Advancing active citizenship: A Citizenship Academy as a means to strengthen local democracy?

Discussion Paper and Roundtable Report prepared by Isandla Institute

July 2012

Project Description

The Politics of Local Governance Project, an initiative of Isandla Institute, seeks to explore the interface between three domains: the local state, political society (more especially political parties) and civil society/ communities/citizens. More particularly, the project seeks to critically engage the four, inter-related, key problems identified as:

1. The reductionist approach that conflates institutionalised participation in the form of 'invited spaces' with meaningful expression of active citizenry (thereby showing intolerance to any other form of community engagement or 'invented spaces' by communities);
2. The dominant political culture across political parties that considers these parties as the 'rightful', if not sole, custodians of citizen's aspirations and interests (feeding into the intolerance mentioned above);
3. Relatively weak and fragmented community organisations, with implications for their ability to claim rights and act as checks and balances to political power and bureaucratic reductionism; and,
4. A general retreat by civil society organisations/ the non-profit local governance sector from what is considered 'political society', in particular the space taken up by political parties.

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Discussion Paper

1. Introduction

South Africa has a vibrant history of local democracy characterised by mass mobilisation and an active citizenry united in its opposition to the Apartheid regime. This however was deflated in the early years of democracy as political participation became channelled through political parties and institutionalised modes of engagement. In addition, the communities were demobilised through a mentality that 'the-state-will-provide' which continues to lie at the heart of South Africa's state-centric approach to development and democracy.

Arguably, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) and subsequent local government legislation sought to entrench and institutionalise active citizenship. Ironically, the result has been the opposite, as acknowledged by the government. While the government's main preoccupation seems to be to 'fix' (rather than discard or complement) what is not working (most notably the ward committee system), thereby working on the supply side of participatory local governance, it is equally important (if not more so) to generate and strengthen demand from below.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) has been at the forefront of calling for active citizenship, which has found resonance with a wide range of actors and stakeholders. However, given the fractured nature of communities and weak non-partisan leadership at community level, there is a need to strengthen relevant competencies and capacities to enable the notion of active citizenship to become a reality. It is in this light that the idea of a citizenship academy

as mooted in the 2011 National Development Plan is intriguing and potentially appealing. This discussion document will explore the idea of a citizenship academy further and highlight a number of critical issues that warrant further scrutiny and in-depth discussion. Isandla Institute's starting point is that the consolidation of political participation and representation presupposes an active, engaged public that is able to claim rights, negotiate priorities and accept negotiated outcomes. South Africa is far from achieving this. Perhaps the citizenship academy is a suitable vehicle to help us achieve this.

2. A history of local activism and grassroots mobilisation

South Africa has a vibrant history of local activism and mass mobilisation in opposition to the Apartheid regime. In many ways, this form of activism showed strands of leadership from below. It was driven by participation of ordinary community members that had "responded to their abysmal urban living condition and this resistance eventually immobilised the coercive and reformist actions of the Apartheid state" (Swilling 1987:1). The United Democratic Front (UDF), a federation affiliated by a number of civic, religious, trade union, student, women, youth and political organisations that shared common objectives in their opposition to the Apartheid regime, was formed in response to the escalating and spontaneous uprisings organised by ordinary people throughout the country (Swilling 1987:3). The 1980s and early 1990s in South Africa therefore were regarded as the utopia of mass mobilisation as local people kept the momentum

in actively defying and opposing the then regime, despite the numerous and most brutal clashes between the state apparatus and the people. Thus, although the majority of people living in South Africa were denied formal citizenship, one could argue that by contesting the illegitimacy of the Apartheid state and laying claim on the country's riches and sovereignty they exerted active citizenship.

This form of active citizenship was, of course, never sustained beyond 1994. The dawn of democracy brought with it three major changes in the country's character of mass mobilisation. First, political participation was now channelled through political parties, something that had not been possible for the majority of South Africans since the banning of the ANC and other opposition political organisations (e.g. the PAC) in 1960. Following the unbanning of these political organisations, many other organisations and community formations that had filled the political space in the absence of formally recognised political parties (e.g. churches, CBOs, civics, etc.) either ceased to exist (e.g. UDF) or

stopped playing these roles in the early 1990s. Political parties, and the ruling ANC in particular, confidently asserted themselves as the true representative voice of 'the people', leaving little space for other forms of political organisation outside of their purview.

Secondly, after the establishment of local government in 2000 political participation in (local) government affairs was channelled through legislated structures, forums and processes such as municipal Councils, ward committees, Integrated Development Forums (IDPs), and so forth. While the institutionalisation of public participation in municipal affairs was widely lauded at the time – and is still seen as a key hallmark of South Africa's local government system – this has had the unfortunate effects of, on the one hand, reinforcing a compliance mentality towards public participation and, on the other hand, restricting public participation to the structures and procedures provided in policy (also referred to as 'invited spaces'), with little appreciation for other forms of social mobilisation and claim making.

