

Chapter 11

Public Participation in South Africa as we Enter the 21st Century¹

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Introduction

The “average citizen” (in Milbrath’s (1965) words) did what was “expected from him or her” in South Africa’s second democratic election on 2 June 1999. More than three-quarters of the voting public cast their votes. The high voter turn-out reflected the hope among South Africans that they and their children would benefit from the democratic system. The deepening of democracy, however, is dependent on the participation of citizens in civil society and the political system (Diamond, 1993). Moreover, such participation must be inclusive of all in society (Lijphart, 1996). Worldwide, theorists and political practitioners who profess democracy take political participation seriously irrespective of their particular political background. Although there is disagreement as to what the optimum level of participation should be to guarantee a functional democracy, the key dictum remains: Participation by citizens at various levels is essential to make democratic societies work.² Indeed, participation is a prerequisite to make any society work—be it populist or technocratic. Once participation drops below a certain level, strains emerge within the society and can eventually lead to its disintegration.

In this chapter participation is regarded as wide-ranging civil activity at national, regional and local levels.

Rationale

South Africa, like many other countries in the southern hemisphere, made its transition from authoritarian rule to democracy with a founding elec-

tion. In the five years following the 1994 founding election, many changes occurred, notably in terms of the formalisation of structures of civilian representation, oversight and participation.

Whatever form of democracy is chosen (representative or proportional systems, or multi-party, non-party or one-party systems), participation by the citizenry strengthens democracy. In the case of South Africa, a choice was made for multi-party politics during the multi-party negotiations, which culminated in the formal acceptance of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) as well as the Bill of Rights. The formal structures created at national, provincial and local government levels function well in the majority of cases. Examples abound: the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), the National Council of Provinces, parliamentary constituency offices, forums for community-police interaction and the defence review process. Indeed, the central objective behind these institutions was to enhance public participation.

The democratisation process in South Africa, as well as in other young African democracies coincided with the institutionalisation of civil society organisations. Moreover, strong civil leaders joined the formal politics and became policy makers. Others seized the opportunity to move into the more lucrative business sector. Amongst others, these processes contributed to what critics from the South African NGO sector call the “demobilisation” of civil society organisations. Some argue that this will negatively impact on public participation among South African citizens. Various observers have pointed out that public participation in African democracies—including South Africa—is sub-optimum.³ The rationale for this study is therefore to assist and encourage policy-making bodies, executives, political practitioners, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in adding value to public participation in democratic institutions at all levels of government. The ultimate aim is to optimise the benefits of public participation for the citizenry, democracy, social justice and economic growth in South Africa following the 1999 election.

In order to achieve this aim, existing policy-making structures in South Africa and public participation in them were analysed on the basis of data collected by means of a quantitative survey in March 1999. The

focus is on levels of knowledge on policy making among the citizenry and their reported participation at national, provincial and local levels. Their main concerns around policy making were also gauged. For the benefit of the reader, the data given below are supported by brief analyses and policy recommendations.

Methodology

Survey questionnaires were administered to random clustered national probability samples of 2 200 respondents throughout the Republic of South Africa in March 1999. The results based on the national samples had a maximum margin of error of $\pm 4,7$ percentage points.

The sample design was based on the census data of 1991. The former Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC states) were excluded from the 1991 census and statistics from these areas had to be added to the totals of the provinces of which they now form part in order to determine the proportional representation of the nine provinces in the sample. The universe of the sample design was all members of the South African population of 18 years and older, stratified according to nine socio-economic area types and provinces.

The allocation of respondents to socio-economic categories was roughly proportional to the adjusted 1991 population census figures with a few exceptions. Multi-stage cluster (probability) sampling was used to draw the respondents, using the adjusted 1991 census figures as a sampling frame. Census enumerator areas and similar areas were used as the clusters in the penultimate sampling stage, from which an equal number, one or two by four, of households was drawn. All clusters were drawn from the final clusters with equal probability (systematically). Respondents were drawn at random from qualifying household members. The provincial distribution of the realised sample is given in Table 11.1.

The realised sample was weighted according to the 1996 census data on the biographical features of the South African population of 18 years and older, and is thus a broad reflection of the perceptions of the adult population of South Africa.

It should be noted that the data were analysed by means of SPSS, and the data analysis was restricted to the generation of frequency tables, cross tabulations of variables, correlation analysis and multivariate analysis of variance.

Table 11.1: Sample allocation, March 1999

Province	Realisation	African %	Coloured %	Asian %	White %
Western Cape	256	16	54	–	30
Northern Cape	102	31	49	–	20
Eastern Cape	297	87	7	1	5
Free State	208	83	1	–	16
KwaZulu-Natal	344	79	1	12	8
Mpumalanga	198	87	–	1	13
Northern Province	244	93	–	–	7
Gauteng	344	65	4	2	28
North West	217	89	–	–	11
Total	2 210	72,0	10,3	2,4	15,3

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Results

The research was aimed at establishing the knowledge of respondents on local councils, parliament and policy formulation including departmental green papers, white papers, bills and the passing of acts by parliament.

Knowledge

Knowledge of Institutions and Policy-making Processes

The findings are both interesting and disconcerting. Generally respondents felt that they did not have enough knowledge or were uncertain about the stages of policy formulation.⁴

In answer to the question, “*Would you say you have enough knowledge about the green paper/white paper/bill/act*”, more than one-third said they did not have enough knowledge. Most respondents were uncertain as to whether they had enough knowledge about the stages of policy making. For the purposes of this chapter, the uncertain group was merged with those respondents who indicated that they did not know enough.

