

Not waiting for Jackie O: lessons for public participation advocacy in South Africa



Laurence Piper¹

ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of an important event, namely, the Pioneers of Participation workshop held in November 2009 in Cape Town, for public participation advocacy in South Africa. By tracing the shifting consciousness of one participant, a key provincial official (Jackie O whose name has been changed), the article shows both how such events can change mindsets to create better informed, better inspired and more connected advocates for public participation, and that this transformation is not necessarily permanent. Hence, it is argued that events like the Pioneers workshop are best located in a broader advocacy strategy appropriate to the particular context of state-society relations. In South Africa's case it is argued that this strategy ought to focus on the twin objectives of policy reform – both to make formal participatory spaces more inclusive, democratic and empowered and to support the emergence of independent, popularly rooted yet technically competent civil society formations that are capable of mediating both popular needs and the policy system. How these objectives ought to be realised is an open question, but it is clear that events like the Pioneers workshop can be a galvanising and mindset changing resource in this broader strategy.

Keywords: advocacy, public participation, local governance, officials, mindsets, civil society

1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, over 40 local government practitioners from seven African countries with track records as 'pioneers' of public participation attended the Pioneers of Participation workshop held in Cape Town to share experiences, to network, to be inspired and to impart ideas about how to deepen their future practice. An event inspired by an international workshop held in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2007 called 'Champions of Participation', the Pioneers workshop sought to reproduce the information, energy and ideas that the Champions generated – and it appeared to work. By the end of the workshop most participants reported feeling better informed, more inspired and better networked to continue and to improve their work. However, how much difference can this kind of event make? Is this really the best way of taking forward the case for public participation in South Africa?

These questions are inspired by the example of one of the participants, a provincial government official called Jackie O, who is responsible for public participation in one of South Africa's nine provinces. At the start of the Pioneers workshop, Jackie O seemed somewhat aloof, reluctant to engage, and when she did her behaviour was somewhat defensive and technocratic. By the end of the workshop, she was publicly making the case for the reform of attitudes in the public service before one of her superiors. Yet, despite a clear shift in attitude towards endorsing public participation and the rights of citizens, when engaged a few months later, Jackie O appeared to have reverted to her old approach.

Based on the insights offered by the experience with Jackie O, this article makes the case that events like the Pioneers workshop, which are effective in changing people's mindsets if well run, need to be part of a larger advocacy process for public participation in South Africa, and indeed everywhere that they are pursued. Furthermore, in South Africa's case, this larger advocacy process should be directed towards two critical goals, namely: the policy reform of the invited spaces of local governance to make them more inclusive and empowered spaces, and the emergence of popularly rooted social movements and/or civil society formations that also have the technical capacity to engage the policy sphere. Only by both opening the appropriate kind of participatory spaces and enabling appropriate forms of social mobilisation into these spaces will public participation become meaningful in South Africa. This is what it means to 'work both sides of the local governance equation' in a local context.

This article begins by outlining the parlous condition of local state-society relations in South Africa, despite formal institutions for public participation, before moving on to describe and assess the Pioneers workshop. Drawing on the story of the shifting consciousness of Jackie O, the article makes the case for the importance of linking such events to a larger advocacy strategy.

2 SERVICE DELIVERY, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, AND CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Over the past ten years in South Africa, the number of public protests against poor local governance, and especially poor service delivery, has risen dramatically. Indeed, according to Omar (2006), between 1997 and 2005, the number of peaceful protests rose from 5 130 to 9 230. Over the same period, the number of violent protests rose from 880 to 932. Most read this as frustration with the lack of development in poor communities. Also remarkable is the fact that protests have increased despite the introduction of 'invited spaces' for communities to engage local government since 2000. These 'invited spaces' (the ward committee system and requirements for public consultation around the annual budget, development planning and the like) appear to have done little or nothing to reduce protest or improve service delivery.

Notably, despite a commitment to 'participatory democracy' in the constitution, the idea of public participation is not a South African innovation, but follows trends across much of the world, and especially the global South. Perhaps the two most famous examples of new forms of public participation are the participatory budgeting processes of the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, and the village level participatory development planning processes of the Kerala province of India. Notably though, in recent years almost every democratic country in the world, regardless of

its economic development or democratic robustness, has witnessed attempts to enhance public participation in governance, especially local governance.