Figure 1. Modes of civil society engagement
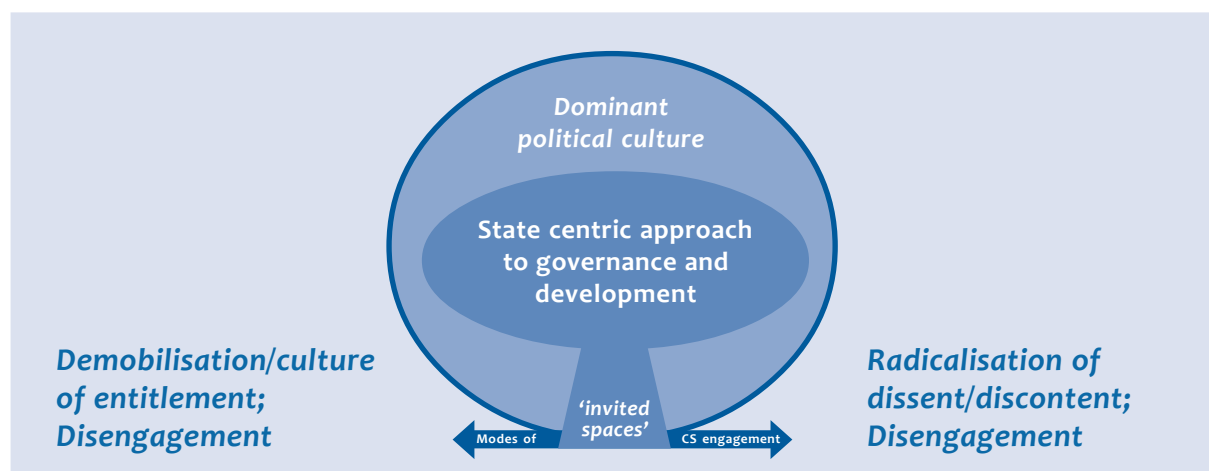
Thirdly, as the dominant political party took over the reins of government, the democratic state and South African citizens alike fell victim to 'the-state-will-provide' mentality. The ANC marketed itself as a 'people's government'. Through its election slogan, the party promised a range of services and its rhetoric minced no words about how the party will deliver and provide 'A Better Life for All' (ANC Election Manifesto 1994). Once in government, this perspective became entrenched in state structures, as reflected in the state-centric approach to governance and development.

Separately and collectively, these three factors have – in some respects ironically – contributed to a disengaged citizenry. Figure 1 summarises this point. On the one hand of the spectrum, disenchantment with the pace of development and the quality of governance and democracy has resulted in demobilisation of communities. Another contributing factor is the culture of entitlement, which is linked to 'the-state-will-provide' mentality. On the other hand of the spectrum, dissatisfaction with the pace of

development and the quality of governance and democracy has fuelled widespread discontent and radicalised dissent. While one could argue that this is a particular mode of political engagement, in many respects it is informed by a conscious decision to disengage from formal governance structures and processes.

3. The status of local democracy in South Africa

There is widespread consensus that 18 years after the dawn of democracy the state of local democracy in particular is cause for concern. South Africa's local government system, which has a developmental mandate well-envisioned in the White Paper on Local Government (1998), is hardly developmental in its approach nor has it been particularly effective in generating and sustaining public participation. This applies to both its planning and decision making processes. Notwithstanding its mandate and close proximity to people and communities, evidence suggests that meaningful inclusive governance in local decision making remains a distant goal. As the