Table 11.2: Knowledge of stages of policy making

Knowledge	Green paper	White paper	Bill	Act
	Percentage			
Uncertain/not enough	90	89	83	79
Enough	9	10	16	21
Total	99	99	99	100

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

When broken down, respondents who “did not know enough/were uncertain” about all four stages or did not answer the question (about 1%) amounted to 72%. Those who “knew enough” about one or two of the stages totalled 20%. Only 8% of respondents indicated that they knew enough about three or four of the stages. With less than one out of ten respondents saying he or she felt confident about his or her knowledge concerning crucial aspects of policy formation, it seems that the ability to participate in contemporary democratic South Africa is seriously undermined by lack of knowledge.

This is further confirmed by the answers to questions about understanding of the activities within political institutions, which is another crucial aspect of knowledge about policy-making processes. A large majority of respondents indicated that they did not understand what was happening in their local council and did not consider themselves to be well informed about decisions made in parliament.⁵

Regarding local councils, respondents were asked, “*What would you say about your understanding of what goes on in your local council?*” As the percentages in Table 11.3 show, less than one-fifth (18%) of the

respondents indicated that they understood what was happening in their local council.

Table 11.3: Understanding of local council activities

Little (do not understand, understand a bit)	75%
More (understand, understand completely)	18%

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

The questionnaire item on parliament read: “*I am well-informed about the political decisions in parliament that affect my community.*” Respondents had to indicate their level of agreement with the statement.

Table 11.4: Being informed about political decisions in parliament that affect communities

Do not agree (disagree completely/disagree)	66%
Do agree (agree, totally agree)	25%

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

The above indicators of understanding and knowledge about policy-making processes and institutions are related but not coinciding. People who thought that they knew enough about the stages of policy making might have had little understanding of what happened in their local council and felt ill informed about decisions taken in parliament. In the same vein, people who felt well informed about political decisions in parliament and/or understood what was going on in their local council, might have felt that they did not have enough knowledge about the stages of policy making.

This point is supported by the fact that 70% of respondents who indicated that they knew enough about one or two, and 60% of those who indicated that they knew enough about three or four of the stages in policy formulation, indicated little or no understanding of what happened in their local council. Moreover, respectively 72% and 56% of respondents who

knew enough about one or two or about three or four stages felt that they were ill informed about decisions taken in parliament.

These findings imply that knowledge among respondents (and presumably among the citizenry as a whole) about policy making at national level did not necessarily equal their understanding of their local council. The inverse was also true. Knowledge about the functioning of a local council did not necessarily imply knowledge about parliament or policy-making processes such as green papers, white papers, bills and/or acts.

Understanding of what goes on in local councils and being informed about parliamentary decisions seemed to coincide more strongly.

More than two-thirds of the respondents did not understand the functioning of their own local council and, at the same time, felt ill informed about decisions taken in parliament.

In order to improve understanding of political institutions and their functioning, the citizenry should be better educated, clearly on more aspects than the four stages of policy formulation. Transparency of political bodies, active citizen interest in the affairs of public institutions and insistence on being informed are other factors that play an important role in people's understanding of policy making.

Responses relating to the functioning of local councils and parliament were broken down to reflect rural/urban and provincial data.

There was little difference between rural and urban respondents in terms of the association between understanding the processes and being informed. Provinces differed somewhat more in terms of understanding and being informed about local councils, parliament and policy-making processes. The provincial differences in lack of understanding about these aspects are clear from the first two columns of Table 11.5.

A comparison of provincial levels of understanding showed that respondents from Gauteng, the Free State and the Eastern Cape had the lowest levels of *lack* of understanding of local councils and parliament. These results suggest that in these provinces people have a better understanding of political decision making than people in the other six provin-

ces. Respondents in the Northern Province, Northern Cape, Western Cape and North West, on the other hand, had the highest level of lack of understanding. The Northern Province and Western Cape samples also reported little knowledge of the stages in policy making, whereas respondents in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal showed relatively high levels of knowledge.

The figures in Table 11.5 show a number of trends that may need to be examined to arrive at a better understanding of public participation. (It was not the aim of this survey to examine such trends in detail, though.)

Table 11.5: Lack of understanding of local councils, parliament and policy-making processes in provinces

Province	Lack of understanding of local council	Lack of understanding of parliament	Lack of knowledge of policy-making processes*
	Percentage		
Northern Province	91	86	89
Northern Cape	91	77	76
Western Cape	89	81	82
North West	88	86	73
Mpumalanga	82	81	77
KwaZulu-Natal	79	83	67
Eastern Cape	78	47	63
Free State	75	68	79
Gauteng	73	63	67
Average total	80	73	72

* This column represents the respondents who did not know enough or were uncertain about their knowledge of green and white papers, bills and acts.

- KwaZulu-Natal was the only province where respondents were better informed about their own local councils than about parliament. The province also showed a higher than average knowledge of policy-making processes at national level.
- Five provinces showed a higher than average lack of understanding of local councils and six provinces did so in respect of parliament. Lack

of understanding of local councils and of parliament differed between one and 14%, except in the case of the Eastern Cape where the difference totalled 31%.

- Only Gauteng and the Eastern Cape recorded lower than average percentages of lack of understanding as well as knowledge of policy-making processes.

Knowledge and Level of Education

It is generally believed that knowledge about policies strongly correlates with the level of people's formal education. This would imply that people with little education would have little understanding and knowledge of political institutions and policy-making processes compared to people with a high level of education.

The findings of this study refuted such a deterministic relation: Although the relation between level of education and knowledge about policy formulation was strong, understanding of local councils and parliament correlated weakly with formal education.

