Tighe Geoghegan[1]

Claiming a voice in sustainable development: Participation and bottom-up approaches

This chapter discusses the role of citizen participation in sustainable development. It examines the contribution of various forms and levels of participation in achieving sustainable development. It explores some of the impediments to mainstreaming citizen participation in sustainable development, and reviews approaches that have been effectively used to overcome these obstacles.

Why does sustainable development require participation?

Major international statements on sustainable development over the past twenty years have commonly called for the participation of all sectors of society in national development processes (Box 3.1 below). While the rhetoric about participation has been accompanied by some encouraging changes in both policy and practice, the rationale, value, and requirements for more participatory and democratic processes of development are still only partially accepted, maybe poorly understood, and the mainstreaming of participation remains a distant goal. Failure to understand and address the many structural, cultural, economic, political, institutional and attitudinal obstacles to the participation of different sectors of society in development may be a major reason why progress towards a more sustainable future has been so limited and halting. In order to begin to make participation in sustainable development a reality, it is first necessary to be clear on why, how, by whom and on whose terms participation occurs.

Box 3.1. International and regional statements on participation relevant to small states

Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, 2005:

> … there is a need for strengthened cooperation and partnership in support of sustainable development of small island developing States at the national, regional and international levels. Such partnership should be broad-based and ensure the involvement and participation of relevant stakeholders. (Clause 3)

The Strategy also calls for the participation of youth (clause 14), women (15), civil society (74) and the private sector (88).

Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, 2002:

> We recognise that sustainable development requires a long-term perspective

and broad-based participation in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation at all levels. (Clause 26)

All countries should ... promote public participation, including through measures that provide access to information regarding legislation, regulations, activities, policies and programmes. They should also foster full public participation in sustainable development policy formulation and implementation. (Clause 164)

Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States:

Critical to the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed to by Governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21 will be the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups. New participatory approaches to policy-making and implementation of sustainable development programmes will be necessary at all levels. In that regard, there is a special role for groups that include women, youth, senior citizens, indigenous people and local communities, as well as the private sector, labour and non-governmental organizations. As stated in Agenda 21, one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. (Clause 71)

Mahé Programme of Action for African SIDS, 1998:

African SIDS have primary responsibility for their sustainable development and in so doing should involve the active participation of all major groups, including women, children and youth, indigenous people and their communities, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers, trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technology community and farmers. (Section XVI)

St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS, 2006 revision:

The Member States of the OECS share a vision of development that is based on the principles of sustainability, stakeholder participation, equity and justice; that protects and enhances livelihoods; that reduces vulnerability to risk, stresses and shocks; that brings people out of poverty; and that results in improvement in the quality of life for all.

By 2010 Member States commit themselves to [a]cknowledging, in policy and action, and making appropriate provision for, the *meaningful and informed participation of civil society, local governments and administrations and the private sector* as managers and decision-makers.

Sustainable development requires fundamental changes in the way the earth's assets are allocated, managed and used. Although poverty is sometimes blamed for degradation and over-exploitation, these are often the result of decisions made by powerful economic and political actors. The structures, policies and systems perpetuating the status quo are deep-

seated, complex, and thus resistant to technical fixes. Bringing those who are affected by these structures, but who are often silent, into the negotiations required to bring about change, is a first step in from the commitment to sustainability becoming a reality. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004: 342).

The comprehensive nature of sustainable development – the sum of many actions at every level of human activity – also demands the participation of all sectors of society (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 177). Participatory approaches bring in a variety of perspectives, information, ideas and values, and provide arenas for identifying potential synergies and conflicts and negotiating partnerships and trade-offs. Such processes can help overcome a tendency to emphasise sustainable development's managerial and technical aspects, which can result in 'intellectual constructs of bureaucratic and professional analysts' rather than fundamental change driven by the priorities and needs of society (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 117). Involving all those who have an interest in or who are likely to be affected by decisions and management actions (often referred to as *stakeholders*) can also strengthen institutions and capacities for sustainable development (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 178–179; Geoghegan et al., 2004: 4). Participation is therefore not only an integral component of sustainable development, but also can be the primary driver of the changes that it engenders.

What does broad-based participation mean?

While seeking the full participation of all members of society may be impractical, the prevailing practice of limiting participation to the major civil society, private sector and government actors can reinforce structures perpetuating inequitable policies and unsustainable practices.