Figure 2: Level of trust in local government vs. community protests, 2004-2010
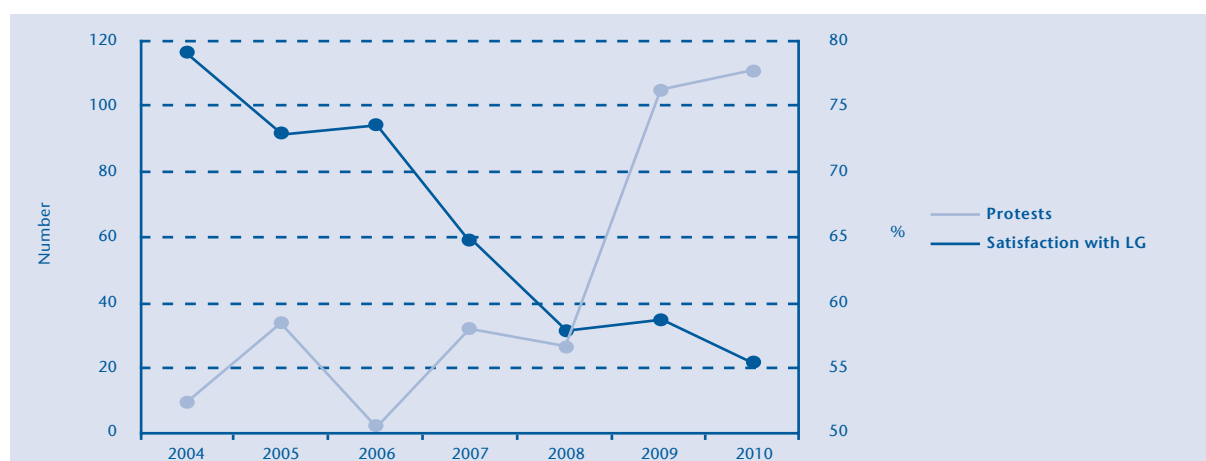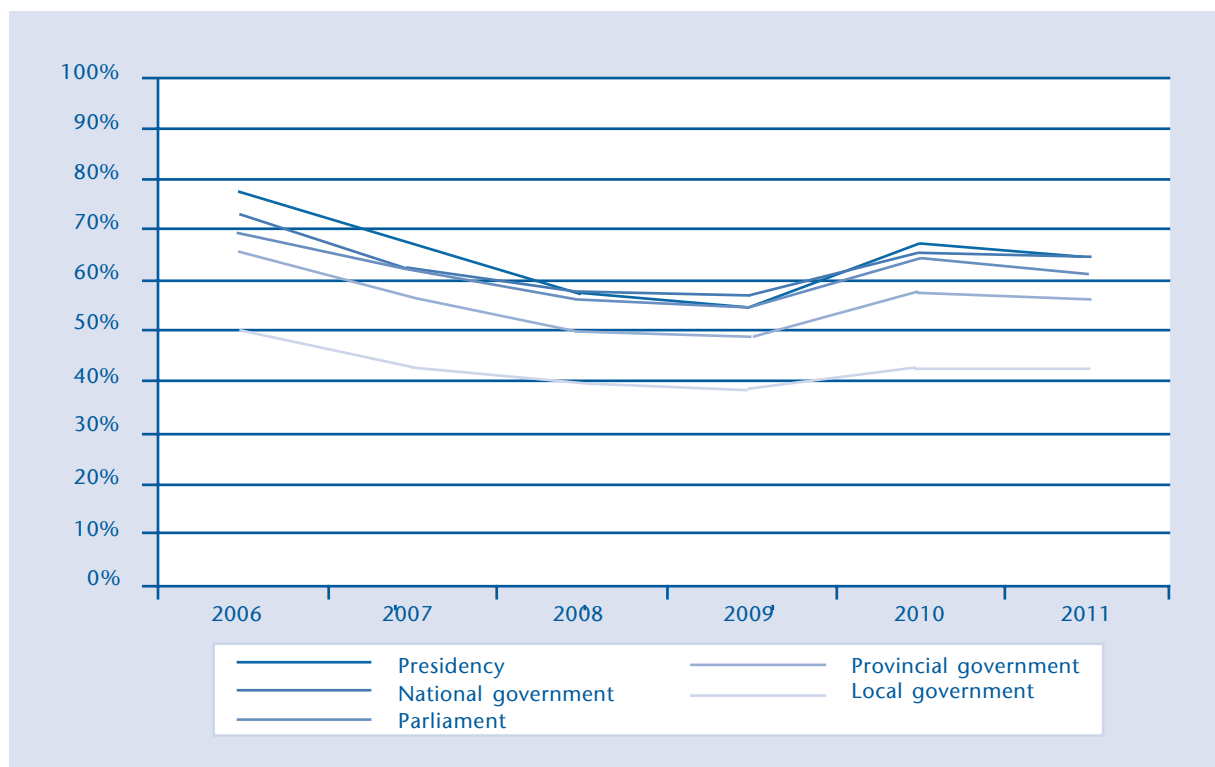

Source: The Presidency (2012:31)

Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN) notes in its 2011 State of Local Governance Publication, themed *Recognising Community Voice and Dissatisfaction*, service delivery concerns, the lack of real influence on local decision making, combined with weak and seemingly unresponsive local leadership, are critical factors that serve to fuel recurring spates of community protests across the country. Similarly, the government's latest assessment contained in the 2012 *Midterm Review of the Priorities of Government* report observes that the level of trust in local government has declined sharply since 1994 (see Figure 2).

The assessment suggests that the escalation of community protests throughout the country correlates with the increasing distrust in local government (The Presidency 2012:30).

While levels of trust in public institutions and elected leadership are declining, even more concerning is the fact that local government ranks lowest compared to other spheres of government (see Figure 3).

