

**LOGO SOUTH THEMATIC  
PROGRAMME: PUBLIC  
PARTICIPATION**

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# **1. THEMATIC PROGRAMMES IN LOGO SOUTH**

## **1.1 LOGO South**

LOGO South, the Good Local Government programme for developing countries, was started in 2005. The objective of the LOGO South programme is to strengthen good local government as a condition for poverty reduction. The programme focuses on reinforcing the capacity of local government by investing in people, in other words, capacity development is development of human capacity.

On behalf of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), VNG International runs the LOGO South programme. VNG International is the international co-operation agency of the VNG. LOGO South is funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is built on the experiences of its predecessor, the Municipal International Cooperation in Developing Countries programme (GSO). This programme existed from 1993 to 2002, and was also run by VNG International.

The programme is operationalised through country programmes and thematic programmes. These programmes are based on a situation analysis, and have their own sets of objectives, activities and results. All programmes contain a logical framework.

The aim of making the programme objective operational in this way is to ensure:

Ownership and participatory development of the framework;

1. Coherence with international (donor) policies and practices around the theme;
2. Result orientation at the programme level;
3. Flexibility in the choice of activities and adjustments during implementation.

## **1.2 Development of the LOGO South thematic programme public participation**

Within the LOGO South programme, there are four distinctive thematic programmes:

1. Local water management;
2. Local waste management;
3. Local responses to HIV/AIDS;
4. Public participation at the local level.

The various thematic programmes have different characters. Whereas the first three thematic programmes are related to 'real' problems at the local level, public participation would seem to be more process related.

Assuming that high quality public participation is a condition for local development, the lessons of this 'crosscutting' thematic programme are important in itself, but simultaneously, they can serve to improve results in other policy fields. In other words, enhanced public participation is a means to an end, the end being improved living conditions at the local level.

Drafting a thematic programme is a participatory process of all involved parties in the developing countries and in the Netherlands. Thematic programmes can only be successfully implemented when all the parties involved are committed.

Experience dictates that such commitment is best achieved by building the programme on the needs of the parties involved. This is why a 'stocktaking' exchange activity was organized in Stellenbosch in September 2006. Local councillors from Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, South Africa and The Netherlands took part in this event.

Through a series of presentations and exercises, the participants learned about the respective systems of local government and about the room for public participation in particular.

Groups made up of councillors of different countries performed SWOT analyses and shared ideas for innovative instruments which may be of use to council members (anywhere in the world) in their attempt to improve public participation. The general direction of this thematic programme is largely derived from the various contributions that were made by the practitioners working together in Stellenbosch.

This draft programme was discussed with the Dutch councillors who took part in the Stellenbosch meeting. After this meeting, and before it is finalized, it was also put to the councillors from Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

### **1.3 About this document**

This thematic programme consists of two parts. Part one contains an analysis of public participation at the local level, with a particular focus on the role of councillors. Some of the content of this part is drawn from literature; other elements are the result of the deliberations in Stellenbosch. Part two contains the programme design including the programme objectives, activities and expected results. The annexes contain a list of the sources that were used to draft the programme, and a logframe.

## **2. PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

### **2.1 Public participation**

Public participation, citizen participation, community participation, collaborative civic engagement; these are just a few of the terms which are used to describe the involvement of citizens in policy making. We have chosen to use the term public participation throughout this programme. When the term public participation is used, it represents the involvement of citizens in the local government process (in the broadest sense).

### **2.2 The importance of public participation**

The unique feature of local government is local accountability. Local representatives are elected to serve local people. Local authorities are there to develop a longer term vision for the community, to improve the quality of life of people, to provide services that meet local needs and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the community.

Local authorities are not alone in their responsibility. Community organizations and other public and private sector bodies have an interest in the development of the local community. Whether they are youth groups, residents' associations or Chambers of Commerce, these organizations have a stake in the community. They benefit from its development. At the same time, they have much to contribute to its development.

A local authority belongs to 'local' people and local organizations. If it is to meet local needs, it has to understand what those needs are.

Who understands this better than the people themselves? If it is to make a real impact on the development of the community, why not harness the commitment and expertise of all community organizations in a shared endeavour?

Perhaps fundamentally, participation is intrinsic to the core meaning of democracy. It is essential for good governance as it improves information flow, accountability, due process, and gives voice to those most directly affected by public policy. Democracy theorist Robert Dahl emphasizes the notion of 'effective participation' - i.e. citizens having an adequate and equal opportunity to express their preferences, place questions on the agenda, and articulate reasons for endorsing one outcome over another.