Individuals have a diversity of stakes in sustainable development, which reflect the impact of sustainable practices on their economic activities, daily routines, resource consumption patterns, health of themselves and their families, options for personal advancement, recreational activities, and other aspects of their lives. Because of these different stakes, people cannot be neatly separated into a particular 'stakeholder group', although that is what many approaches to participation, especially those driven by themes or specific events, try to do. People are essentially asked to choose whether to be represented as, for example, a 'woman' or a 'conservationist' or a 'commercial resource user'. Not only does this approach oversimplify the complexity of people's multiple identities, it may also reflect the lobbying efforts of interest groups, reinforcing inequities and excluding the voices of the most marginalised.

The problem can be compounded by the absence or weakness of institutionalised forms of governance that allow for citizens regularly to participate in decision-making on matters that affect their interests. While representative democracy, where it exists, offers citizens voice and accountability, power plays at least an equal role in political decision-making, and the needs and interests of the poor and weak tend to be least well-served (World Bank, 2001: 112–114). Local government appears to many people to offer a more promising avenue for institutionalised citizen participation. Local Agenda 21 is a global programme,

begun in 1991, to work towards sustainable development through local structures of government. At their best, these initiatives have promoted broadly inclusive processes of consultation on sustainable development issues and priorities, and translated these into concrete local actions (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 64). To date, however, most success has been in industrialised rather than in developing countries, where local government tends to be less autonomous and power structures that exclude the poor are likely to replicate themselves through the successive layers of government (e.g., Crook, 2003). In small developing states, particularly, local government can be absent or weak.

On the other hand, it can be misleading to talk about stakeholders being excluded from participating in development. Even the poorest and most marginalised people manoeuvre constantly to pursue their interests, even if the only means available are manipulation or resistance (White, 1996). The aim of participation is to create avenues for more open and constructive ways of influencing development processes and outcomes.

The challenge, therefore, is not so much to identify 'what groups' should participate as to find practical ways of incorporating, on a continuing basis, the diverse and multiple views, needs, interests, values, ideas and talents represented by each individual and by the various institutions, groups, networks and communities of which she or he is part.

What constitutes meaningful participation?

Much has been written on the different ways in which the term participation is used and understood (e.g. Rahnema, 1992; Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 178–185). In Table 3.1 the forms of 'participation' found in a survey of over 200 development projects are ordered along a continuum from passive listening to active involvement. These distinctions illustrate that sometimes what is termed participation offers participants no role except to listen, to provide information or to react to decisions already made. The amount of stakeholder involvement in sustainable development plans is necessarily variable as scale increases from

Table 3.1. Levels of participation in policy processes

1	*Participants listening only* – receiving information from a government public relations campaign or open database.
2	*Participants listening and giving information* – through public inquiries, media activities.
3	*Participants being consulted* – through working groups and meetings held to discuss policy.
4	*Participation in analysis and agenda-setting* – through multi-stakeholder groups, round tables and commissions.
5	*Participation in reaching consensus on the main strategy elements* – through national round tables, parliamentary and select committees and conflict mediation.
6	*Participants directly involved in final decision-making on the policy, strategy or its components* through direct participation or representation in planning and decision-making bodies.

Source: Adapted from Bass et al. 1995

local to national, and direct involvement of all affected parties is rarely possible even for local decisions. Nevertheless, for participation to be meaningful to all, it should at least offer fair and adequate representation of a wide range of stakeholder interests and concerns, channels for two-way communication, and the opportunity to contribute to decisions.

Who should lead participatory processes?

It is generally assumed that the state will take the lead in creating the structures for participation and co-ordinating the involvement of different sectors of society in processes of sustainable development. However, the reality is more complex, and while the state generally does play a central role in creating the structures for citizen participation, leadership is also occurring, and must occur, on a range of levels.

The role of the state

Regardless of the type of government it embodies, the state has a crucial role in creating the enabling environment for participation and is the legitimate leader of national public policy processes on sustainable development. However, the state cannot mandate participation or unilaterally set its terms. States have attributes that can actually impede participation: these include vested interests opposed to participation and entrenched attitudes and institutions that are adverse to change. State-led participatory processes have also been derailed by the dominance of public agencies with their own agendas and lack of follow-up to agreements and decisions (Vordzorgbe, 2002). As governments progressively employ the rhetoric and establish the institutions for participation, they need to be mindful of the more fundamental changes and commitments that participation implies.