The 2009 *State of Local Government in South Africa* report recognises that existing structures and forums for public participation are not functioning well and are highly susceptible to patronage and factionalism (COGTA 2009a). Government's approach to this conundrum is to 'fix' current institutions, most notably the ward committee system. The Presidency, for example, through its 2012 *Midterm review of the priorities of government* report, calls for the finalisation of the legislative and funding framework for improved functioning of ward committees, in

Figure 3: Confidence in government institutions, 2006–2011[1]

Source: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2011)

March 2012. The government further encourages ward committees to develop ward-level service improvement plans (The Presidency 2012:33).[2] The temptation to fix ward committees and other legislated structures and processes for public participation is perhaps understandable, but unless this is embedded within a broader approach to address the wider systematic factors that inhibit community participation in local governance it is likely to replicate the current problems.[3]

While it goes without saying that improvements on the supply side of participatory local governance can be made, there is equally a concern with the demand side, i.e. the extent to which citizens and communities actively engage in claim making on the state, hold the state accountable and initiate their own development processes, without waiting for the state to deliver on their behalf. During the apartheid years and the early years of democracy, organised civil society played a critical role in empowering communities and engaging in civic education. Since then, organisations like IDASA, the Black Sash and the Education and Training Unit (ETU) have been unable to sustain this work due to various reasons, including shifts in donor funding patterns.[4] The sector has also lost some of its key leaders and community activists who took up employment in the new democratic government post 1994.[5] Furthermore, as highlighted before, many civil society organisations retreated from an overtly political role as the ANC and other political organisations were unbanned and the democratic state started to take shape. Where they did claim an independent political space, or were seen to

be doing so, they were brandished by senior government leaders and the governing party as being 'unpatriotic'.[6] While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the current role and state of organised civil society in more detail, the point is that there has not been much sustained work in the area of civic education and social accountability. As a result, communities are by and large unable to act as checks and balances to political power. Communities themselves are, of course, fraught with social and political fissures and tend to be highly fragmented.

It is against this background that the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission 2011) calls for active citizenship – a highly evocative, yet not unambiguous term. Embedded within the concept is the need for local communities to articulate and demand public accountability. Ramphele, on the occasion of the 2nd launch of the Open Society Monitoring Index (2012), challenges citizens to stand up and hold the political power accountable. Ramphele states that "the most stable and progressive democracies have developed and promoted civic education programs that enable citizens to understand what it means to be a citizen and how that translates into rights and responsibilities" (Ramphele 2012:13). She further argues that citizens who are empowered by the knowledge of their ownership of the democracy are unlikely to tolerate the level of unaccountability and impunity in high places which have become part of the country's political culture.

Equally important, and presumably closely intertwined with the notion of active citizenship, is the need to strengthen and support non-

partisan leadership from below. The National Development Plan suggests that municipalities have a critical role to play in ensuring that communities become more organised, are active participants in development and are able to hold municipalities accountable. It states:

'In the long term, every municipality should promote citizenship education and training to strengthen community organisation, planning and project management skills and competencies, perhaps through some kind of "citizenship academy" run by a non-governmental organisation or educational institution' (NPC 2011:258).

4. A Citizenship Academy: A vehicle to strengthen local democracy?

The NPC proposal to establish something akin to a citizenship academy is an intriguing one, which warrants further scrutiny and exploration. The following points are presented by way of infusing a more in-depth and broad-based discussion on this.

1. The first issue to consider is whether municipalities are indeed responsible for civic education and, more especially, have any role to play in strengthening community organisation, as the National Development Plan suggests. Although not articulated as such in relevant policy and legislation, the White Paper on Local Government does suggest a role for municipalities in civic education at least (amongst others by raising awareness of human rights issues and promoting constitutional values and principles, but also more broadly by calling on municipalities

to facilitate access to information for communities). It also calls on municipalities to 'actively seek to empower the most marginalised groups in the community and encourage their participation', which suggests a responsibility in strengthening their capabilities. This is, of course, not the same as strengthening grassroots structures to act at times collaboratively with, at times independently of, at other times possibly in a confrontational manner to, local government.

2. The purpose and role of the citizenship academy needs to be more clearly defined. The National Development Plan suggests that it would provide civic education programs to enable citizens to perform their civic duties (i.e. rights and responsibilities) and hold the state and political representatives accountable. In this regard, it could promote a culture of democracy and human rights, a culture that enables individuals to develop the collective project of building communities. It could seek to strengthen social cohesion, mutual understanding and solidarity. The National Development Plan furthermore suggests that its role is to strengthen community organisation through the provision of training and capacity building. Arguably, this may well involve leadership programmes to strengthen non-partisan leadership from below. Presumably, the intention is to put programmes in place that mobilise communities in a structured and inclusive manner to effectively engage the (local) state and to guide and implement development interventions.

A pertinent question is what, if any, role the citizenship academy has in responding to the critical development problems facing South Africa, namely structural unemployment, systemic poverty, rising inequality and low levels of education (especially amongst youth). With South Africa now rated the 2nd most unequal country in the world after Namibia and a Gini-coefficient of 0.65[7], how does it address economic disparities? And how can such an initiative respond to the challenges faced by women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups within society?

Related to this, how does the proposed citizenship academy relate to the youth development questions facing South Africa, given that youth unemployment is particularly high? According to National Treasury (2011:5):

- "42 per cent of young people under the age of 30 are unemployed compared with less than 17 per cent of adults over 30,
- Only 1 in 8 working age adults under 25 years of age have a job compared with 40 percent in most emerging economies,
- Employment of 18 to 24 year olds has fallen by more than 20 per cent (320 000) since December 2008,
- Unemployed young people tend to be less skilled and inexperienced – almost 86 percent do not have formal further or tertiary education, while two-thirds have never worked".

