



IOPD members' common position on the Post-2015 development agenda

The importance of public participation and democratic impetus under the Post-2015 development framework

The IOPD's members congratulate civil society and the international bodies for their discussions on development goals, for both the form and content of these discussions. Keen to make our contribution towards improving this framework and bringing on board the IOPD's perspective, whose aim is to help to spread participatory democracy, understood as public involvement in governance, by restoring the public's confidence in democratic institutions and their political representatives, we shall be reflecting on the following issues:

- **Participatory democracy**

Public participation is one of the basic cornerstones of democracy; indeed, when it comes to democratic legitimacy and satisfaction levels, participatory experiences usually yield highly positive results. Public participation can be a directly citizen event or a mixture through intermediaries, such as associations or other bodies.

Participatory democracy offers citizens an opportunity to participate, by giving opinions, debating or voting on decisions that affect their daily lives. It therefore allows citizens' basic needs to be prioritised.

There can be no social, economic and environmental development without involvement from the whole of society in the decision-making process. A sustainable world is possible through awareness among the individuals making up businesses, the public sector and civil society. Collaboration between the various sectors will strengthen the social fabric we need for achieving wellbeing in public life.

That means **representative democracy, far from being sufficient on its own, needs to be complemented by public participation.** It is the people who know best what their concerns and interests are and that is why they must be able to have their say in governance and even make joint decisions, depending on their community interests and views. Without public participation it will be the interests of the most powerful economic minorities that prevail.

- **Transparency and participation**



We understand that transparency and participation are two inseparable concepts. Participation makes no sense unless governments are transparent and open up their data and information to public management, because citizens cannot give opinions or participate without full knowledge of the issue.

And open data and transparency are not very interesting on their own, only if they go hand in hand with the public's ability to influence decision-making and policies so they might change or improve the current situation.

We are therefore committed to ensuring public authorities are transparent and open up their data, so they can offer a form of public participation that is truly effective and so the two concepts (transparency and participation) are coordinated across the board by various government departments.

- **Local decentralisation**

It is on the local level that development challenges are being detected. Their proximity to citizens makes their responses better adapted to the people's needs and issues. That is why it is important for international bodies and cooperation agencies to help to carry out a process of political decentralisation in the field of development. Central governments lack this capacity for dialogue that all the parties involved in local governments have.

Local approaches are essential in development policies, as their aims and scope need to be exhaustively monitored. Aims differ according to the territory in question, so local autonomy in development is an issue that needs to be dealt with. Even so, we need to free this decentralisation process of red tape, because the goal is for help, not interference, from international bodies and cooperation agencies in making things faster and better.

- **Communication and internalisation**

People need to be given appropriate information on all the participatory mechanisms and how they work. A local authority can have ambitious mechanisms and participatory practices, but if these are unknown to the public they are not going to use them and they will lose their effectiveness. That is why we believe it is very important to ensure people are kept informed, educated and made aware of the participatory mechanisms, and is essential for the participatory processes' success.

By "internalising" we mean the need for government politicians and civil servants to take on board and opt for participation as a means to better government rather than a rival or challenge to their authority.



- **Using new information and communication technologies (ICTs)**

The social and political changes being brought about through new communication technologies such as the internet, smartphones and all their associated applications must be taken into account in development goals and may provide a very useful tool for participatory processes. It is thanks to these technologies that information can be more easily shared (open data) and better communicated, and discussions established without the need for travel or numerous meetings that may complicate the participatory processes.

But there is still plenty to study and learn in this field to achieve better results.

- **The role of participatory budgeting**

Participatory budgeting allows us to discover the public's priorities while citizen participation and awareness spread. It is a tool that helps to ensure transparency, joint responsibility, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in the administration of public resources.

Participatory budgeting may be regarded as an educational process to achieve larger public participation in the future. It is aimed at creating governments that provide cooperation spaces between citizens, civil society organisations and governments, so that the most important issues are negotiable.

Even so, participatory budgeting is not an easy process to implement in any context and, what is more, it is sometimes advisable to have experts involved, to verify its proper implementation.

- **Appraisal**

Like any public policy, public participation policies need to be correctly and periodically appraised so that any faults and mistakes can be spotted during their implementation and they can be made more effective.

We recommend participatory practices are appraised, as a way of achieving greater impact on community social, economic and environmental development.

At the IOPD we therefore propose reflection on the need to support **the independence of local governments** through effective decentralising processes. There is also a need for these local



governments to open up to **governance by their citizens**. National and international bodies must therefore promote public participation through legislation, the distribution of resources, the training of professionals and political support.

We also propose that all cooperation development projects should always include **discussion and joint-decision processes** with the people concerned, so that the project helps to empower people, as well as improving their material living conditions.

Key ideas:

- Local democracy must include elements of participatory democracy.
- Citizens are the best players for detecting their own basic needs.
- Bottom-up participation is, therefore, a good strategy for achieving economic and social development.
- Citizens need to have information and access to basic data on their community before they can participate.
- Local governments are the closest to the people, so decentralising political power and financial resources must be carried out down to this level of authority.
- Besides spreading and communicating participatory processes among the population, politicians and civil servants must also believe in these policies if they are to be successful.
- Public participation is not just a means for improving governance but also an end in itself: improving the quality of democracy.