# **Topic: Listening to Citizens. Local Democracy at the Centre of Governance**

# *Transcription from Pauline Sangham*

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**Date** : Thursday, 14 November 2019

**Time** : 15:00 – 16.30pm

**Venue** : 3 B

Participants : **International IDEA, City of Johannesburg, City of Barcelona**

**Speakers : Alberto Fernández Gibaja,** International IDEA Presentation.

**Kate Joseph**, research specialist in Strategy & Relations in the City of Johannesburg, South Africa

**Adrià Duarte** is the coordinator of the IOPD Technical Secretariat

**José Manuel Ribeiro**, is the mayor of Valongo, Portugal

**Imen Ouardani**, deputy mayor of Sousse (FR)

The opening of this session and first presentation was done by Adrià Duarte from OIDP who outlined the objectives of the session which is

· To discuss in depth, the different experiences and approaches to include citizens in the measurement and improvement of local democracy, especially from the point of view of local officials. The main deliverables and/or impact of the session is to add and support local officials and institutions working towards improving local democracy with a better understanding and experiences.

· Link to the 2030 Agenda implementation

- SDGs 11 and 16 have a direct connection with the activation of citizen participation.

- SDG 11.3 By 2030, increase inclusive and sustainable urbanization and the capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable planning and management of human settlements in all countries.

- SDG 16.7 Ensure adoption at all levels of inclusive, participatory and representative decisions that meet the needs.

*The session was divided in two interrelated parts.*

The first part of the session will focus on understanding and discussing the idea of local democracy and the role citizens and governments have in it. The session will start with a presentation by OIDP on the principles of Local Democracy, followed by a presentation of International IDEA focusing on how to measure and assess democracy at the local level, and the role of citizens in such process. Following these two presentations, the City of Johannesburg will present their experience on using surveys to include citizens in local democracy.

The second part of the session will focus on a panel with the participation of 3 elected local officials that will demonstrate their point of view and experience in different methods to measure assess and improve local democracy with the involvement of citizens.

The panel discussion will be concluded with an open debate between the panellist and the public around the key questions exposed.

**Kate Joseph**, research specialist in Strategy & Relations in the City of Johannesburg, South Africa said that building and giving practical examples enhance Local development and customer satisfaction.

She said you can do this by asking the following 3 questions:

* *How can local government listen to citizens?*
* *How can local government respond to citizens?*
* *How can local government involve citizens?*

She indicated that there are a whole lot of tools like freedom of the press etc. at the centre of governance and planning. Kate said listening to citizens is African example of Good deliberation - ability both to speak and to be heard and raise these concerns as well as suggestions to local governments. Communities on the ground speak better. She said that surveys are the best way to give good customer satisfaction, and government needs to do this with their citizens in order to understand the needs in their communities, particularly in service delivery asking how citizens feel, they must know, so they can improve on this correctly and timeously.

*Why surveys?* Because there are many benefits to this tool like:

Opportunities for resident input. Improved awareness and active citizenship. Opportunities for feedback to residents, strengthened stakeholder relationships, Improvement in service delivery, assessment of local government performance, allows local governments to identify and respond to key needs and priority areas and it is Beneficial for developmental goal setting agendas.

City of Johannesburg experience was based on community surveys methodology. Since 2005 the City of Johannesburg has conducted annual satisfaction surveys among residents. There are 5.5 million people living in the city of Johannesburg and it is growing at a rapid rate with migration of workers into the city. Representative sample of households based on the number of households per geographic region in the city. Face-to-face in-depth interviews with people will be very effective it will be working on the ground & convenient for residents and cover topics such as: Access to services, satisfaction levels, and suggestions/ views of residents. We need to looks into specific types of service delivery, expectations and geography. The management of city image is just a perception out there, we need to let our citizens know the challenges we face and get them to be part of the process as well so they know and understand the challenges

The city of Johannesburg experience should be citizens at the centre of local democracy because they are a rich source of data. This allows the City to look at satisfaction findings within a longitudinal context to help drive improvements within local service delivery and assessing and enhancing customer satisfaction which is an important tool for a responsive government.

They are not only opinions, but informed by citizens who use specific services. The evidence is inherently democratic, representing the perspective of residents. This is opportunities for resident input and feedback more frequently than 5-year electoral term.

Complimentary to public participation and integrated community based planning – reaches a wider audience and offers robust qualitative data.

We need to be Responding to citizens Impact, Achievements, Basic services. Because of this 6 336 new public lights installed. 198.6 km of water pipes replaced reducing pipe bursts. 884.05 lane km of roads resurfaced. 9 978 households in informal settlements electrified.

With Housing, 7 857 social housing units were developed. On the economic sector, 7 opportunity Centres to support and equip young job seekers was established. On the health, of 80 clinics, 27 clinics with extended operating hours, with 10 functional mobile clinics will be rolled in 2019/2020.

Socially, 11 libraries have extended hours.

Kate asked the following, *are the investments we are making into key service delivery areas making an impact on the lives of our residents?* Sometimes despite responsiveness, perceptions can be stubborn and difficult to shift. In such cases, surveys can help gauge and improve government-citizen communications.

Surveys she said an awareness raising component, helping to inform deliberative public knowledge and perceptions because Informed public knowledge can lead to improved perceptions, changing the image of a city.

The benefits of this tool:

The IDP mobile application, the Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa and the Umuganda community participation in Uganda

Putting citizens at the centre of governance is crucial because the aim of the surveys is to guide the City’s decision making ability and feed into planning and budgeting process, supporting evidence-based policy making and governance. Public transparency improves accountability of local government.