3. How does the mooted citizenship academy relate to existing structures and processes of public participation, most notably the ward committee system? With both the government and the governing party clearly being so vested in the ward committee system and in its centrality in the participatory governance repertoire, it seems likely that the response to the citizenship academy could be lukewarm at best, as it could be perceived to be in competition to (or undermining of) the ward committee system. Arguably, however, the role of the citizenship academy could be to strengthen the competencies of ordinary citizens, organised communities and ward committee representatives to be more effective and influential in local governance matters. As such, it could be in the interest of ward committees in particular to have well-run citizenship academies in municipalities.

4. Is it necessary to set up another structure/ initiative, or can existing initiatives such as the National Youth Service be remodelled or reinvigorated to take on the proposed roles of the citizenship academy? The National Youth Service is meant to "provide long-term and effective means of reconstructing South African society whilst simultaneously developing the abilities of young people through service and learning" (National Youth Commission 1998). Reconstruction, according to the Green Paper on National Youth Service included "the physical rehabilitation and renovation of community resources, such as buildings and land, as well as providing the more intangible, but perhaps more critical, service of rebuilding communities" (National Youth Commission 1998). Reconstruction also

includes the task of ensuring that young people have a valued and significant role to play within their communities and that they enjoy access to the opportunities they require to make a healthy transition to adulthood. Apart from the National Youth Service, one could also review the role of Community Development Workers, for example, in relation to the roles attributed to the citizenship academy.

5. In terms of the institutional modality, the proposal to keep the citizenship academy at arm's length from the municipality seemingly has merit as it will (hopefully) avoid a situation whereby it gets caught up in either bureaucratic inertia or political wrangling. If the proposed citizenship academy is run by an NGO or educational institution, how can a mutually constructive relationship between the municipality and the citizenship academy be articulated? And what does this mean for resourcing of the initiative; particularly at it is state-initiated?

6. How can this initiative deal with the risk of elite capture? In Ramphele's words, such initiatives should not be the preserve of educated people and their children, but should be "particularly relevant to those trapped in "the subject identity crisis" at the bottom of a humiliating hierarchical social system that seems to confound most political analysts" (Ramphele 2012:14).

7. Linked to the point above, how can one ensure that the citizenship academy does not suffer the same fate as ward committees, which were

meant to be apolitical structures but are now "often merely extensions of political party structures and do not encompass the full range of interests within communities" (Qwabe and Mdaka 2011:71)? Will the 'outsourcing' of the coordination and management of citizenship academies to external parties (e.g. NGOs and/ or educational institutions, as suggested in the National Development Plan) ensure that they are insulated from party-political tussles and encroachment?

8. Finally, it would be premature to deal with the question of content and what programmes the mooted citizenship academy would offer before any of the preceding questions have been resolved. However, a few suggestions are made by way of further concretising the idea of a citizenship academy. The one example is to provide training on social accountability tools as a means to strengthen the capabilities of communities to hold their municipalities and elected representatives to account. Furthermore, it is imperative that the civic education and training provided move beyond procedural issues, i.e. how does a representative community structure or ward committee function, or how to take advantage of IDP hearings to engage in the IDP process. Based on criticism expressed that public participation and development have more often than not become delinked (see GGLN 2012, and particularly Van Donk 2012) from one another, and based on the fact that the idea of a citizenship academy appears in

the chapter dealing with transforming human settlements in the National Development Plan, it is important to highlight the need for interventions to strengthen spatial literacy and budget literacy, so that communities are able to engage in processes of prioritisation and place-bound development.

Whatever shape or form the proposed citizenship academy may take, ultimately its establishment and effective functioning depends on a willingness on the part of both municipalities and political parties to share power with local communities and to be held to account by local communities. The question is whether this is a pipedream or something that can become a reality in South Africa.

The consolidation of political participation and representation presupposes an active, engaged public that is able to claim rights, negotiate priorities and accept negotiated outcomes. South Africa is far from achieving this. Perhaps the citizenship academy is one vehicle to help us achieve it.

Endnotes

1   Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2011). SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey: 2011. Accessed, 06 June 2012.

2   In 2011 the Department of Cooperative Governance initiated a review of the ward committee system, with the intention of publishing a concept paper and/or guidelines in 2012.

3   Isandla Institute's Comment on the National Development Plan, March 2012.

4   Idasa, Black Sash lose millions in funding. Zara Nicholson, IOL news, 2 February 2012.

5   Friedman and McKaiser (2009) however disagree with this analysis. They argue that it is incorrect to claim that civil society has been in decline since the end of Apartheid. They claim that the anti-Apartheid resistance was not conducted by civil society defined as "means by which citizens claim their right to participate in the political decisions which a democratic government makes on their behalf" (Friedman and McKaiser 2009:16). They claim that the mass mobilisations and active citizenship popular in the 1990s was simply a resistance to domination bound to happen where majority of the people are unable to participate in a 'racial oligarchy deliberately designed to exclude them (Friedman and McKaiser 2009:17). To them, civil society actually became possible post-1994 for most South Africans for the first time in the country's history.