The reasons for this are many and complex, and can be traced to new theories and practices of development (World Bank, 1996); new theories and practices of democracy (Cohen, 2002; Habermas, 2002) and democratisation (Mattes, 2002); and at the intersection of all of these, new theories and practices of citizenship (Cornwall, 2002). Gaventa (2006) makes the point that scholars of democracy are faced with a paradoxical situation of competing narratives of democratic triumph and deficit. On the one hand, democracy is being celebrated as the hegemonic form of global governance, with 120 of 192 states formally democratic, although only 85 are recognised as full democracies. On the other hand (Gaventa, 2006: 7), there is ‘the sense that democracy is in crisis, faced by a series of democratic deficits which are calling its very vitality and meaning into question’.

Gaventa (2006) himself argues that both views are correct in that they mean different things by democracy. Thus, (Gaventa, 2006:08) ‘while the institutional forms and procedures of democracy increasingly may be in place, the critical challenge now is how to deepen their inclusiveness and substance, especially in terms of how citizens engage within democratic spaces to create more just and equitable states and societies’. Key here is how systematically marginalised groups, especially poor people, are better able to access the formal decision-making processes of governance. Following Cornwall (2002:17), these new participatory institutions and practices can be termed the ‘invited spaces’ of participatory local governance. These invited spaces would include Hendricks’ (2006:486) ‘micro deliberative structures’ and Fung and Wrights’ (2001:5) ‘empowered deliberative democratic structures’. Examples are the participatory city budgeting in Porto Alegre; functionally specific neighbourhood councils in Chicago, the United States (US); village governance in Kerala, India; and citizen’s juries in the UK.

Initiated by the local state, invited spaces typically look to draw local communities into a process of consultation, deliberation and sometimes joint decision-making on key local issues. Perhaps just as important in understanding this form of state-society relation is popular mobilisation led ‘from below’ by civil society or local communities. Hence Cornwall (2002:17) contrasts the ‘invited spaces’ created ‘from above’ by the state with ‘organic spaces’ created ‘from below’ by those outside the state. The latter include spaces created from popular mobilisation, as well as spaces in which ‘like-minded people join together in common pursuits’ (Ibid:17). Holston and Appadurai (1999) describe the emergence of a right-based citizenship amongst the urban poor marginalised by neo-liberal governance, and mobilised through social movements, which looks to transform social relations from the ground up. Mirafteb and Wills (2006) paint a picture of oppositional ‘invented’ spaces opposing ‘invited’ spaces in the South Africa, but also elsewhere in the world, and also for the same reason, the globalisation of neo-liberal economic policy.

In South Africa’s case, as noted above, the innovation of ‘invited spaces’ has come in the form of requirements for public participation which are established in principle in the constitution and then established in law as ‘participatory governance’ for local government. At heart these requirements centre on the institution of ward committees, and requirements for public participation in the budget, development planning, performance management and related processes (see Barichievu et al., 2005). As noted above, these institutions do not seem to be

stemming the tide of popular protest not least, as argued elsewhere (Piper & Nadvi, 2010), because they tend to be poorly designed in a number of ways, but principally through being disempowered and therefore meaningless spaces, and so by-passed by real decision-making.

In this context, politicians and officials tend to take divergent, yet equally problematic approaches to public participation. Politicians are quick to hijack ward committees – and to some extent *izimbizo* – to their own more particular political ends (Piper & Deacon, 2008), whereas most officials have approached public participation issues with either disinterest or a technocratic gaze (Piper & Nadvi, 2010). In different ways, both actors have undermined the limited potential dividend offered by the new ‘invited spaces’. In addition to poor institutional design, Piper and Nadvi (2010) also argue that another key challenge facing meaningful public participation in South Africa is the relative weakness of civil society and especially social movements in relation to political parties.