As Table 11.6 illustrates, lack of understanding was lowest for local councils, followed by parliament and policy making. A better understanding of local councils, parliament and policy making was more likely among respondents who had Standard 10 or higher. Lack of knowledge about these aspects was highest among respondents with Standard 6 or lower.

The results suggest that education about the state structure and ways to influence political decisions should be incorporated in the early phases of formal education.

Further analyses revealed that knowledge about the various stages of policy making differed more significantly between provinces than between levels of education. Thus independently from educational differences in knowledge significant differences exist between provinces. This suggests that information campaigns on local councils, parliament and policy making should particularly concentrate on the provinces with the greatest lack of understanding of these aspects.

Table 11.6: Levels of understanding based on education

Education level	Lack of understanding of local council	Lack of understanding of parliament	Lack of knowledge of policy making
	Percentage		
Standard 6 and lower (49%)	87	74	83
Standard 7 + 8 (21%)	82	72	68
Standard 9 (21%)	73	73	62
Standard 10 and higher (9%)	60	64	48

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Educational levels explain variations in understanding of local councils and parliament to a much smaller extent than they explain understanding of policy making.

Participation

Participation in policy-making processes was studied in two ways. Respondents were asked about their intention to join public hearings at various levels of government and their actual participation in policy-making processes and community activities. The intention to join public hearings would indicate people’s willingness to participate in policy making, whereas reported participation would provide insight into political activities within civil society.

As will be discussed in the next sections, the willingness to participate in public hearings was generally high, and incidences of (reported) actual participation were not disconcertingly low. However, intended participation and reported participation varied significantly between provinces. Respondents with a better understanding and knowledge of policy-making institutions and processes were more likely to participate. Furthermore, respondents who had relatively more trust in the government reported higher levels of participation, whereas disparities in living stan-

dards were not related to the intention to participate and were only weakly related to reported participation.

Participation at Local, Provincial and National Level

Willingness to participate in policy making does not always translate into actual participation. This discrepancy partially results from obstacles to participation. Although it was beyond the scope of this survey to investigate the various obstacles that may stand between people's intention to join and their reported actual participation, some reasons for this kind of behaviour will be alluded to.

Respondents were provided with various options for participation in policy making. They were asked whether they "*would participate or ask advice*" in public hearings at government departments "*if they had the opportunity to do so*". The choices consisted of public hearings at several levels and were aimed at establishing their intention to join in policy-making processes. As with understanding of and knowledge about policy making, substantial proportions of the respondents were uncertain what to answer (varying from 13% to 22%). The majority of the respondents were prepared to join in local and provincial public hearings, however. Participation at national level was less likely among most of the respondents.

In terms of reported participation, provincial differences were substantial. Rural/urban differences were less salient, but nevertheless significant, with slightly higher rates of participation in urban areas.

Respondents in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga showed greater willingness to participate at the various levels. Northern Cape and Western Cape residents seemed to be the least interested in participating. Participation in KwaZulu-Natal was relatively low as well, but this only pertained to provincial and national levels. The intention to join at local level was relatively high among the respondents in KwaZulu-Natal (Table 11.7).

The intention to participate at local and provincial level was higher among black⁶ respondents than among coloured and Asian respondents. White respondents showed the least willingness to participate. The differences between black, coloured and Asian respondents were insignificant regarding participation in national bodies. White respondents, however,

Table 11.7: Intention to participate in policy making in each province through public hearings*

Province	Local council	Provincial legislature	National parliament	Government department
Percentage				
Eastern Cape	74	50	58	55
Mpumalanga	74	58	36	36
Gauteng	70	49	38	30
KwaZulu-Natal	76	32	22	23
Free State	65	45	31	28
Northern Province	62	49	32	30
North West	58	43	32	40
Western Cape	53	38	35	34
Northern Cape	48	29	19	24
Total	67	44	35	35

* The percentages reflect the proportions of respondents who said they would participate.

also showed the lowest interest in participation at this level (see Appendix A of this chapter).

It should be noted that racial differences were smaller than the disparities between the provinces. Differences in the intention to participate between racial groups within provinces were more significant than between the racial groups at national level.

In the question, “*How often would you say you (personally) participate?*”, respondents were asked about various aspects of civil participation. Four aspects of participation were distinguished:

- opinions in local councils;
- statements at public hearings;
- participation in organisations active in neighbourhood affairs; and
- enquiries at parliamentary constituency offices.

In terms of reported activity or participation in the nine provinces, the following was found: Reported participation was relatively high among

respondents from the Eastern Cape and Northern Province. The Free State, Northern Cape and Western Cape samples shared relatively low levels of participation (Table 11.8).

Table 11.8: Reported participation per province*

Province	Local council	Public hearing	Activity – organisation	Enquiries at parliamentary constituency offices
	Percentage			
Eastern Cape	31	32	67	21
Northern Province	26	28	42	12
KwaZulu-Natal	22	19	36	9
Gauteng	20	23	43	8
Mpumalanga	18	15	28	3
North West	13	15	28	5
Northern Cape	7	8	39	2
Free State	9	9	28	2
Western Cape	9	6	20	8
Average	19	19	38	9

* The percentages reflect the proportions of people who said they participated often or continuously.

Participation, Standard of Living and Trust in Government

Participation in policy-making processes can be assumed to be generally more likely among South Africans who trust the government than among citizens who do not feel they can trust the government. This assumption was confirmed by this study. As is shown in the following two tables, the higher the level of trust,⁷ the more frequently respondents expressed the intention to join and the more often they reported to have participated in various activities.

Political participation seemed to be far from an élitist endeavour. A rough categorisation into lower, middle and higher standards of living reveals that those worse off tended to participate more often than those who had a higher standard of living, as shown in Table 11.9.⁸ The intention to

participate did not differ between the groups, which suggests that class was not such an important factor in participation.

