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**What was the problem?**

In the mid-1980s, the city of Minneapolis was experiencing many of the problems that had threatened the stability of cities throughout the United States: flight of the middle class, deterioration of the housing stock, lack of investment in residential neighborhoods, declining numbers of local businesses, loss of living wage jobs, reduced investment in public infrastructure, increasing levels of crime and poverty, and the growing dissatisfaction of residents. In 1987, with signs of neighborhood decline in Minneapolis becoming increasingly apparent, a Task Force was formed, which found that physical revitalization of Minneapolis neighborhoods was badly needed and would cost over \$3 billion. In May 1989, an Implementation Committee proposed a revitalization program that would “protect” fundamentally sound neighborhoods, “revitalize” those showing signs of decline, and “redirect” those with extensive problems.

**What was the innovation?**

In 1990, the Minnesota legislature passed legislation that gave the state’s largest cities the authority to establish neighborhood revitalization programs, and allowed Minneapolis to use up to \$20 million of its Tax Increment Financing proceeds, annually thru 2009, to fund improvements to neighborhoods. These programs would be based on plans developed by neighborhood residents.

The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) was established to make the residential neighborhoods of the city better places to live, work, learn, and play. NRP shifts the traditional improvement paradigm from a reliance on professional planners and government bureaucrats to one that focuses on engaging and empowering residents. It

acknowledges that people with the greatest proximity to an issue, problem, or opportunity, and an interest in accomplishing change are the ones who may be most motivated and able to make real change happen. Neighborhood-based priority setting, planning, and implementation are the core of the program. In NRP, residents and other neighborhood stakeholders create Neighborhood Action Plans (NAPs) that describe the neighborhood they want in the future, and the goals, objectives, and specific strategies that will help them accomplish their vision. NRP completes the empowerment process by providing funding to each neighborhood to help them implement their approved NAP.

#### **What were the obstacles?**

The obstacles were many and formidable. These obstacles included: training residents to conduct inclusive planning processes; developing standards for recognition and operation of neighborhood organizations; mentoring neighborhood leaders; developing relationships between neighborhoods, and between neighborhoods and their local governments; sporadic and inconsistent cooperation from city departments; improving the understanding of residents about government and its various processes; creating a template for neighborhood action plans; ensuring financial accountability and developing processes for transferring funds; creating contracts; and, the host of minor and major roadblocks associated with creating a program while it is being implemented. One of the most significant, but initially unexpected, obstacles was a major reduction in the revenue stream that occurred when the program reached its 10th anniversary (the halfway point of its expected life).

#### **4. What were the results?**

The results were much more significant than originally expected. The program generated the participation of every neighborhood in the city, an increase in the number of neighborhood groups from an initial 42 to 72. Neighborhood groups were recognized as part of the civic infrastructure. Investment of over \$280 million of public NRP funds leveraged over \$1 billion of additional public and private investment in everything from home improvements, to construction of affordable housing, to services for young people and seniors. More than 1,000 residents became involved in the boards of neighborhood groups. Residents learned new skills. Multijurisdictional public improvements were coordinated. The program created a general sense of identity and connection to place for residents.

**Robert D. Miller** has been Director of the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) since 1992. Before joining the NRP, he was director of the Community and Resource Exchange Program and had served for 14 years as a Planning Supervisor and Senior Management Analyst for Hennepin County. Before serving with Hennepin County, Mr. Miller had been a Personnel Manager and Special Assistant with the Veterans

Administration. He was a member of the Urban Consortium Energy Task Force for 12 years and has served on state, county and city task forces, and special committees and study commissions in a wide variety of topical areas. He was also the owner of a successful restaurant in Minneapolis. In addition to these activities, Mr. Miller served on the Board of Directors and was elected president of a community association in Virginia, helped found a neighborhood association in Minneapolis, chaired a Parent-Teacher Association, and has recruited and mentored an uncounted number of people for community service.

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Citizen Engagement in Deliberative Democracy  
***Together We Can Tackle the Power Gap***

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**What was the problem?**

Despite record investment in public services from 1997 to 2001, and the achievement of priority targets, the British government found that most people believed they had little power over state decisions which affected their daily lives. Even though there were clear improvements on headline measures such as reduction in crime figures, more provisions for childcare, increased number of hospital treatments, and more unemployed helped to find jobs, there was growing doubt as to whether the government was acting on what citizens were truly concerned about. Consequently, the public was all too often unconvinced that their needs were being met. From 2001 to 2003, the proportion of people who felt they could influence decisions affecting their concerns fell from 43% to 38%. It reflected the broader trend of a rising number of people saying that they did not vote, or participate in public affairs, because ultimately they had no real power over government institutions.