Civil society and participatory processes

Civil society, including NGOs, community organisations, private sector associations, churches and labour organisations, is also an important facilitator of participation, and particularly the participation of the poor and the socially and politically marginalised. Organisations that represent stakeholder interests, whether those of women, farmers, big business, micro-entrepreneurs or citizens generally, can create a link between individuals and governments and a channel through which the interests of their constituents can be broadcast. Equally importantly, they can also help people organise in response to government policies and actions that are not in their interests. However, civil society organisations can also misrepresent or homogenise people's interests. Their most useful roles, therefore, are in organising participatory processes and communicating their results, rather than being proxies for groups of stakeholders.

Challenging unsustainable policies and initiatives through grassroots participation

Many sustainable development initiatives occur at the community or 'grassroots' level. Significantly, some of the most innovative and effective grassroots efforts have evolved out of a sense of marginalisation, through opposition to state plans or resistance, often in the face

of considerable government hostility (Massol González et al., 2006; Renard, 2005). An important lesson from these experiences is that citizens and communities can and do take responsibility on issues of sustainable development even when governments and their policies fail to be supportive or are even antagonistic, and when civil society institutions fail to adequately represent their interests. In fact, given the powerful forces perpetuating the unsustainable practices that contribute to continuing poverty and insecurity, progress towards a more sustainable world may be driven more by the sum of individual grassroots initiatives such as the one described in Box 3.2 than by the international agreements and national strategies that capture the headlines.

Box 3.2. A grassroots approach to sustainable development

In June 2000, a group of citizens in the village of Toco in north-eastern Trinidad and Tobago were surprised to discover that a large area of the village had been earmarked, through negotiations between the government and a group of developers, for a major infrastructural project including a ferry port, oil bunkering facilities, marina, and cruise ship terminal. Much private land, including the heart of the village, was to be acquired through eminent domain. While it was widely agreed that the area needed development opportunities, most residents preferred those that would protect and enhance the many natural and cultural assets of the area. The plan that was being negotiated did not fit that mould.

Following a meeting with the developers that confirmed their concerns, the group called a press conference and invited the public to attend. At that meeting, over 100 members of the community came out in opposition to the port plan, and appointed a committee to organise a local response, including the preparation of an alternative development plan that would allow for the sustainable development of Toco and the surrounding region and respect the interests and desires of the local population.

The way in which the government port plan was prepared and the inadequacy of the plan itself to meet local development needs, meant that the counter-plan had to be developed with the full involvement of stakeholders, in order to demonstrate its greater legitimacy. A participatory process also offered an opportunity to create a shared vision of development for all the communities in the area.

The method that was used to identify options, negotiate alternatives, and develop the plan included the following steps:

- a first round of formal consultations in each affected village
- informal consultations wherever and whenever possible
- incremental synthesis of the information coming from the consultations
- development of a draft plan
- a second round of community consultations to present and refine the draft plan
- a presentation of the revised plan at a public meeting for all the communities covered by the plan, to seek local endorsement and present it to the political directorate, and

- a final meeting in the capital city to present the plan to the country and get wider input.

The group spearheading the initiative put substantial early effort in mobilising residents and gathering and sharing information. By the time the actual planning process began, the local population was well aware of the issues and ready to be involved. The committee also employed media events such as a radio call-in programme to mobilise and inform the larger Trinidadian community.

This spontaneous grassroots initiative forced the government to cancel the original port development plans and to consider instead the community's alternative plan.

•Adapted from Geoghegan et al. (2004: 32–34)

Institutional capacity for participation

Just as institutions, whether of the state, civil society, private sector or community, require skills, knowledge and resources to perform their technical functions, they require capacities and orientations to effectively lead or take a role in participatory processes. These include a world view and institutional culture that are accepting of participation, structures and strategies that enable it, and skills and material resources to operationalise it. Building such capacities requires a conscious and sustained effort over time (Krishnarayan et al., 2002), starting with the recognition that institutional change is needed and that the skills and resources for engaging in participatory processes differ from those required for other aspects of governance and management. Capacity-building is a never-ending process since capacity is context-specific; changing conditions or relationships will require new forms of capacity and approaches to working effectively with others.

Basic principles of participation

Before considering methods for mainstreaming participation into processes of sustainable development, it is useful to consider some basic principles that have emerged out of experience over the past two decades:

The right to participate includes the right to negotiate objectives and outcomes.