Procedures that emphasize ongoing participation between elections and consensus-oriented decision-making provide more legitimate decisions because people have been involved in making them, emphasizes Jane Mansbridge in the book 'Beyond Adversary Democracy'. The book stresses how collective decision-making in an alternative workplace and in a town hall meeting in New England (in the US) produced more durable policy solutions than either electoral or top-down approaches.

One practical outcome of participation is the creation of 'social capital'. Social capital is the trust and confidence that is developed when government and civil society meet together in pursuit of a community's common good, explains political scientist Robert Putnam. Social capital is the basis of legitimacy for official government institutions and is necessary for effective and efficient governance. Without social capital, when trust and confidence are lacking, progress of government efforts can be hindered.

In the long run, communities without trust are dysfunctional and in the worst scenarios violence among contending social forces can erupt.

Public participation therefore, can be a critical tool in reinvigorating social capital that exists and building new social capital when it is absent.

### **2.3 Public participation strategies**

Community participation is one of the key pillars that make a local authority effective. But it does not just happen. In more centralized countries, people may expect local officials to take the decisions, to tell them what to do. They are not used to sharing in decision-making. Public participation is something the local authority must work at. It needs a strategy both to engage local people and to bring local organizations into constructive partnerships.

The starting point is building awareness. Local people and organizations, as much as officials, have to understand the rights, obligations and opportunities of local government. In some cultures, this awareness is widespread, in others, it is weak.

Secondly, people and organizations have to be informed of the activities of the local authority, its policies and plans, its decisions, its performance results. The local authority needs mechanisms to do this: a communication strategy, a quarterly magazine, a sympathetic press, local radio and television programmes.

Thirdly, people and organizations should be consulted on the draft plans and budgets and the kind of services they want. Such an approach should become second nature to elected representatives and officials. Service providers should get feedback from service users on the quality and accessibility of the services provided.

Fourthly, people should have the opportunity to participate in decision-making where it is relevant. They could participate in, for example, local committees or youth parliaments to which budgets have been devolved. There could be specified times when they can speak at council meetings.

Fifthly, local organizations may be able to work in partnership with a local authority to deliver particular services more effectively. A tenants' association can take responsibility for maintaining a residential building. Youth organizations can work with the police and local authorities to reduce juvenile offences.

## 2.4 Designing successful public participation processes

The design of a public participation process is not based on a single approach or a single method. There is a wide variety of techniques that may serve different purposes or have varying forms, costs, structures and effects. These approaches may be used singly or in combination. Which method might work best, and when it should be used, is highly contingent on the context. For example, in a particular local context there may be a traditional local culture of decision-making with long-standing patterns of policy formulation, leadership, and class or ethnic relations that inform the feasibility of an approach or method. So, designing culturally specific methodologies involves taking into account on-the-ground structures, discretion and sensitivities.

At the risk of oversimplifying, let's hold that public participation is either initiated by public actors or by the local authority. Too often, initiatives by the public are regarded to be cumbersome, or even hostile, on the part of local authority. If public actors are so concerned by a certain matter that they put their time and energy into reaching out to the local authority, the least the local authority can do is to devote serious attention to the issue and the people that have raised it.

In any case, the local authority can always initiate a public participation process itself. But, what does this take, and which underlying factors should be taken into account?

### 2.4.1 The CLEAR framework

Factors that underlie participation and non-participation are set out in the CLEAR framework below. This framework is based on in-depth studies and it will help local authorities understand what drives participation. Moreover, it will help elected representatives and staff to assess the participation and consultation efforts of their own local authorities (Summarized from the report of Prof. Gerry Stoker 'Extending Local Participation' to the CDRL, October 2004).

*Framework regarding in-depth studies on public participation*

Factor affecting participation	How it works	Associated policy target
Can do	The individual resources that people have to mobilize and organize (speaking, writing and technical skills, as well as confidence to use them) make a difference in their capacity to participate	Capacity building: specific support measures or targeted development

<u>L</u> ike to	To commit to participation requires a sense of involvement with the public entity that is the focus of engagement	Sense of community, civic engagement, social capital and citizenship
<u>E</u> nabled to	The civic infrastructure of groups and umbrella organizations makes a difference because it creates or blocs an opportunity structure for participation	To build the civic infrastructure so that there are groups and organizations around to channel and facilitate participation
<u>A</u> sks to	Mobilizing people into participation by asking for their input can make a big difference	Public participation schemes that are diverse, engaging and reflexive
<u>R</u> esponded to	When asked people say they will participate if they are listened to, not necessarily agreed with, but able to see a response	A public policy system that can show a capacity to respond

Getting people to participate is not easy. There may be a lack of capacity to participate or a lack of engagement with politics or with local issues. There are no quick-fix solutions. Results take a long time to come. But the behaviour of local politicians and managers is important. If they ask people to participate in a committed and consistent manner and respond effectively to any subsequent participation, people are more likely to become engaged.