Table 11.9: Participation and levels of trust in government*

Trust in government	Intention to participate in			
	Local council	Public hearing	Provincial legislature	Government department
	Percentage			
Low (never/seldom)	61	35	27	28
Middle (sometimes)	69	48	38	27
High (mostly/always)	76	53	43	43

* The percentages reflect the proportions of respondents who intended to participate.

Table 11.10: Reported participation and levels of trust in government*

Trust	Local council	Public hearing	Activity—organisation
	Percentage		
Low	15%	15%	26%
Middle	23%	24%	43%
High	23%	22%	52%

* The percentages reflect the proportions of respondents who said they participated often or continuously.

Table 11.11: Reported participation based on living standard measure (LSM)*

LSM	Local council	Public hearing	Activity—organisation	Enquiries at constituency offices
	Percentage			
Low	23	22	46	8
Middle	19	23	44	10
High	18	15	30	10

* The percentages reflect the proportions of respondents who said they participated often or continuously.

Participation and Knowledge

Knowledge about the four stages of policy formulation was related to willingness to attend public hearings at the provincial and national level, and to the intention to participate in the policy formulation processes of a government department: The greater the knowledge, the more willing respondents were to participate. Attending public hearings of local councils was more likely among respondents who had a better understanding of the functioning of local councils. Respondents who felt well informed about the political decisions made in parliament were more willing to participate in all four types of policy-making processes.

Respondents who reported higher levels of participation in their local council and in public hearings displayed a better understanding of local councils and felt better informed about parliamentary decisions. Participation in activities of community organisations seemed to have a positive effect on understanding, feeling informed and knowledge of policy making.

It should be noted that the correlation between participation and knowledge is to be understood in two ways: Knowledge helps and motivates people to participate, and participation adds to people's knowledge of policy-making processes and institutions.

Political Preferences

Respondents who confessed allegiance to the ANC were somewhat more likely to be involved in public processes. At the same time, however, participation among respondents belonging to other political parties varied by province and political party.⁹ Further analysis revealed that belonging to a specific party did make a difference, but could not explain why provinces and rural/urban areas differed from each other.

Issues

At a national level, the three most often reported issues that respondents would raise at a public hearing were services, the economy, and safety and security.

In answer to an open question, “*What are the most important issues in your community that you would raise at a public hearing?*”, more than one-quarter of the respondents indicated that services had the greatest priority, followed by economic issues and then by safety and security, with about one-fifth of the respondents saying that they would raise these issues (see Table 11.12).

Table 11.12: Issues raise at public hearing

Services	28%
Economy	20%
Safety	18%
Education	6%
Health care	3%
Politics	3%

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

The priority order above differed from what South Africans generally saw as the most pertinent issues in the country according to the SABC/Idasa/Markinor Opinion '99 surveys, as well as HSRC surveys conducted between October 1998 and March 1999. These surveys suggested that South Africans saw job creation, safety and housing as the three most pertinent issues in the country. Services in terms of water, electricity, roads and so on were less often mentioned when respondents were asked what (national) government should do (Opinion '99, SABC/Idasa/Markinor). This was in line with the issues that South Africans seemed to be the most willing to protest against (HSRC social movement study, March 1999).

The fact that respondents in this survey most frequently mentioned services when asked about issues to be raised at public hearings indicates a concern over the responsibility of local and provincial government to provide, sustain and enhance basic services in the community.

Prioritisation of issues that respondents would put forward at public hearings varied from province to province. The three most reported issues at a provincial level are listed in Table 11.13.

Table 11.13: Issues at provincial level per province

Province	Services	Economy	Safety
	Percentage		
Northern Province	53	24	4
North West	46	21	8
Eastern Cape	37	21	14
Mpumalanga	32	24	11
Free State	28	21	8
Gauteng	27	17	27
Northern Cape	21	22	13
KwaZulu-Natal	16	21	21
Western Cape	6	22	33

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

In KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, safety and security and economic issues were more often mentioned than community problems related to absent or inappropriate services. Gauteng, another province characterised by extensive levels of crime, also scored high on safety and security issues (GIS Centre, HSRC, forthcoming crime report).

Although some differences in percentages were evident, the three most topical issues in all the provinces remained services (service provision and delivery) at local level, the economy, and issues related to safety and security.

Information

As knowledge and participation seemed to be linked, the survey attempted to establish how respondents and thus presumably the citizenry in South Africa obtained most of their information.

Respondents were asked, “Where do you get most of your information on political decisions that affect your community?” More than half of the respondents (58%) mentioned the media (radio 20%; television 18%; newspapers 85%; other media 16%) as their primary source of information about political affairs affecting them. One-quarter (25%) said that the community was their main source. A further 7% mentioned political parties and 4% local government.

The community played a more important information role in the Northern Province, the Free State and Mpumalanga than elsewhere. Respondents in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, on the other hand, were more likely to mention the media as their most important source of information (see Table 11.14).

For those who believe that South Africa is well on its way to have an informed citizenry as a result of Internet access and the “information revolution”, the results of the survey are disconcerting to some extent.

The percentage of respondents relying on or receiving information through the Internet was insignificant: less than 0,5%. Posters and billboards were only mentioned by 1% of the respondents.

Table 11.14: Two main sources of information in provinces

Province	Media	Community Percentage
Eastern Cape	77	12
KwaZulu-Natal	62	21
Western Cape	59	28
Gauteng	57	24
North West	51	25
Northern Province	49	39
Free State	47	36
Mpumalanga	47	34
Northern Cape	34	29

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

The survey also attempted to establish “*the most important organisation/institution in the view of respondents*” to address problems in the community. From the results it transpires that the community played a very important role in assisting people with problems in their immediate surroundings (30%). Local government came second with 24% (see Table 11.15).