Participation is constrained if participants have no legal or social standing in the decision-making process. Such standing can come through legal rights to the land or resources at issue or formal participation in a decision-making body that has such rights, or through laws providing citizens with the right to participate in matters affecting their economic or social well-being. Forms of consultation such as public hearings may be ineffective when they carry no obligation to take the ideas and opinions expressed into account (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 179).

Participation in development decisions is increasingly characterised as a basic human right (Pettit and Wheeler, 2005). Some countries have signed laws or regional agreements guaranteeing broad rights to participate. For example, Bolivia's 1995 Popular Participation Law introduced decentralisation to the municipal level to increase public involvement in polit-

ical decisions. While these decentralised decision-making processes have largely been captured by local elites aligned to the main national parties, the law nonetheless represents an important step in establishing the need for a legal grounding for participation (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 203).

Other initiatives to establish legal rights to participation have worked through international agreements such as the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (known as the Aarhus Convention), established by the United Nations Economic Committee on Europe in 1998. It has since been signed by 40 countries and by the European Union. The Convention 'grants the public rights and imposes on Parties and public authorities obligations regarding access to information and public participation and access to justice' (UNECE 2007).

Small states have also provided formal guarantees of the right to participate. A revision of the St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability, accepted by Member States of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States in 2007, commits each state to making 'appropriate provision for the meaningful and informed participation of civil society, local governments and administrations and the private sector as managers and decision-makers' in matters related to environmental sustainability (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, 2006: 11).

Stakeholders in participatory processes need adequate information, negotiating skill, and the willingness and time to be involved.

The inadequacy and poor quality of many participatory processes often stems from a tendency of lead actors, particularly governments and donors, to approach sustainable development as a 'project' rather than a process, and tie it to rigid timeframes and outputs that turn participation into just another deliverable. Inadequate attention to building the capacity of stakeholders to participate effectively, insufficient time for stakeholders to prepare and poor dissemination of information needed for decision-making are commonly cited obstacles to effective participation. Establishing trust and building frameworks for participation require a significant time investment, for example up to five years to plan and implement the mechanisms and processes for participation in national strategies aimed at mainstreaming sustainable development (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002: 195).

Even when adequate time and effort are invested in mobilising stakeholders and providing them with information to assess issues and form opinions, high levels of participation are not guaranteed. People must make choices about how to spend their time and resources. For many stakeholders, such as poor women with family responsibilities, these choices are quite constrained. Participatory processes can put demands on people that they cannot meet. It is therefore important that organisers seek to understand the underlying reasons for low participation and find creative ways to overcome them.

Stakeholders and their interests change over time.

While allowing adequate time for processes to develop is crucial, situations, and the ways in which they affect people, change constantly. One danger of institutionalising participatory processes too rigidly is that they can become 'stuck' on issues and groups of actors and fail to identify new issues, stakeholders and relationships that may be emerging.

Participation requires confronting power and marginalisation and accepting the possibility of conflict.

Sustainable development implies giving a voice to poor stakeholders, who have little influence over normal political processes, and to those whose positions are unpopular and therefore tend to be outvoted in those processes, while ensuring a level of equity among competing interest groups. This means offering spaces in which different stakeholders feel comfortable to make substantive contributions. Initiators of participatory processes generally exert considerable control over decisions such as who participates, to what degree and on what terms, and by so doing can constrain undesirable participants and levels of participation. The selection of methods can also favour some stakeholders and exclude others. For example, methods that involve large amounts of written material exclude the non-literate, while those based on frequent meetings can exclude people with conflicting time commitments. The result is often a decline in participation over time. As power relations establish themselves in participatory forums, less powerful and more nonconformist stakeholders may drop out, although it may outwardly appear that participation is continuing (White, 1996: 149).

It is not unusual in participatory processes for entire groups of stakeholders to be overlooked because of cultural or social biases that relegate them to insignificance; this is the case for women in many parts of the world, as well as for people from minority ethnic or religious groups.

When the institutions of participation do welcome all stakeholders and offer space for the less powerful, conflict is inevitable, as stakeholders assert their rights and challenge the status quo. In fact, 'the absence of conflict [in participatory processes] is something that should raise our suspicions' (White, 1996: 155).

The reasons different stakeholders choose to be involved in participatory processes can vary substantially (White, 1996). Governments and international agencies may use participation to legitimise their agendas, while those they seek to involve would necessarily have other motivations. In grassroots initiatives, some may use participation to show strength through numbers, while others are motivated by personal interests. Thus beneath the surface, individual motives and power relations are always in play, even as the institutions of participation may be working to equalise power and achieve consensus.