6   In his address to the ANC National Conference in 1997, President Nelson Mandela gave a highly critical perspective on NGOs in particular: "We must draw attention to the fact that many of our non-governmental organisations are not in fact NGOs, both because they have no popular base and the actuality that they rely on the domestic and foreign governments, rather than the people, for their material sustenance. As we continue the struggle to ensure a people-driven process of social transformation, we will have to consider the reliability of such NGOs as a vehicle to achieve this objective. The success achieved by many CBOs based on the contribution of "sweat equity" by very poor communities, points to the need for us seriously to consider the matter of the nature of the so-called organs of civil society." Thabo Mbeki's presidency was also considered as very hostile to CSOs.

7   The 39 most unequal countries in the world, 06 October 20011. Article by Lincoln, K.

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Advancing active citizenship:
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Report of the Roundtable
dialogue

Cape Town
21 June 2012

isandla
institute

Programme for the Roundtable dialogue - 21 June 2012

10.00-10.30   **REGISTRATION (Tea & Coffee)**

10.30-11.15   **OPENING:**

Welcome, Mirjam van Donk, Director, Isandla Institute

Presentation of discussion paper: Advancing active citizenship: A Citizenship Academy as a means to strengthen local democracy? Pamela Masiko-Kambala, Policy Researcher, Isandla Institute

11.15-12.30   **SESSION ONE: INTRODUCING A CITIZENSHIP ACADEMY TO ADVANCE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP:**

Karl von Holdt, Commissioner, National Planning Commission and Director, Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP), University of Witwatersrand

Ivor Chipkin, Executive Director, Public Affairs Research Institute

DISCUSSION

12.30-13.30   **LUNCH**

13.30-15.00   **SESSION TWO: A CITIZENSHIP ACADEMY- ITS ROLE AND FUNCTIONING:**

Reckson Luvhengo, Chief Director, Governance and Public Participation, Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs

Edgar Pieterse, Director, African Centre for Cities and Professor, School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics, University of Cape Town

DISCUSSION

15.00-15.45   **SESSION THREE: PERSPECTIVES FROM POLITICAL PARTIES ON A CITIZENSHIP ACADEMY:**

George Boinamo MP, Shadow Deputy Minister: Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Democratic Alliance

DISCUSSION

15.30- 16.00   **WRAP UP AND CLOSE**

About the Roundtable

Isandla Institute hosted a Roundtable dialogue titled "Advancing active citizenship: A Citizenship Academy as a means to strengthen local democracy?" on 21 June 2012. The event deliberated on the notion of active citizenship, an issue also recently picked up by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in its draft National Development Plan (NDP) document released in 2011. The Roundtable dialogue also explored the idea of a citizenship academy mooted by the NPC and whether it is a suitable means to cultivate and support (non-partisan) leadership from below.

Opening

Mirjam van Donk, Director of Isandla Institute, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. She noted that topic of this Roundtable has generated a significant amount of interest, as it seeks to engage with what is perhaps one of the few concrete (albeit not quite concretised) proposals on how to advance the compelling, yet elusive, notion of 'active citizenship'. Van Donk highlighted Isandla Institute's starting point on this matter, which is that the consolidation of political participation and representation presupposes an active, engaged public that is able to claim rights, negotiate priorities and accept negotiated outcomes. She noted that despite rhetoric to the contrary, and despite a progressive legislative framework that has sought to institutionalise public participation in municipal affairs, dominant political cultures and institutional realities in South Africa militate against such an active citizenry.

In fact, she noted that the current political reality in South Africa reveals a paradox. On the one hand, South Africa is a multiparty democracy, with a constitution and policy provisions to protect all human rights, including political rights. The country also boasts one of the most innovative local government systems in the world characterised by decentralisation, local revenue raising capacity and a metropolitan system that allows for integrated planning and redistribution (White Paper on Local Government: 1998). Moreover, the system of local government promotes a variety of participatory mechanisms and procedures to render planning and budgeting subject to community input and oversight. At the same time, however, evidence suggests that the political system is still immature, and that meaningful inclusive governance remains a distant goal.

She argued that the recurring spates of community protests across the country have their roots in service delivery concerns, the lack of real influence on local decision making, and weak and seemingly unresponsive local leadership. She also noted that the level of trust in local government has declined sharply since 1994 and ranks lower than any other spheres of government. She argued that much of the blame for this malaise has been put on municipal administrations, elected representatives, the design of the local government system, political parties and, occasionally, communities. While noting that there is probably some truth in all of these perspectives, she pointed however that the discussion of the day is not meant to find fault or attribute blame; but intends to focus on workable strategies to

reinvigorate community activism, revitalise municipalities (which by definition includes the political structure, the administration and local communities) and reconstitute relationships between the electorate and the local state.