Table 11.15: Appropriate organisation to address problems (%)

Community	30
Local government	24
Political organisation	12
National government	11
Provincial government	4
Business/labour	2

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Interestingly, respondents did not differentiate much between certain community organisations. By far the majority just said that the “community block” (living area) or the community in general was the most appropriate body to address their problems. Respondents were not questioned about the role of community leaders and street leaders, in particular, but they seemed to be implied in the reported “community” category. Almost one-third of those who mentioned the community referred to “leaders”.

Further analyses revealed an interesting relation between the issues respondents would raise and the most appropriate organisations to address these issues in the community. Generally, the street leaders seemed to perform an important role. Regarding safety and security, however, friends were mentioned relatively frequently. Civics were most often mentioned by respondents who would raise problems like access to water, electricity, roads and other services.

Focus on Gender

In the course of the struggle for liberation in South Africa, the exiled ANC stressed the attainment of a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa (Moosa in Corder, 1989, pp. 90, 92; Adam & Moodley, 1986, pp. 95-96, 99, 102, 213ff). However, even before going into exile the ANC together with other organisations resolved at the “Congress of the People” (resulting in the *Freedom Charter*) that their aim was to establish a state with political rights for all “regardless of race, colour or sex”. Moreover, equality for all national groups, a fairer distribution of wealth, social security, the right to education and co-operation with others within the international community were stressed (Pampallis, 1991, p. 200). The simple point of departure at the time was that harmony was to be achieved through “equal rights and opportunities” and that “only a democratic state based on the will of the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, sex or belief” (Farouk Meer in Polley, 1988, pp. 30, 31). During the 1980s mass resistance against apartheid (and its modernisation in the form of the tricameral parliament) escalated. The internal democratic protagonists such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) were outspoken about their non-racial and non-sexist approach in activist and militant politics (see Gottschalk in Liebenberg et al., 1994, pp. 192ff).¹⁰

The ANC’s guidelines for a democratic South Africa issued in 1989 (the Harare Declaration) stressed equality on gender and racial basis and re-affirmed the ANC’s commitment to non-racialism (Liebenberg, 1990). While women were central to the struggle for liberation, liberation organisations did not always live up to the ideal of non-sexism (Gouws & Kadalie, 1994, pp. 20ff). Rantete (1998, p. 45) is perhaps more explicit: “In the end, while the [ANC’s women’s] league made significant strides advancing the rights of women [within the ANC] this continued to be counterbalanced by serious weaknesses.” Hence, for theorists like Gouws, Kadalie and Rantete, major challenges had to be met after 1994, and presumably also after the adoption of South Africa’s first democratic constitution. In this regard the reader is referred to the Constitution as well as to the Bill of Rights.

Women's issues (violence against women and rape in particular) enjoy a higher profile than ever before on the political agenda of the incumbent government. In order to assess gender-related differences in knowledge about policy-making processes and participation in political decision making, separate analyses were performed for testing the influence of gender on the indicators of public participation discussed in the preceding sections.

The results are based on univariate and multivariate analyses of variance that tested for provincial, educational and gender main effects as well as interaction effects between the independent variables. The provincial and educational analysis discussed in the preceding sections did not take cognisance of gender. Therefore this section focuses on the main and interaction effects of gender only.

Knowledge, Understanding and Being Informed

Generally, satisfaction with level of knowledge, understanding and informedness seemed to be more likely among men than among women. Male respondents reported somewhat more, just significant, satisfaction with knowledge about the stages of policy-making processes, understanding of the local town council and informedness about decisions made in parliament.

Hassim and Gouws (1998, p. 69) argue that:

the development of institutions inside and outside government for the purpose of making and influencing social policy from a gendered perspective has shifted the terrain of politics more closely into and around the state, rather than around society.

Thus the extent to which women and men differ in their knowledge/participation will be described in order to assess women's readiness to get involved in political decision-making processes at an individual level.

However, men and women in the lowest and highest educational groups reported the same level of knowledge of white and green papers, acts and bills. No correlation was found between educational level and

understanding of the local town council and feelings of being informed about parliamentary decisions.

Table 11.16 (a) (b) and (c): Knowledge/Understanding

“Do you feel that you have enough knowledge about a white paper, green paper, act, and bill?”

(a) Knowledge of policy making	Male respondents	Female respondents
	Percentage	
None	68	76
One/two	22	18
Three/four	10	6

“What would you say about your understanding of what goes on in your local council?”

(b) Understanding of local council	Male respondents	Female respondents
	Percentage	
Little (no/a bit understanding)	77	84
More (understand/ understand completely)	24	16

Agreement with *“I am well-informed about the political decisions in parliament that affect my community”*.

(c) Informed about parliament	Male respondents	Female respondents
	Percentage	
Do not agree (disagree completely/disagree)	69	75
Do agree (agree/totally agree)	31	25

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Furthermore, it should be noted that differences between male and female respondents were not influenced by province. Gender differences were found in all nine provinces.

Participation

Interestingly, gender-related disparities regarding participation seemed to be extremely marginal. Regarding willingness to join in decision making at the various levels of policy making, men seemed to be more likely than women to attend hearings in parliament. The intention to attend local and provincial public hearings, as well as the intention to join in governmental department policy processes were the same for men and women as shown in Table 11.17. These findings were not moderated by province or by level of education.