Participation in policy processes requires linkages and feedback loops from local to national.

In many countries, including a number of small states, participation has become embedded in local development institutions and planning practices. More recently, the focus has shifted to participation in national policy processes (Pimbert, 2004: 3). This scaling up has proven difficult, even for small states. Unless approaches tailored to this larger scale are employed, the number of people directly and deeply involved will decrease as the scale increases. This may be acceptable if the interests of stakeholders are adequately represented and have weight in the decisions and policies that emerge. National Sustainable Development Councils, established in many countries in the decade following Rio, may offer a vehicle for this; however, their effectiveness as stakeholder forums has so far been limited.

Box 3.3. National Sustainable Development Councils

Creation of National Sustainable Development Councils (NSDCs) is one approach to operationalising the commitments to stakeholder participation made in global sustainable development forums. Although there is no single template, the main objectives of most of these councils have been to bring major stakeholder groups together to assist in development decision-making and policy formulation. The structure would appear to be well-suited to small states where it is possible to identify most major stakeholder groups and accommodate representatives within a single council. Although considerable international support has been devoted to the establishment of NSDCs since Rio, their effectiveness as vehicles for stakeholder input into sustainable development planning and decision-making has not yet been substantial.

NSDCs were established in six Caribbean states (Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, and St. Lucia) through UNDP's Capacity 21 programme in the mid-1990s. Only Grenada's has continued to function, and although its membership encompasses representatives of most sectors of society and it has contributed to government policy and decisions, particularly regarding its international commitments to sustainable development, it has not fundamentally changed national decision-making structures in favour of greater citizen participation (Rosenberg and Thomas, 2005). In contrast to the Caribbean, most small African states have successfully established NSDCs, but they mainly serve to co-ordinate the efforts of different ministries and statutory bodies, and representation of non-governmental actors is very limited. There are for example no representatives of farmers on the NSDCs of any African country (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005: 31–32).

In summary, experience over the past ten years seems to indicate that NSDCs may play a useful role in co-ordinating inputs to national sustainable development strategies from key partners or in contributing to an improved understanding of sustainable development issues, but they have not yet proven effective as mechanisms for stakeholder consultation and participation in decision-making.

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Decentralised or multi-dimensional structures of governance also enable the interests of the majority to be negotiated 'upward' from local to national, and then fed back down for implementation or renegotiation. While such processes can simply channel local inequities upwards, they at least provide the possibility of broad participation and limit the potential of capture by powerful national or international actors.

The form participation takes should fit the larger social and political context.

In developing countries, the values, processes and structures underpinning sustainable development initiatives may be heavily influenced by donors and international agencies, sometimes conflicting with the local agenda or context and thus impeding eventual mainstreaming. This is particularly true of participatory processes in countries where the avenues through which citizens normally participate are different from those in donor countries. For example, external agencies may view an absence of national NGOs as a sign of weak civil society, and overlook vibrant local institutions. The ways in which citizens participate in government also vary and may not always conform to western or other models and norms (for example the 'bottom-up' consultation models employed by countries such as Cuba and Vietnam), but be locally legitimate nonetheless (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002:181).

In some contexts, multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making is not socially acceptable or culturally appropriate. Such situations may require very different approaches, not necessarily apparent to outsiders, for integrating the needs and interests of all of society without undermining or threatening entrenched social hierarchies and norms; such approaches have, for example, been employed to involve women in societies where they have no 'official' role in political decision-making. Finally, there are situations, for example under totalitarian rule, in which the political or cultural context is hostile to even indirect forms of stakeholder participation in decision-making. In these cases, external support can be important to grassroots or civil society resistance.

A glance at methods and approaches

A vast literature exists on methods for effective participation, bringing with it a multiplicity of sometimes bewildering acronyms. The main sets of methods that have gained prominence over the past twenty years can be broadly categorised as follows:

- *Participatory learning and appraisal*: This group, which includes the widely used set of tools known as Participatory Rural Appraisal, or PRA, aims at incorporating stakeholders in building the information base required to address problems that have been pre-identified, and, increasingly, to contribute to the analysis of issues.
- *Stakeholder analysis*: These methods support the identification of stakeholders and analysis of their interests, as necessary steps in the participatory process. They are helpful in assessing who should be involved and how, and what their stakes are.
- *Participatory planning and conflict management*: These approaches bring stakeholders together to plan and negotiate on issues that affect their lives or livelihoods.