Without independent, popularly rooted, and yet also technically capable organisations able to mediate popular demands and the technical and representation demands of the policy system, citizen dissatisfaction and elite rule are unable to articulate meaningfully and constructively. A clear example of this mediatory leadership, and the impact it can have on formal policy processes, was the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). However, TAC is the exception rather than the rule. In South Africa, state-society relations are characterised mostly by a lack of substantive and constructive engagement that effectively addresses popular needs. The outcome of this context of the poor design of ‘invited spaces’, and a paucity of effective ‘invented spaces’, is one where civil society tends to be ‘enraged or disengaged’ from local governance (Piper & Nadvi, 2010). Added to the opportunism of some politicians and the technocracy of many officials, a generally negative set of attitudes towards public participation in South Africa comes into focus. What then can be done?

In what follows the article explores one attempt to transform the mindsets of key players involved in public participation, namely, the Pioneers workshop. In assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the event, the case is made that while such events can transform consciousness through informing, educating, inspiring and connecting important players, in the South African context such events need to be linked to a broader strategy of policy reform of invited spaces and supporting emergent social movements. First, though, the article explores the origins of the Pioneers of Participation idea.

3 ADVOCATING FOR PARTICIPATION: THE CHAMPIONS MODEL

In June 2007, a ‘Champions of Participation’ workshop was held at the University of Sussex, Brighton in the UK. The workshop brought together some 45 advocates or ‘champions’ of participation in local government, about half from the UK and about half from 14 other countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. At the workshop, through dialogue, field trips, reflection and debate, participants shared their knowledge and experiences, but also formulated broad-based recommendations for how to enhance public participation both in the UK and worldwide.

Notably, the Champions workshop was organised by a combination of academics researching public participation through the Citizenship Development Research Centre (CDRC) at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, and practitioners from Logolink, a global network of practitioners from civil society, government and academia working to deepen democracy through greater citizen participation (see <http://www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/index.htm>). The event was widely regarded as a success, with most participants being very energised and inspired by what they shared, and it has spawned a number of subsequent events around in the world, including two in the UK and the Pioneers workshop in South Africa which is the subject of this article.

The Champions workshop was timely as the UK, like many other countries, was increasingly recognising the need for a policy framework that supported citizen engagement in local governance – an agenda often referred to as ‘new localism’ (Gaventa, 2007). In October 2006, the South African Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its Local Government White Paper, entitled ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’, which emphasised the importance of strong local leadership, empowered citizens and responsive services. Community participation was seen as central to these changes and the government intended to encourage and support them, not only in the most deprived neighbourhoods, but across the board. The DCLG White Paper (2006:1) states that communities ‘should be able to influence decisions, take direct action if they so choose, seek redress where services are failing and call providers and politicians to account’.

Similarly, in July 2006, the British Department for International Development (DFID) released its White Paper on ‘Eliminating World Poverty: Making Governance Work for the Poor’. The DFID White Paper emphasises that the fight against poverty requires governance institutions that are characterised by capacity, accountability and responsiveness, and also argues for the active involvement of empowered citizens. According to Gaventa (2006:2) ‘similar calls for participatory governance, in which government officials, elected representatives and citizens work together, are emanating from dozens of other policy statements, including from the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the Council of Europe, and United Nations agencies among others’.

As well as building networks and inspiring practitioners to new and innovative ways of engaging, the Champions workshop looked to intervene in policy debates in the UK. At the time, legislation on local governance and citizen participation was being drawn up in Parliament. There was also a sense that, as the movement for democratic decentralisation had been much stronger in the south, this was an opportunity to ‘reverse the flow’ of democracy exporting so that northern democracies like the UK and the US would have an opportunity to recognise the innovations from newer, emerging democracies. Further, the workshop took very seriously the idea that enhancing public participation was not about the public versus the state, but about building new relations across old divides and thus ‘working on both sides of the equation’ between citizen demand and government response. The workshop was thus one of the first international events to focus especially on the realities of the roles played by elected representatives and government officials those champions who ‘hold open the doors and promote the engagement of those from the wider community’ (Gaventa, 2006:2).

As noted already, one spin off or ripple effect from the Champions workshop was the Pioneers workshop. The idea for this event was floated at the CDRC meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2008. The intention was to bring together various practitioners of public participation from both state (politicians and officials) and communities (NGOs and community-based organisers) to share experiences and to inspire future work and collaboration. A policy engagement session was also suggested. The idea was to reproduce the model of ‘working both sides of the equation’ to target officials who are key players in facilitating public engagement, especially in the invited spaces of the state.