Table 11.17: Intention to participate

Participation intention	Male respondents	Female respondents
	Percentage	
Join public hearing in local council		
No	32	33
Yes	68	67
Join public hearing in provincial government		
No	55	57
Yes	45	43
Join public hearing in national parliament		
No	62	67
Yes	38	33
Join governmental department policy processes if invited to do so		
No	64	66
Yes	36	34

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Contrary to what the above results on knowledge suggest, women were as likely as men to join in policy making at the local, provincial and national levels of government—reported participation did not seem to be gender related. Moreover, in all provinces and at all levels of education, gender

differences were insignificant in respect of reported participation (see Table 11.18).

According to Hassim and Gouws (1998, p. 68):

the challenge for women's movements now appears to be centred more directly on the ways in which institutional gains can be used to address different women's needs".

Little is known, however, about how female citizens act or intend to act upon grievances typically associated with gender inequality, such as poverty and violence, which are often associated with the motherhood role of the majority of women. Hence the extent to which political participation of women is linked to gender and to motherhood will now be analysed.

Women seemed to be more likely than men to raise services and health-related issues at public hearings, respectively 30% (versus 26%) and 4% (versus 2%).

Table 11.18: Reported participation

Actual participation	Male respondents	Female respondents
	Percentage	
Speak to councillor	21%	19%
Make a statement in public hearing	22%	18%
Active in community activities	42%	37%
Make enquiries at constituency office	10%	9%

* As percentages were rounded off and some respondents did not give a definite answer to all questions, the totals reflected in some cases do not add up to 100%.

The data do not suggest that certain issues enjoyed more priority among women with children (the motherhood hypothesis) than among women without children. The only statistically significant difference that was found, pointed to the opposite: Women with children were less likely than childless women to mention health-related issues (3% versus 5%). This can be partly explained by the fact that older women—for whom the motherhood role perhaps decreased in relevance or for whom health might have become a personal issue—more frequently mentioned this issue.

In short, while understanding, knowledge and the intention to join in policy-making processes at national level seemed to be higher among men than women, actual or reported participation was not related to gender. The survey results suggest that gender-related differences marginally contributed to disparities in public participation.

The implications of these findings for the policy maker and agents active in civil society are that provincial/regional differences are more salient and perhaps therefore in need of more attention. More specifically, provincial differences stemming from socio-historical dynamics and fiscal disparity seem to have more impact on public participation than gender-related differences.

This is not meant to demean the gender initiatives taken by policy makers and/or civil society, which should be continued. However, the research in this study points towards other areas that are of equal—if not greater—relevance in terms of public participation. (See also Roefs & Liebenberg, 1999; Rule, 1999.) These areas will be discussed in more detail below.

Discussion

The following recommendations fall within the broad ambit of policy. The recommendations are based on the assumption that, in addition to regular elections, democracy entails continuous public participation. In other words, although regular elections are the minimum requirement for a democracy, they do not suffice to sustain democracy (KID press release, 8 June 1999).

“We need first to embrace participatory democracy, transparency and accountability—then one can implement a good programme of public participation ...” (KID Conference on Public Participation and Governance in South Africa, 22-23 October 1998, Cape Town).

“When we struggled for freedom in South Africa, we also struggled for access to information. While services are essential, so is information. Let us not alienate people from information that can empower” (KID Conference on Public

Participation and Governance in South Africa, 22-23 October
1998, Cape Town).

Factors emerging from the survey results which require the attention of policy makers and other role players are discussed below.

Access to Proposed Legislation

The public should be provided with executive summaries of each bill and policy paper in an easily accessible and crisp format to enable them to grasp the contents and practical implications of the proposed legislation. The findings of this survey suggest that such information should be communicated primarily through the radio (local, provincial and national), followed by television (preferably national television), and newspapers. The findings of the study suggest that these media are far more effective than posters and websites.

Posters and websites/the Internet seem to be unattractive options for respondents. The multitude of posters that still adorn South Africa's streets, often illegible and poorly designed, may cause information overload and reader aversion. Moreover, whereas state officials and academics may have access to the Internet and websites, few citizens have access to them.¹¹

The survey also suggests that provincial differences in knowledge and information sources need to be taken into account. This implies that provinces and provincial stakeholders should adapt their communication and information (education) strategies to the citizenry in their particular region.

Formal Education

Various theorists and observers regard education for the citizenry on the functioning of the state and state processes, inclusive of public institutions, as very important. Education increases awareness and understanding of state structures, institutions and processes. It is suggested here that education around the composition and functions of such structures should be included in secondary school curricula. Citizen education, if formalised within the educational system, is likely to advance understanding as well

as knowledge, and will foster the will to participate in state functions, which may ultimately manifest in active participation in and the sustainment and deepening of democracy in South Africa.

Involvement of Civil Society

Civilian organisations should be drawn into the law-making process at national, provincial and local level at an early stage so that their inputs have a bearing right from the start. *Early and timely invitations to participate are crucial.*

Responses to Submissions

Previous reports suggested that protocols be established to guide national and provincial legislatures in responding to submissions from the public. This study showed that there was a strong overall intention to participate in policy processes among the respondents, regardless of the political parties to which they belonged. This strong interest should be translated into active involvement to add value to public participation in democracy in South Africa. Apart from giving written feedback to organisations, groups, civic structures or institutions on whether their submissions have made an impact upon the legislation (and to what extent), broader feedback should be given to the public in general by means of the radio, the print media and television. Talk shows and phone-in programmes on radio and television could be used to good effect in addition to more formal feedback via news and/or actuality programmes.

National, provincial and local authorities (elected representatives) should also ensure that communication is thorough and effective by evaluating their feedback to their constituencies.