In closing, van Donk called on the participants to conduct an in-depth analysis of this concrete proposal of the establishment of citizenship academies by municipalities to provide civic education and strengthen community organisation which is mooted by the NPC.

Pamela Masiko-Kambala, Policy Researcher in Isandla Institute's Politics of Local Governance Project then presented Isandla Institute's discussion paper titled "Advancing active citizenship: A Citizenship Academy as a means to strengthen local democracy?" (See part A of this report or www.isandla.org.za).

Introducing a Citizenship Academy to advance active citizenship

The discussion in session one was led by Karl von Holdt, Member of the National Planning Commission and Director of Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) based at University of Witwatersrand and Ivor Chipkin, Executive Director of Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).

Von Holdt's main argument was that South Africa has very active citizens contrary to the belief that citizens are passive and demobilised by the state processes. However, he noted that citizens are active in a manner that we do not approve of. According to him, this feeds into the anxiety of the elite who usually do not approve of the way citizens act. In this regard, he

cautioned against what he regarded as an emerging narrative post 1994 which seeks to categorise "good" vs. "bad" citizens – '"good citizens" in this case being those that work through formal processes (electoral, bureaucratic, judicial) to influence events while "bad citizens" are those that usually engage in violent, destructive protests. Von Holdt argued that we should reject this form of characterisation and also begin to dissect the reasons why the so-called bad citizens engage in protest marches.

He argued that this simplistic categorisation of citizens was invalidated through the research work conducted by the Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) in various communities in the country. Through this work, they have come to understand that violence is a form of communication. He argued for example that vigilante mobs were in many instances formed by active citizens who have been failed by organs of the state. He narrated a particular experience where members of the Community Policing Forums have been unable to conduct their work effectively due to Police officials in the area not being responsive to their initiatives to fight crime in their communities. He questioned whether residents resorting to illegal methods, vigilante mobs as in this case, do not in fact engage in a form of lively engagement with the state driven by desperation. Von Holdt further claimed that citizens cannot be divorced from the state and therefore argued that "the state gets the citizens it deserves". The state has to provide practical means for people to behave differently. The big question for him was whether the state has the capability to generate this.

Chipkin started by acknowledging that there is a general concern with weaknesses and corruption in government. He argued however that the performance of government is uneven; it has been both good and bad. He argued that we need to qualify the notion of government failure. The symbolic function of a dominant party as a bearer of Apartheid resistance and the manner in which people with political credentials but no capacity or skills were deployed to government have to be accounted for in the analysis. He argued that the failure of the public sector also has a lot do with the organisational dynamics of the institution. The model, he argued, was borrowed from the private sector which is a powerful and relatively autonomous cluster of institutions led by dynamic leaders. Less therefore is reflected about how the structure of public service is preventing overall success as the organisational structure is mismatched to actual talent available, but also possibly mismatched to steady, consistent results. He added that the fact that government departments continuously poach qualified staff members from each other makes matters worse.

Chipkin further argued that there is also a widespread failure of departments to work effectively across institutional boundaries, a problem which finds a wider echo in the ways that red-tape, mandates and elaborate oversight mechanisms can frustrate delivery even where budgets and personnel are in place. In essence, he argued that the crisis in service delivery is largely due to the institutional and organisational dynamics of the public sector in its relationship to citizens. In ending his presentation, he called

for citizens to continuously find measures to engage with government in order to help build a strong institution of government.

The two inputs by the speakers were followed by a lively discussion session. Participants equally cautioned against the temptation to create a binary between "active" and "passive" or "good" and "bad" citizens. Inputs from participants also affirmed the views that most citizens usually have no other option but to resort to the streets (and disorder) in order to capture the attention of the state. Protest as a tool, it was argued, is often used as the last resort by many communities when the state institutions are unresponsive to their plight. While torching a building (school, clinic, etc) that essentially belong to citizens cannot be justifiable, how does one expect citizens who are devalued by the state to behave any better?

It was also pointed out that the idea of a Citizenship Academy presumes that the problem is with citizens and not the state. This is problematic in that it suggests that one must 'retreat from society' and go and learn about the being an active citizen in some academy. Other participants welcomed the idea of the establishment of a Citizenship Academy and argued that only innovative measures like this have a potential to lead to the ideal. The Academy also has to be about sharing experiences and learning's from other state-led community initiatives (e.g. CWPs, EPWC, etc) and community led initiatives (e.g. TAC). It should include government officials, activists, communities, civil society organisations, etc. in order to rebuild the state together with communities. There was equally a strong view that civic education has to

be widespread; it should be included in school curriculum and should enrich each person in the country.