Further, it was thought that it would be good to target practitioners from across southern Africa, and not just South Africa. The thinking here was that there was significant commonality around this issue across the region. Hence, as reflected in the concept note (Piper, 2009), from Angola, through South Africa, Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana to Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, governments and citizens are endorsing similar ideas about local and democratic decision-making through citizen participation. In general, though, because of the relatively recent democratisation process in the region, these initiatives are at an early stage. In some places like Angola we are still mostly at the level of new policy development. In others, like South Africa, we have seen the first attempt at new forms of public participation.

The relative newness of democracy and ideas of public participation to the region led to the suggestion that instead of speaking of champions of public participation of ten to twenty years as in other parts of the world, in our region we can speak of pioneers of participation – practitioners who are at the cutting edge of local democratisation. Precisely because of the newness of democracy and ideas around local participation, and also because of the specific conditions in the African region, we stand in dire need of innovative thinking around public participation in our context. Further, it was recognised that while the region has challenges that are more daunting than in other parts of the world, including the weakness of the local state, but we also have some advantages, not least the legacy of participation in many traditional political practices such as the *pitso* or village council in Lesotho, and new forms of popular politics of the anti-colonial movements.

At the same time, it was recognised that the Pioneers workshop was occurring at an opportune time in South Africa, when it was increasingly common cause that there were significant problems with local governance, not least around service delivery as evidenced by the substantial number of protests around the country. In light of this the national department (then known as the Department of Provincial and Local Government) had called for a ‘turn-around strategy’ for local government, and was also reviewing the existing institutions of public participation. It was our hope that the workshop might be able to distil some key policy messages that could be directed at this South African specific policy process.

Informed by this orientation, representatives from the CDRC approached the Isandla Institute in early 2009 to explore whether they may be interested in co-hosting the event, partly on the basis that they were acting hosts of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN), which was the Logolink Southern Africa affiliate, and on the recommendation of a contact at the German donor, GTZ, who had worked with Isandla before. In this way, we looked to reproduce, at local level, the original partnership between the CDRC and Logolink that drove the Champions workshop. This

approach proved inspired as Isandla, led by Mirjam van Donk, proved an extremely professional and well-organised partner who was able to bear the main weight of organising the event. From the start we were able to secure support from donors, initially from GTZ and then, through Isandla, DFID southern Africa, and the idea became a reality. Indeed, it is notable that the person responsible for giving us the money from the DFID had attended the Champions workshop and was thus already won over to the idea.

The narrative that follows describes the unfolding of the event, offering an analysis of its strengths and weakness, and identifying lessons relevant to the CDRC and future work of this kind, especially advocacy for public participation in South Africa. The section is organised around a narrative about the personal journey of Jackie O who is a reasonably senior official responsible for public participation in one of the provincial governments in South Africa. Jackie O's story succinctly encapsulates the strengths and weaknesses of the Pioneers workshop and assists in distilling lessons for future advocacy around public participation in South Africa.

4 PIONEERS SOUTHERN AFRICA: ASSESSMENTS

In making the case, two different, if related, kinds of assessment are required. The first is the more focused assessment of whether the Pioneers workshop met its objectives as an event in and of itself; and the second, larger question (which is the focus of this article), is the broader significance of the event for public participation advocacy. While most of the analysis will focus on the latter issue, which is developed through the device of the story of Jackie O, some assessment of the event in its own terms is also important, as a successful event is required to have any some impact at least. It is thus with the more focused assessment that I begin.

The Pioneers of Participation event took place from 9 – 13 November 2009 at the Erinvale Estate in Somerset-West, Cape Town, South Africa. The event consisted of three core activities:

- A workshop for 40 participants from seven African countries (Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe) and Brazil, India and the UK from the evening of 9 November to the morning of 13 November;
- Site visits to local projects in Khayelitsha, Langa and Manenberg (12 November);
- A policy seminar with key actors and stakeholders in the South African context, attended by an additional 30 people (13 November).

The key objectives of the Pioneers workshop were to:

1. Deepen the understanding of the benefits of public participation, especially for service delivery and local democracy;
2. Share practical and effective models of public participation to inspire practitioners;
3. Reflect on the inhibitors and challenges to public participation at both individual and institutional levels;
4. Identify innovative responses to identified challenges at individual and institutional levels;
5. Identify mechanisms for networking and supporting both participants and national and regional public participation initiatives.