Focus on Issues

The survey showed that an issue-based approach was effective in attracting people's interest and involvement in the law-making process. Respondents provided information about the issues uppermost in the public's mind. It follows that they would rather participate in activities that

address and resolve such issues, than in those that they do not consider important. Therefore legislatures at various levels should be aware of the concerns of their constituencies when providing feedback and/or inviting participation.

Constituency Offices

The role of constituency offices is to inform the citizenry about political parties and law-making processes. The opinions and “street wisdom” of elected representatives to national and provincial parliaments suggested that parliamentary constituency offices were important. However, only 9% of the respondents in this survey indicated that they made use of constituency offices.

Parliamentary constituency offices should therefore be redefined as vehicles for improving public participation in governance. This would include setting standards for the training of staff, defining the functions of constituency offices, and getting clarity about who is served by these offices. It may be best to centralise the development and management of such offices as well as the training of staff. Constituency offices need to provide links with the communities in their particular areas. They need to be seen as forums where the public can articulate local interests, and where the general public is being exposed to information about legislation and government policy at national, provincial and local levels.

To fulfil their purpose, constituency offices should embark on effective communication on their role and how this role relates to the needs of their constituencies. This should be done through the relevant media. According to the KID report on public participation (October 1998),

[t]he media, especially the radio, should be used more effectively in public participation programmes, e.g. the broadcasting of parliamentary deliberations, and phone-in radio programmes. Newspapers could have dedicated columns to inform and educate the public about new legislation and the process of participating in policy formulation and the legislative process.

Moreover, regular feedback is essential.

Constituency offices can be a useful information and communication tool. However, this study seems to indicate a need to popularise constituency offices and enhance their efficiency through benchmarking and performance evaluation, although the approach may have to be adapted to the particular province.

It is perhaps also appropriate to consider the regulation of constituency offices through legislation. Their exact roles need to be defined to ensure that they serve their constituency as a whole and that the resources are optimally utilised. Training programmes and refresher courses for staff in such offices should become an entrenched practice.

Disadvantaged Groups

The recommendations so far can primarily be realised among so-called “literate” people, i.e. people able to read, and people who have access to the radio and television. Other people should however not be excluded from public participation, the more so as this study found that the intent to participate in political processes was overall high, thus including the “poor” and rural dwellers, those sectors who are most likely to be illiterate and without access to radio and television.

Other means of communication should therefore be employed to reach these people, for example audio-visual media, theatre and creative workshops. More resources should be allocated to the arts, for example street theatre, to overcome language and literacy barriers in communication between communities and government. The popular media can assist in highlighting, explaining and debating complex issues around governance. “Road-shows” by government departments, political parties and other stakeholders may also enhance communication—especially in rural areas or smaller towns.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most promising finding in this chapter is people’s willingness to join in public hearings. The information and opinion exchange that occurs here is crucial for a successful democracy. The study found that, at

the end of Nelson Mandela's presidency in 1999, the majority of South Africans seemed to be quite willing to engage in local policy making, which augurs well for the country's democratic political institutions.

However, the study also found that the public was poorly informed: Less than one in ten respondents indicated that they felt adequately equipped with knowledge about the various stages in the legislative process (green and white papers, bills and acts). Moreover, two-thirds felt ill informed about parliament and indicated that they had little understanding of their own local councils.

It should be noted that the functioning of a democracy is not necessarily related to public knowledge about the legislative process. It is also impossible to determine the optimal level of understanding required to ensuring the proper working of democratic political institutions. However, cognisance should be taken of the perceptions and opinions of the South African public. The study asked respondents what they thought of their own knowledge about the various stages of policy making. Those respondents who indicated that they did not have enough knowledge and understanding, presumably felt a need for being better informed.

In short, the respondents were generally willing to participate in legislative processes. However, they also felt that they did not understand the workings of political institutions. Education might contribute to overcoming obstacles (lack of knowledge and understanding) to realising the intention to participate in governance. However, the weak relation between understanding and education evidenced by the results as well as that between understanding and class-related factors suggest that education would have little effect on a better understanding of the legislative process. What would have a much better effect on understanding of the legislative process are information provided by community leaders and relatively accessible media, such as radio and television. Active use of these media and alternative interactive and local educational and informative initiatives are recommendable.

South Africa harbours various population groups—segmented by race, language, class, area, age and political affiliation—of which some might explain disparities in engagement in legislative processes. Province

emerged as a very strong explanatory variable in this study. Generally, respondents living in the Northern Province, Western Cape and North West felt less well informed than respondents from the other provinces. It was also in these provinces where people reported lower levels of participation in public hearings. Since other demographic characteristics proved less relevant, the findings suggest that interventions aimed at promoting public participation should address local disparities in knowledge and understanding while focusing on proper means of informing the public.

Notes

- ¹ The survey on which this chapter reports, was initiated and sponsored by the Khululekani Institute for Democracy (KID). The former executive director of KID, Campbell Lyons, and staff members Vusi Sibiyi and Thabo Liphoko constructed the questionnaire and executed the survey.
- ² In this regard see Milbrath (1965). Populist societies—even if termed “undemocratic” (by, for example, Dahl, 1977)—also stress the need for public or citizen participation. Examples include populist regimes (such as Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara), young democracies in the aftermath of authoritarianism (such as Italy after 1945) and popular autocracies (such as Libya under Ghadaffi or the United Arab Emirates). Diamond, 1993.
- ³ See Jabu Sindane in the Centre for Policy Studies report on democratic consolidation cited above.
- ⁴ The percentages do not all add to 100%, due to missing data.
- ⁵ Note that the responses reflected the respondents’ own knowledge and perceptions of the process/institutions.
- ⁶ KID prefers to refer to “black” rather than “African” respondents. The authors followed KID guidelines in this regard.
- ⁷ Respondents were asked, “*How often do you feel you can trust the government to do what is right for people like you?*” The options were: never, seldom, sometimes, mostly and always.