The CLEAR model suggests to policy-makers that, if they wish to increase local participation, the solution is largely in their hands. All the key factors that drive up local participation are open to their influence. Policy levers are available.

Activity levels rise where people can participate, like to participate, are enabled to participate, are asked to get involved, and are responded to. If this is the case, the question is, how can the CLEAR model be made to function optimally?

## 2.5 Role of councillors vis a vis public participation

Above, it was mentioned that local authorities must and can make work of public participation. But, what or who really is the local authority? In most systems of local government, we can distinguish an executive board, a council, and civil servants. When literature, best practices, manuals, etc. are studied, one will quickly notice that, where it comes to local authorities, most of the capacity building efforts in the field of public participation are directed at either the executive board or the civil servants. In itself, there is nothing wrong with that level of attention. However, a lack of attention for councillors can seriously disturb any attempt at involving the public in the local government process.

Why is this so? Unlike civil servants or (in some cases) the executive board, councillors are directly elected by the people. They are regarded to be the vehicles through which people can make themselves heard. They are expected to be in touch with the needs of those they have the responsibility to represent. Councillors and the council should act as enabling agents to the community.

Earlier, we referred to the concept of 'social capital'; the trust and confidence that is developed when government and civil society meet together in pursuit of a community's common good. Ideally speaking, councillors are the catalysts of social capital at the local level.

This leads us to the central question: *how can councillors create an optimal climate for public participation at the local level, and how can they be supported in doing so?* In other words, what do they need to learn before they can put the CLEAR framework in motion?

Unfortunately, councillors are faced with various challenges in their attempts to increase the involvement of the public in local matters.

The following points were made at the September 2006 Stellenbosch meeting:

- Quickly after taking up their mandate, councillors are regarded by the general public to be 'insiders' (as opposed to being outsiders). Whether this is objectively correct or not, it does lead to changes in attitude which are not conducive to better relations / public participation;
- Councillors are often 'volunteers'; they have relatively little time to deal with many and complex matters. Sometimes there is a lack of time to 'see things through', which is particularly important in relation to the public;
- Councillors don't always have the skills to engage in meaningful public participation processes;
- Councillors only have a mandate for a limited number of years; civil servants, NGO's and the people will normally 'outlive' them;
- Interest groups usually press for 'special' interests, individuals often come with personal problems: however, the councillor has to think of the development of the municipality at large;
- The council agenda is not always transparent. In any case, it is often difficult to set a clear agenda and to make 'problems' (of the people) fit into the agenda;
- It is difficult to communicate to people about documents which are difficult to understand;
- Sometimes participatory processes get stuck in the consultative phase: 'consultation constipation';
- Corruption among councillors ruins the 'social capital';
- Promising more than one can offer also ruins the 'social capital'.

Taking into account these observations, the programme design described in the next part of this publication sets out to provide practical assistance to councillors.

### **3. PROGRAMME DESIGN**

Public participation is an important element of good governance. In September 2005, councillors from Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, South Africa and The Netherlands came together (LOGO South Exchange Activity) to discuss the role of councillors vis a vis (the enhancement of) public participation. An essential conclusion of this session was that councillors are potentially instrumental in connecting the public to government, but that they are generally poorly equipped to act in this manner. The reasons for this are multiple, and can be classified as 'universal' (1), country specific (2) and municipality specific (3). Our approach is primarily targeted at councillors, and covers these three levels, simultaneously.

#### **3.1 Programme objective**

Universal level:

- Councillors in local government acquire better insight in public participation processes

#### **3.2 Expected results**

Country level:

- Councillors from at least 4 of the participating Logo South countries acquire insight in the possibilities and limits in their respective countries of greater involvement of people in local matters.

Municipal level:

- Innovative practices in the field of public participation in municipalities have been implemented

#### **3.3 Planned activities for 2008**

'Universal' level: publication (February 2008)

- This Thematic Plan is supposed to be useful for councillors in all parts of the world. Insights of the Stellenbosch exchange activity and other relevant sources have been used to list the challenges of councillors, and, more importantly, to provide practical suggestions on how to overcome these.