As can be seen from the above objectives, it is really only point 5 that speaks to a broader advocacy strategy. Hence, assessment of performance on the first four points is really a focus on the event itself. In this regard, it is fair to say that, according to the views of both participants and organisers, the workshop did secure points 1 and 3 very well. They learned a lot about existing good practices from the region, and especially about the challenges it faced, which was very enlightening. I would say they did reinforce a commitment to enhance constructive state-society relations, but as importantly, they also affirmed the important of civil society independence and right to democratic action in contexts where the state was not democratic, or behaving in a democratic way. In many ways this was one of the key positive and distinction outcomes of the workshop which was to affirm civil society and autonomous and democratic action regardless of the state, especially in those contexts where the state is not democratic. The messages of the benefits and challenges to public participation in South Africa also came through very clearly at the policy dialogue.

With regard to points 2 and 4, the outcomes were more mixed. Certainly the workshop participants did share many examples of practical and effective models and innovative responses from elsewhere around the world, and the international resource people were very helpful here, but they failed to draw enough on the success stories of participants. Indeed, these ought to have been foregrounded earlier on in the process. Nevertheless, they did manage to do some of this, and certainly participants' insights came through as deliberations unfolded, both in small groups and in the plenary session. Perhaps the most important positive outcome here was to affirm the wide range of possibilities for democratic engagement and civil society initiative in contexts where people assume that none is possible, including Zimbabwe and the Sudan. Indeed, in any context other than direct civil conflict, public participation processes led by civil society can make a real and constructive difference to governance.

Perhaps the most significant shortcoming in terms of the key objectives was the failure to identify mechanisms for networking and supporting both participants, and national and regional public participation initiatives. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the Pioneers workshop reached some policy players, and had a presence in the public realm, but what the tangible impacts of these will be is not clear. In one way that may have assisted, I was invited to be on a consulting team that is conducting a massive review of ward committees in South Africa, and the experiences of the Pioneers workshop have definitely shaped my view of public participation in South Africa, and I know many of the people in the relevant government department now. However, the key point, which will be further developed in the following section, is that the workshop suffered from a lack of a clear, broader strategic orientation as regards public participation.

The lack of a clear broader strategic vision for advocacy was compounded by a lack of an organisational home to drive this project. At the time of Pioneers workshop it was my hope that the GGLN or Logolink Southern Africa might take this forward, but this has yet to transpire. Notably, there was clear interest from participants in further networking. By the end of the policy workshop, the vast majority of participants were inspired to renew their work – to hold more and similar events – and even, judging by comments made on the final evening of the event, to hold a reunion. Thus, the workshop opened a space and created some momentum which has not been advanced due to the lack of both a broader strategic vision and an organisational home to drive this vision.

Perhaps, however, it would be misleading to close this section on too negative a note. The Pioneers workshop was well organised, well facilitated and the policy dialogue was a very professional and landmark event. It is important to remember that as an event, and in terms of its first four objectives, the workshop was a clear success, and many invaluable lessons and experiences were consolidated that could be of great value for future events. In this sense it is clear that, although they are hard work, and require tremendous resources, especially human resources, events like the Pioneers workshop create new networks of practitioners, enthusiasm and energy for public participation and new knowledge about public participation. The Pioneers workshop really affirmed the importance of doing public participation work in non-democratic contexts, and of the vital and important role of an independent and democratic civil society and community organisations in leading this work.

How events like the Pioneers workshop might link to broader advocacy is thus the only real problem area, and is illustrated in the next section by the story of Jackie O.