- ⁸ The living standard measure (LSM) was calculated for each respondent according to his/her access to a range of household appliances, municipal services, shops and financial services. The LSM is a standardised measure for living circumstances in South Africa. The low, middle and high categories each constituted one-third of the people interviewed.
- ⁹ Appendix B contains data referring to national levels of participation among members of the ANC, NNP, DP, UDM, IFP and other voters. Provincial data are presented for the two biggest parties in each province.
- ¹⁰ This in itself did not provide the ANC with a “moral superior status”. Robert Sobukwe of the Pan-Africanist Congress made it clear at the time that the distinctive quality for citizenship was not colour but whether a person as an African was in favour of a polity ruled by Africans for Africans to the benefit of Africans. Various sources point out that nepotism and corruption existed on various levels within the ANC during the “struggle” years. (See, for example, Johannes Rantete, 1998, pp. 55, 59ff; Sechaba & Ellis, 1990.)
- ¹¹ More cynically put: They are the “hype” of corporate executives and young bureaucrats.

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Appendix A

Intention to Participate

Intention to participate in local council by race and province*				
Province	African	Coloured	Asian	White
	Percentage			
Western Cape	89	47	–	34
Northern Cape	41	52	–	48
Eastern Cape	73	88	–	77
Free State	25	–	–	86
KwaZulu-Natal	82	–	60	43
Mpumalanga	74	–	–	80
Northern Province	67	–	–	59
Gauteng	85	94	–	27
North West	60	–	–	40
Average	75	56	54	37

* Empty cells contained less than 10 respondents.

Intention to participate in provincial legislature by race and province*				
Province	African	Coloured	Asian	White
	Percentage			
Western Cape	45	38	–	32
Northern Cape	20	33	–	32
Eastern Cape	50	48	–	55
Free State	52	–	–	5
KwaZulu-Natal	34	–	34	11
Mpumalanga	55	–	–	78
Northern Province	49	–	–	42
Gauteng	63	60	–	10
North West	46	–	–	8
Average	49	40	35	22

* Empty cells contained less than 10 respondents.

Intention to participate in national parliament by race and province*				
Province	African	Coloured	Asian	White
	Percentage			
Western Cape	48	34	–	25
Northern Cape	11	25	–	14
Eastern Cape	58	54	–	68
Free State	37	–	–	0
KwaZulu-Natal	21	–	39	11
Mpumalanga	35	–	–	37
Northern Province	32	–	–	39
Gauteng	45	35	–	16
North West	34	–	–	8
Average	37	35	42	20

* Empty cells contained less than 10 respondents.

Intention to participate in government department by race and province*				
Province	African	Coloured	Asian	White
	Percentage			
Western Cape	48	32	–	28
Northern Cape	13	29	–	27
Eastern Cape	54	63	–	73
Free State	31	–	–	41
KwaZulu-Natal	23	–	34	11
Mpumalanga	35	–	–	37
Northern Province	30	–	–	39
Gauteng	45	53	–	22
North West	31	–	–	14
Average	36	36	38	25

* Empty cells contained less than 10 respondents.

Appendix B

Levels of Participation

Intention to participate by political preference at national level				
Party	Local council	Provincial legislature	National parliament	Government department
Percentage				
ANC	74	51	41	39
NNP	46	33	32	34
DP	54	30	26	28
IFP	73	38	24	35
UDM	73	39	41	36
Other	50	30	31	29

Intention to participate by political preference at provincial level					
Province	Party	Local council	Provincial legislature	National parliament	Government department
Percentage					
Western Cape	ANC	70	40	45	42
	NNP	45	41	36	35
Northern Cape	ANC	44	27	12	20
	NNP	80	46	38	42
Eastern Cape	ANC	74	52	61	56
	UDM	79	46	49	48
Free State	ANC	74	49	37	29
	NNP	14	–	–	3
KwaZulu-Natal	ANC	86	34	25	23
	IFP	76	37	24	35
Mpumalanga	ANC	77	58	34	35
	NNP	51	23	3	3
Northern Province	ANC	60	46	31	28
	NNP	67	67	37	37
Gauteng	ANC	89	66	46	48
	DP	41	25	38	36
North West	ANC	64	50	33	31
	Other	62	23	18	7

Reported participation by political preference at national level*				
Party	Contact with councillor	Statement at public hearing	Participation in community organisation	
		Percentage		
ANC	24	24	46	
NNP	7	9	18	
DP	8	7	31	
IFP	34	33	46	
UDM	18	22	43	
Other	21	14	34	

* The findings related to making enquiries at parliamentary constituency offices were not broken down due to the small number of respondents who engaged in this activity.

Reported participation by political preference at provincial level

Province	Party	Contact with councillor	Statement at public hearing	Participation in community organisation
		Percentage		
Western Cape	ANC	22	18	37
	NNP	1	–	5
Northern Cape	ANC	7	12	40
	NNP	7	2	36
Eastern Cape	ANC	33	30	70
	UDM	24	30	51
Free State	ANC	9	10	29
	NNP	–	–	23
KwaZulu-Natal	ANC	29	26	45
	IFP	34	35	49
Mpumalanga	ANC	14	17	31
	NNP	–	0	3
Northern Province	ANC	26	25	41
	NNP	45	42	59
Gauteng	ANC	28	33	52
	DP	4	3	25
North West	ANC	14	16	27
	Other	7	–	23