These approaches have largely been tested and refined at local levels. As the scale of participatory processes has increased to regional, national and even international levels, new methods are emerging. There has been particular interest in a set of approaches referred to as *deliberate and inclusive processes*, or DIPs. These methods seek to assure the full and considered involvement of a diversity of social actors in determining policy needs and directions. They include tools such as visioning exercises, multi-criteria analysis, and citizen panels, which give representatives of major interest groups a substantive role in policy

processes. Their scope can be expanded through techniques such as radio call-in programmes, community consultations, and opinion surveys.[2]

Whatever methods are used should be effective in eliciting information and stimulating dialogue on sustainable development issues and needs. The information and perceptions that participatory processes can uncover can be organised into the following typology:[3]

- *Priorities*: What aspects of sustainability are most important to what groups? What have the greatest impacts on people's well-being and livelihoods and on the economy?
- *Problems*: Where do the priorities and interests of different groups create conflicts that must be negotiated to achieve sustainable outcomes?
- *Power*: What are the relations among different groups that impede equitable access or sustainable use of natural resources? Whose interests have precedence in existing decision-making processes and whose are overlooked?
- *Potentials*: What capacities can different groups bring to the process of sustainable development? How can those capacities be strengthened and put to most effective use? What are the roles and responsibilities of various actors, and how might they be redistributed to ensure more equity and create real opportunities for participation?
- *Partnerships*: Who is already doing what and how can the efforts of all be most effectively marshalled and organised?

Small states and participation

While making participation an integral part of national development depends on political will and the distribution of power within society, small states may be appropriate sites for learning about mainstreaming participation and scaling it up to national levels. Size may give small states an advantage in implementing participatory processes, particularly at national level, given shorter physical distances separating stakeholders, more frequent interaction between local and national levels of governance, and dense social networks in which 'everybody seems to know everybody'.

There are also a number of factors that may affect the rationale and form of participation in small states. For example, the capacity within agencies responsible for sustainable development is likely to be limited and staff must necessarily be generalists. It therefore becomes necessary to draw on knowledge and expertise from outside government to address complex problems of sustainable development.

Small states are particularly vulnerable to shocks including global market volatility, environmental change and disasters. Change, and the need to adapt to change, may thus be a more frequent issue for small states than larger ones, requiring regular processes of collective decision-making and negotiation among stakeholders. While participation cannot decrease the vulnerability of small states to external shocks, it can help build their resilience.

Small states negotiate participation at multinational levels differently than larger states. While often disadvantaged and even marginalised in global processes, most small states are

parts of regional or global groupings that can enable them to represent the interests of their stakeholders at international forums on sustainable development. However, doing so requires the development of effective co-operation mechanisms, civil society networks, and structures for communicating and disseminating information.

Conclusion

Securing meaningful stakeholder participation is essential for achieving the vision of sustainable development now shared by nearly all countries, large and small. Attention to process is crucial, and much effort has gone into developing and disseminating appropriate methods and approaches. Actors at different levels have also shown their commitment. Governments have enacted policies and ratified international agreements supporting people's right to participate. Civil society organisations have played leadership roles in mobilising stakeholders and facilitating their participation. Impressive grassroots initiatives have demonstrated that people are prepared to act on issues of sustainable development even when they are discouraged from doing so. However, while there have been local level successes, broad-based participation of all sectors of society in national or regional processes has proven difficult to achieve. The essential challenge remaining is to confront and overcome entrenched attitudes, institutions and power relations that impede the effective mainstreaming of participation in processes of sustainable development.

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Notes

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2 For a comprehensive overview of participatory learning and appraisal, see Pretty et al. (1995). Good references on stakeholder analysis include Ramírez (1999) and Renard (2004). On participatory planning and conflict management, see Geoghegan et al. (2004) and Ramírez (1999). For more on DIPs, see Pimbert and Wakeford (2001) and Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2004: 393–407). For an example of an inclusive participatory policy process in the small state of Grenada, see Bass (2000).

3 The typology, developed by the author, synthesises the uses of participation found in a range of works including Bass et al. (1995) and Geoghegan et al. (2004).

4 Starred references can provide further information and guidance on the theory and practice of participation in processes of sustainable development.