**What was the innovation?**

In 2003, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs asked for a new government unit to be set up to tackle the problem of the power gap between state and citizens in England. As the head of this unit, I devised the “Together We Can” campaign—a culture change program which brought local and central state bodies across the country together to work with community sector partners in order to demonstrate how citizens could be empowered to work with government to set and achieve common goals. Never before had a national government taken a strategic approach to encourage its officials and the wider public to collaborate in decision making in all domestic public policies. The campaign had three key components:

1. Skills for Active Citizenship: supporting the development of people's motivation, skills, and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed. The Take Part Network to promote citizenship learning and the Together We Can online resource are examples.
2. Strengthening Communities: increasing the capacity of community groups to bring together citizens to deliberate and articulate shared concerns. Guide Neighbourhoods, Community Justice Centres, and New Deal for Communities are examples.
3. Partnership with Public Bodies: steering and advising public bodies to work effectively in partnership with local people in assessing needs, considering options for action, determining priorities, and sharing information on results. Examples of such cross-government initiatives include the Together We Can Action Plan, Civic Pioneer local authorities, Neighbourhood Policing, and the Healthy Communities Collaborative.

**What were the obstacles?**

There were broadly four obstacles we had to overcome:

1. The political commitment from our own Ministers was not fully shared by other senior politicians or their officials, many of whom regarded the empowerment of citizens as a marginal issue and did not seriously address it in their policy development. We tackled this by supplying our own Ministers with case studies of improvements to bring their Cabinet colleagues on their side, and presenting key decision makers with evidence on how trust and satisfaction with their services go up as a result of empowerment initiatives.
2. There was virtually no coordination across central and local government, or within either, leading to many missed opportunities for shared learning and collaboration. We tackled this by establishing a national forum for public officials to learn, plan, and support empowerment initiatives.
3. Many confused our work with promoting volunteerism, and diverted attention and resources away from the focus of power redistribution. We tackled this by openly and relentlessly pointing out the distinct focus on power in our work, and insisting on measuring success without reference to volunteering.
4. The public, itself, was skeptical. Moreover, superficial consultation exercises often contributed to discrediting the process of civic engagement. We tackled this by setting higher standards, promoting good practice, and ensuring effective feedback to citizens is built into empowerment work.

**What were the results?**

We had planned to build up the foundational phase of the culture change program by 2006 so that we could push for the incremental adoption of empowerment practices over the next



three years before 2009. The impact of “Together We Can” itself, along with favorable political changes, have considerably accelerated the process of delivering results from our work. These are notable in the following areas:

- By 2006, the Prime Minister and all the Secretaries of State with domestic policy responsibilities had signed up to champion the progress made nationally, and commit to further reforms.
- In 2006, the Local Government White Paper, “Strong & Prosperous Communities,” was published and contributed significantly to strengthen empowerment, particularly with a new statutory Duty to Involve.
- In 2007, a program to accelerate the adoption of empowering practices such as participatory budgeting, community assets management, and devolved decision making, commenced.
- By 2007, the decline in the proportion of citizens who feel they can influence decisions affecting their areas had been stopped.
- In 2008, the Government adopted a formal Public Service Agreement target to empower more people to have influence over public decisions.
- Later in 2008, we will see a cross-government White Paper on community empowerment to set out further reforms.

**Dr. Henry Tam** is the Deputy Director in charge of Community Empowerment Delivery at the Department for Communities & Local Government, Great Britain. He was previously Head of Civil Renewal at the Home Office where he devised the cross-government Together We Can action plan. He was responsible for setting up the Home Office’s Standards Unit for Correctional Services, covering prisons, probation, and youth justice. From 2000–2002 he was the Home Office’s Director for Community Safety & Regeneration in the East of England, responsible for developing a unified approach in implementing Government policies on neighborhood renewal and community safety in the region. Prior to joining the Home Office, Dr. Tam was the Deputy Chief Executive at St. Edmundsbury Borough Council where his duties included corporate management and community development. He directed the Borough’s successful bid for Beacon Council status. His work on democratic engagement with young people won a Best Practice Award from the Prime Minister in 1999. Dr. Tam studied Philosophy, Politics & Economics at the University of Oxford and has a doctorate in Social Philosophy from the University of Hong Kong. He is Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Lifelong Learning, Birkbeck, London University; and, a Fellow of the Globus Institute for Globalization and Sustainable Development, University of Tilburg, the Netherlands.