Citizens are shaping Citizens shaping local democracy & governance. Snapshot of status quo & a gauge of how communities feel the City is performing.

Medium-term horizon enhances responsiveness and accountability of local government.

Long-term horizon feeds data informs research and situational analysis into and guiding local governments’ long-term strategy Johannesburg 2040.

She ended on this point that Local democracy at the centre of Governance and that listening through survey will help tremendously, responding will Identify immediate interventions, and enhance communication to citizens. Involve them for better Outputs (data) because outputs become inputs.

It is the citizen’s voices help shape programme decisions, budget allocation and strategic agenda for their city.

**José Manuel Ribeiro**, is the *mayor of Valongo, Portugal*

Local democracy is not national but proximity Democracy and only his experience will he share and, because it is temporary. The political citizens with power, don’t realise that it is a temporary post. The power to influence and to inspire, to encourage minds, is a huge thing. It is how you use it to do this. And to do this you got to share power with people who will make you look strong in your decisions and that is your fellow citizens and communities. Engage them; power to debate and have outcomes will only enhance your role as a success in local government.

Democracy is a system of proximity, all the dictators they love to be elected, Local government at local levels do not believe in the power of debates from fellow communities and citizens. The mayor has got to be tolerant, in harmony with the communities and cities they govern. As the mayor of Portugal I believe in the power of the citizens. You don’t need lots of money; it is not in the money only but in the process of how you engage people, listening to their needs and wants

Cities have lots of money - 50% of the projects are on paper, the other 50% should come from the people of the cities.

When you debate he said, you become transparent and you engage people. Without analytical accounting how can you talk about spending? Citizen often you to talk with real number, knowing the really how the money is being spent.

In Portugal with town council we have the opportunity to turn all these cities into democracy .

We have everything and opportunity to contact and connect with people. If we are transforming something we take it to schools to engage people. Who said Democracy is easy, it is not to have a Democratic system, you have got to fight a lot if we go deep, we will see Portugal’s Democracy in 1976, 50 years later and we are still fight to improve democracy. We have had always people trying to bring down democracy, nowadays we see proximity problems of the elite and power sharing, we strongly believe in Democracy that means that it is going to have challenges.

**José Manuel Ribeiro**, mayor of Valongo, Portugal said the majority of big things people ask a lot about things around the city. They want a good city, they want to know how we spend the local budget, what is going on, what is going to happen and they always want the opportunities to contribute to better change in the cities. He closed by saying that even though he has only been the Mayor for just 6 years he still has limitations and mandates himself. It is not easy but things can be done differently to expect better results. Thank You

**Imen Ouardani,** *deputy mayor of Sousse (Tunisia)*

**Francisco Salado,** *President of Malaga, Province South of Spain, which has 48 000 people metropolitan*

He said he agrees with fellow Mayor from Portugal. People lose trust in their government and this is a dangerous breeding ground in moderate politics.

We have to deal with corruption cases. He emphasised that citizens need to know what we spend the budget on and what tax goes towards the cities and what is happening and how they can get involved to become inclusive. He said just having the agenda is important to share and what we are doing with citizen’s monies. Proposing generic figures never really feels like they are being told the truth. Need to have a yearly vote on things not wait every four years to vote or to make decisions for the city. Ask citizens what kind of city they like to live in. Get the general consensus include them in projects that have already been rolled out, “Who am I to decide how my city looks when I am only in my position on a temporary basis. It is the citizens that live there long, some even die in the same cities they were born. I don’t have to decide what our seaside looks like, ask the citizens, let it be a participatory process.

**Alberto Fernandez Gibaja,** *International IDEA Presentation*.

Current or existing democracy today is post 1975. Democracy is always a challenge we see this in Bukino Faso, Malaysia, Sudan, although Democracy works and is gaining popularity. Should be of massive concern for the local level is not going to work. Democratic erosion

Democratic are not being protected. Less press freedom these type of thing.

There are two models that has worked for us, the soft model and the hard model.

Citizens are not used to being involved in such decisions so start becoming inclusive. A very good way is to use media to do this for the results to be clear and transparent. Use national identity, maybe have something on a billboard encouraging people to get involved in the process, it is the most democratic thing to do, that is getting people involved in the decision making of cities. Citizens like to talk so by telling them what is going on and what is going to be happening, they feel inclusive and will share what they think will work for the city better than those governments who learn from experience that certain thing is not working in this space. Always be transparent. We have to achieve trust from our citizens they maybe don’t properly understand the figures sent out. Citizens do not see the big picture.

We use cartoons strategy to be creative, kids also understand, to give information deep real information –breakdown. Lot of the time government doesn’t give all information or just part information. Explain the way we use words. Government communicate the wrong way, people lost but don’t understand afraid of debate. Democracy system is decision for all. Cannot be afraid of system of decision because of fear.

The problem of functional literacy -they have difficulties in understanding general things. Whenever we have problems –people want help to solve problem it so gives people the information.

Local experience is one of the most incredible as it encourages creativity and to innovate Youth budget very important must be spent well. Youth are our future.

Youth projects in schools, projects designed with young and old people, forced to communicate energy of youth expertise of the elder politicians is often winning formula for successful campaigns

So much information, so many meetings, rather calls for stakeholders, let them get involved.

*The session ended with a discussion on various questions put to the panel of speakers*

Session ended at 5.00pm