5 JACKIE O'S STORY

I had come across 'Jackie O' before at two previous workshops, one of which I had assisted in facilitating and had done an input of public participation around the world. After that workshop, she had asked me to look over some documents she had distributed in her province concerning ward committee operation. She seemed very grateful for my assistance, although my contribution was small and the issue was a minor one. She was selected for the workshop by the local organising collectively as she was directly involved in this work and, on her application form, had given good motivation to attend the Pioneers workshop. In the event, despite seeming like a safe bet for a 'Pioneer', she turned out to more of a sympathiser – at least to start with. Indeed, the pattern was typical of most of the officials who presented themselves as pioneers on paper, but turned out to be less enthusiastic in person, until the Pioneers workshop changed their minds. Consider Jackie O's case:

Day 1: I am a little nervous as I am addressing the opening session and speaking to the concept paper. I see Jackie O and greet her, but she does not respond. Maybe she did not see me. As the day unfolds we go through two further sessions – one on the benefits of public participation, and one on the challenges to public participation at both individual and institutional levels. There is lots of group work, breaking into different venues, using cards and posters and Jackie keeps a low profile for day 1. If anything she seems a little more reserved than usual. Is she distracted by other work? Is she bored? Is she unsure of revealing herself in front of colleagues? Non-colleagues? Strangers?

Day 2: This is a long day with much group work, starting with inputs from our resource people from Brazil, India and the UK. We then move to session to identify innovative responses to challenges, and identify mechanisms for networking and supporting 'pioneers of participation'. We have to add an extra session, on participants' urging, on the positive lessons from participants' experiences which pushes the final session of the day into the evening. It is a very good session. We should have spotted the gap in the programme – public participation can even help improve public participation events! Jackie O is a bit more engaged, but very technocratic and parochial in her inputs, speaking at length about very specific issues to deal with South African institutions

and law, not really engaging with participants from elsewhere in Africa, or with issues in a broader way. Jackie O seems reluctant to think outside the bureaucratic – and national – box.

Day 3: We split into three groups and go to three sites around Cape Town where we meet with various projects and/or communities engaging in forms of citizen action and participation in local governance. Jackie O and I go to the same project. Following the input from the project co-ordinator and his team, we have a general discussion. Jackie O asks some pointed questions of the junior project team members, and starts to engage in isiXhosa, saying she lives in the area and knows certain things. The team co-ordinator leans over to me and asks if I could get her to stop politicising issues, saying that she has a reputation for being very political. I do nothing, but fortunately the junior project members handle her questions well and the confrontational mood is diffused. The discussion takes another turn and moves onto more constructive ground.

That evening we have a collective debriefing back at the conference venue, where emotions run quite high, as several members, especially from other site visits, report their outrage at the way government has treated certain communities and the poor living conditions in the wealthiest municipality in Africa. This response is led by NGO-types but quickly becomes generalised. The mood has shifted in favour of citizens and a new energy grips the workshop. Experiential learning seems to have done the trick! Jackie O says nothing.

Day 4: In the morning, we break into groups to workshop policy messages for the five target audiences, namely, officials, parties, civil society, citizens, and donors. I decide to go into the officials group with Jackie O to keep an eye on her after yesterday. However, she seems quite contrite after the day before, and earnestly commits herself to identifying the key points that will really make a difference to officials. I nominate her to present and she is flattered but nervous. We sit together and practice her input. She is grateful for my coaching and help. She appears really worried about how she presents herself to her superiors who will be there in the afternoon. After lunch we run the policy session, and Jackie O delivers the message to officials in a very methodical, respectful and perhaps even obsequious way. From her initial aloofness and technocratic, state-centric attitude, she appears to have come around to a more modest and open position. To varying degrees, this is true of almost all the officials. Jackie O's journey is fairly representative. Pioneers changed their mind-sets.

Postscript: Six months after the Pioneers workshop I am part of a research team that is doing a project for the national department, now called Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). Our team approaches each provincial government for information to this end. Jackie O is one of the provincial officials approached, but she refuses to co-operate with the project as she was not consulted. She is one of two provincial officials who refuse to co-operate. It seems she is back to her old ways!

6 LESSONS FROM THE PIONEERS WORKSHOP FOR AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Although there are many lessons to be drawn from the Pioneers workshop, I think that Jackie O's story points to the key strengths and weaknesses of advocating for public participation through events like the Pioneers workshop in the South African context. The key strengths of

the workshop, as illustrated by Jackie O's story, is that it can work to change mindsets, to better inform, inspire and network key individuals who work as practitioners in local governance. The key weakness of the workshop, again as illustrated by Jackie O's backsliding after the event, is that one event can only do so much. Further, it is not just the case that advocacy for public participation ought to be seen 'as a process rather than an event' – in a familiar mantra of our times – but that this broader process is best understood against the analysis provided in the opening section above. That is, the process needs to be an advocacy strategy developed in a way appropriate to the specific context of state-society relations. In the Pioneers workshop case, part of the reason for the lack of development of strategy was the lack of a natural champion to take it forward. That noted, this article focussed more on the need for a broader advocacy strategy, and started the process of identifying what it might look like, and how it might be pursued.