A Citizenship Academy- its role and functioning

Reckson Luvhengo, Chief Director: Governance and Public participation, Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs and Edgar Pieterse, Director, African Centre for Cities and Professor in the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at the University of Cape Town led the discussion in the afternoon session. Luvhengo commented that the proposed Civic Academy is to be located at the local level, yet all spheres of government are required to facilitate public participation. He admitted that government currently lacks a public participation strategy. Luvhengo stated that, despite its shortcomings, the ward committee system is the cornerstone of public participation in the country. In his view, it made sense to refine existing institutional arrangements, rather than creating new ones. He confirmed that government (COGTA) is currently looking at improving the functioning of ward committees. A key decision taken to depoliticise this structure in the future is that the ward Councillor will no longer be the Chairperson of the Ward Committee but an ex-officio member of the committee. To strengthen the work of the committee further, a stipend of R500.00 per month will be paid to ward committee members for 'out-of-pocket expenses' to cover transport and communications costs for example. The payment of the stipend will commence in July 2012 and further information

on this is found in the National Ward Funding Framework document.

Luvhengo also pointed that ward committees are not the only mechanism to channel public participation although it is the only one linked to formal processes. He talked in great detail about the Community Works Programme (CWP), a new initiative managed by COGTA but implemented by Non-Profit Organisations. The CWP aims to cushion destitute community members unable to secure employment elsewhere by paying them R65.00 a day for labour conducted in the community for no more than 2 days a week. The form of work to be done is determined by the community. This initiative will empower communities to make decisions and prioritise their needs.

Pieterse's presentation basically sketched the potential role and functioning of a Citizenship Academy in the country. As a start, he argued that there is always an assumption that there is a need for an intermediary between the state and civil society organisations as these act as separate entities. He argued that the academy could play the role of an interface between the state and civil society. This according to him will go in line with the proposal of the NPC that suggests that the Citizenship Academy should be based in every municipality and run by a non-governmental organisation or educational institution.

He spelt out in detail what the purpose and role of a Citizenship Academy could be, what competencies and capabilities it would enhance, and how it would function. For example, he argued that it could equip grassroots activists to:

- Conduct neighbourhood visioning and planning (aggregator function)
- Prioritise and leverage investments to operationalise the plan
- Maintain, improve and grow neighbourhood assets
- Ensure accountability (vertically and horizontal)

While the term 'academy' may conjure up a particular image of an educational institution, in Pieterse's conceptualisation it would be much more than that, namely a vehicle to bring about a community of practice to engage in planning, priority setting, implementation and monitoring across different scales and sectors. He argued therefore that it could foster social innovation by providing a space for shared learning especially for state actors to gain better understanding of the systemic drivers of local settlement in the city. It could also enhance practical organisational skills (mobilisation, management of CWP and democratic accountability) and prioritisation skills (negotiate priorities to ensure livelihood and sustainability of the neighbourhood).

Pieterse pointed out that the state's conception of the 'local' can refer to the individual (e.g. access to justice, human rights entitlements, employment and social security), a household (provision of basic services, housing, etc) and the community (public infrastructure and services). In other words, the state sees 'the local' in different ways. He argued that the ward level is not the appropriate level to facilitate area-based planning, but that there is a need to break up or regard communities as basic units and/or neighbourhoods that are smaller than the

current geographic boundaries of wards. In concluding, he noted that the citizenship academy should borrow the best characteristics of the Community Work Programme (leadership training closely coupled with funding to create jobs and community controlled spending of those resources), in order to build the core governance skills of local activists as well as consolidate oversight and monitoring of the government.

After the presentations, the floor was opened for further discussions. Participants welcomed Pieterse's presentation, noting that it brought the important 'urban' question to the fore. It was argued that this issue often eludes government and as a result, government is unable to conduct proper urban planning. The discussion also focused on how possible would it be for the country to move from ward based planning to neighbourhood based planning in light of government's preoccupations with fixing ward committees as there are political interests vested in these. The electoral system was also brought up with participants arguing that it would be conducive to connect it to the neighbourhood connections (rather than wards).

The discussion reflected on how government through COGTA has reached a 'policy stalemate' as it continues to fix and re-fix current participatory structures but despite this, the initiatives fail to address the reality on the ground. A comment was made that Roundtables such as this one hosted by Isandla Institute are useful platforms and offer a rare opportunity for government officials to be part of innovative thinking and learning taking place outside government institutions.

Perspectives from political parties on a Citizenship Academy

The Roundtable dialogues usually conclude with a panel of political parties (more often than not the ANC and the DA as the two leading political parties) to allow them an opportunity to formally comment on the day's proceedings. The ANC sent its apologies and was unable to send a representative due to the impending National Policy Conference and a number of Provincial Congresses or Provincial General Councils. As a result, National Executive Members of the party, especially those who are members of the party's Legislature & Governance Sub-Committee were preoccupied with these internal processes while others were finalising preparations for the National Policy Conference.

The Democratic Alliance was represented by George Boinamo MP, Shadow Deputy Minister: Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs. Boinamo welcomed and endorsed the proposal of a Citizenship Academy on behalf of his party. He suggested that the academy should inculcate an understanding of citizenship and also promote reconciliation. In his concluding comments, he thanked Isandla Institute for hosting such an event which has afforded him the opportunity to be part of and deliberate on innovate ideas aimed at strengthening the quality of public participation in the country.

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