Country level: Four country specific training sessions, to be held between April and July of 2008

- There may be 'universal' explanations for the fact that the level of public participation falls behind expectation. At the same time, national legislation, culture and other national factors often prove to pose obstacles. The mandates of councillors, also with respect to actively involving citizens to take place in the local public arena, differ considerably. Therefore, in addition to a 'universal' approach, country specific approaches will be taken. Training sessions (four in total) will be organised for councillors of four different countries. These sessions will be held in the respective countries, and they will be run in close cooperation with national experts.

Municipal level: Small Grants Fund for innovative practices at the local level

- The meeting of councillors from Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, South Africa and The Netherlands clearly illustrated that, despite various obstacles, councillors do have innovative ideas on how to improve citizen participation at their own municipality. A small grants fund will therefore be open (between April and July of 2008) for councillors from LOGO South countries. The fund provides co-financing for innovative practices.
- Cooperation between the applicant and the counterpart in the Netherlands is stimulated, but is not conditional for successful applications.
- In the fall of 2008 an exchange activity will be held to evaluate and share the lessons of the projects with various councillors who have been involved.

#### 4. LOGFRAME PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Title: public participation 2005- 2008				
	INTERVENTION LOGIC	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
<b>Project Global Objective</b>	The capacity of local governments in target countries developed in improving good local government	Achievement of good local government in target countries measured by more transparent decision making	UN Reports, Worldbank reports	
<b>Programme Purpose</b>	Effective local government interventions on citizen participation developed	At least 40 participating councillors put forward council proposals leading to improved citizen participation	Minutes of council meetings	Public participation remains high on the political agenda or receives sufficient attention
<b>Results</b>	<p>Councillors from at least 4 target countries have exchanged information on the possibilities and limits in their respective countries of greater involvement of people in local affairs</p> <p>Innovative practices in the field of public participation in municipalities have been implemented</p>	<p>At least 5 participating councillors from at least 4 different Logo South countries attend the Exchange Activity organised by VNG International</p> <p>At least 3 innovative practices have been submitted to the fund, have been implemented and the results have been disseminated</p>	<p>Reports, minutes of meetings</p> <p>Approved applications, reports of innovative practices</p>	<p>Willingness of councillors to cooperate</p> <p>Proposals are submitted</p>

	Improved knowledge of councillors in the field of public participation in local governments particularly with respect to their own country	At least 10 councillors per country (at least 4) receive training aimed at improving the skills needed to improve the involvement of the public.	Attendance lists, evaluation of trainings	Willingness of councillors to cooperate
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Activities	ACTIVITES	MEANS	COSTS	ASSUMPTIONS
	1. Implementation of annual work plan (for example attendance of seminars, Exchange Activities, publications)	Input of VNG staff, local coordinator, staff of local governments, local and international experts	Costs for all activities contributed by Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local government in target countries and in the Netherlands	Local partners are committed to participate in work plan activities
	2. Programme management (assistance to Dutch and local partners during project implementation, check of financial and narrative reports bilateral projects)			LOGO South staff stays with VNG International or can easily be replaced, local coordinators stay on board or can easily be replaced
	3. Monitorings missions by VNG-i staff to monitor progress on country level and project activities			Political situation in the countries allow missions to take place as planned

## LITERATURE / SOURCES

- Notes of the LOGO South Exchange Activity in Stellenbosch in September of 2006: speeches by professor Mark Swilling, professor John Williams and dr. Jaap de Visser
- Stellenbosch notes continued: notes of the various working groups
- 'Public Participation in Local government, a framework for action', Ivan Meyer and Francis Theron, 2000
- 'Citizen and the City', Harry Daemen and Linze Schaap, 2000
- Council of Europe Capacity Building Toolkit, 2005
- 'Citizens Innovation Local Governance, a 21st Century Approach', Report and Guidelines from the Demos Project (Edinburgh Conference 2004)
- Toolkit Citizen Participation ([www.toolkitparticipation.com](http://www.toolkitparticipation.com))
- Various issues of the Local Government Bulletin, issued by the Community Law Centre of the University of the Western Cape
- 'Citizen Participation: a source of inspiration to the European Union?' Report on a study of best practices in citizen participation in the Netherlands, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, on the occasion of the European 'Multilevel Governance & Democratic Legitimacy Seminar (13 and 14 November, 2003)
- 'Beyond Adversary Democracy' Jane Mansfield, 1980
- Gerry Stoker 'Extending Local Participation', 2004