The opening section made the case that the reason why attitudes toward public participation are generally lukewarm in South Africa has to do with: (i) the poor design of the invited spaces of participatory governance, like *izimbizo* and ward committees; and (ii) the relative lack of independent, technocratically competent and yet popularly rooted civil society formations which can provide the mediating leadership to bring popular needs and technical systems into meaningful dialogue. Initiatives like the Pioneers workshop need to be part of a larger process that looks to redress both of these problems. Invited spaces need to be made meaningful, and communities capacitated to engage in these spaces and make new ones of their own. Indeed, unless events and interventions like the workshop are linked to this broader strategy, they will remain events and not reinforce processes in a positive way.

Indeed, to my mind, this is what it must mean to be 'working both sides of the equation' in South Africa. At the same time as reinforcing moves to empower and open out invited spaces, advocates of public participation should look to affirm independent, technically competent and popular-rooted social movements or civil society formations. Nor is it the case that it should be assumed that one ought to be done without the other, as implicit in the model of public participation is the constructive engagement of politicians, officials and citizens. Thus, it is no use creating empowered participatory spaces to address issues that affect citizens that are democratic in design if those affected by the issues do not attend. Similarly, constructive state-society relations involving popular participation in decision-making on issues that affect citizens will not occur unless there is a space to systematically engage the state. The public participation model is thus a model of collaborative democratic governance between government and citizens which, although not always conflict free, does require significant co-ordination and goodwill on all sides to get going and to sustain.

However clear the broad strategic orientation for advocates of public participation in South Africa may appear on paper, it is clear that it will be hard to achieve such a high maintenance model of state-society relations. Further, the question of how to go about pursuing this model, and the place of events like the Pioneers workshop in these tactics, is ever more mysterious. Fortunately perhaps, space prohibits going into the requisite details in this article, other than to say that the problem of redesigning invited spaces is typical of policy reform, as it will involve re-writing the existing public participation framework for local government in South Africa, and amending several laws. To do this a clear alternative vision that is likely to work in a local context will also have to be developed. Hence the tactical questions will centre on how to achieve these goals.

Similarly, the re-invigoration of invented spaces through the emergence of civil society formations like the TAC is also a substantial challenge, possibly an even harder one to realise as it involves the co-ordinated endeavours of at least hundreds, and eventually thousands. Consequently it is a process that is easier to support rather than initiate. It is notable, however, that the great moments of popular mobilisation in South Africa's history, and especially the civil society-based mobilisation of the United Democratic Front in the 1980s, were the product of popular energies and initiative as much as manipulation from above. Further, as argued by Ballard et al. (2006) amongst others, there has been evidence of a re-awakening of significant social energies in recent years, born of frustration with the responsiveness and accountability of political society. Notably, as illustrated by the xenophobic attacks of 2008, these nascent social forces are neither inherently democratic nor constructive, and hence the significance of ideological and organisational development looms large.

Perhaps the last point to make in this connection is the folly of working only for the one great space or social movement, or combination thereof, instead of affirming a more flexible and plural conception of spaces for participatory engagement between governors and citizens. Thus, although the TAC model is important, it is not necessarily the only way that change can happen, and in this regard it is important to be open to the myriad social ways that innovation can be spawned. In closing, it is worth remembering the one piece of advice offered repeatedly to the Pioneers workshop by civil society actors from the rest of Africa: do not wait for the state to build democracy, you will wait forever. Rather, take action to solve your own problems through building democracy where you live. To paraphrase, in the Pioneers workshop terms, build it, and Jackie O will come.

NOTE

- 1 Laurence Piper is Professor and Head of the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Western Cape. His recent research focuses on the comparative study of new forms of democratic institution and practice, especially at local government level; E-mail: lpiper@uwc.ac.za

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