

**Valuing Social Resources or Capitalising on Them?
Limits to Pro-poor Urban Governance in Nine Cities of the South**

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Introduction

It has become increasingly common for a rich associational life to be identified as a key predictor of social capital, defined by Robert Putnam (1993:167) as 'features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. The concept has been employed across a range of concerns. For example, Fukuyama (1995) has shown how trust, norms and social networks have operated in the interests of business cliques by reducing transaction costs, while in the context of urban development it has been argued that social capital is an important component of the 'asset portfolio of the urban poor' themselves (Moser, 1998). Recently social capital has come to refer more specifically only to associational life or social networks, rather than social norms as such (Foley and Edwards, 1999), while Putnam in his current work (2000) focuses primarily on the issue of civic engagement. It is largely in this later vein that contributors to development debates have suggested that social capital may lead to more effective development interventions.

Drawing on research conducted in nine cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America ¹ this paper analyses evidence of local level networks and associational life, to assess where benefits accrue when they are harnessed in the interests of city governance. The conclusions drawn suggest that those features of social organisation generally understood as social capital do not necessarily benefit poor urban populations and that the social resources of the urban poor are as much an asset for urban development institutions and processes as they are for the poor themselves. Put another way, while urban government and other development institutions may capitalise on the social

resources and social action of poor urban communities, this does not necessarily signify either a valuing of urban social life or a dependence on it. In other words, 'social capital' is no guarantee of pro-poor urban governance.

Conceptualising Social Action and Urban Governance

The broad policy arena for city governance in Africa, Asia and Latin America is one characterised by decentralisation fever (Tendler, 1997), increased focus on private solutions to service delivery (Batley, 1996) and mounting concern with participative urban local government (Douglass and Friedman, 1998). In this context faith in the development potential of social networks and community level institutions for urban management and local governance seems to know no bounds and a wide range of social and associational sites have been harnessed in the interests of urban development programmes. A focus on 'getting the institutions right' has involved attempts at formalising social networks and establishing organisational structures such as neighbourhood committees and community development forums, in order to involve citizens in the identification of problems, the prioritisation of needs and the delivery of local services. No doubt it is for this reason that the work of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) has struck such a chord in the study and practice of international development (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 1999; World Bank, 1997).

Despite the impressively rapid take up of the concept of social capital by the community of development professionals it remains an elusive construct (Uphoff, 1999). Fine (1998) goes so far as to call social capital a 'chaotic' concept and suggests that the lack of definitional consensus and the popularity of this nebulous term are causally related. Any review of the literature will confirm this, with the notion of social capital being employed in respect of individuals, households, communities, governments, NGOs and a range of other institutional relationships. Across this wide definitional panoply the concept of social capital has received three key lines of treatment in the literature, particularly as it pertains to developing countries. First, enthusiasts are keen to point out how social capital can reduce poverty and lead to

¹ This paper draws on nine city case study reports undertaken during the first phase of research during 1998-99, conducted under the ESCOR Commissioned Research on Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty.

more effective governance (Bebbington, 1997, 1999; Brown and Ashman, 1996; Dasgupta and Serageldin, 1999; Moser, 1998; World Bank, 1997). Within this group there has been particular concern over how social capital might be measured quantitatively (Narayan and Pritchett, 1996). Others are cautiously positive, being exercised over whether or not social capital can be created or constructed (Evans, 1996; Putnam, 1993; Unger, 1998). A second treatment argues that social capital as well as being ill-defined, concerns issues we already know about but have defined differently (Sharpe, 1998). Relatedly it is argued that while the general framework might serve as a useful heuristic tool for studying social life, it offers little at the level of policy intervention and planning practice (Campbell and Mzaidume, 2000). A third body of literature comes out of a more thorough going critique of the social capital concept as it has been taken up in relation to international development. In this context it has been argued, for example, that the concept of social capital as defined by Putnam at least, is based on circular argument (Harriss, 1997) and that it has a 'dark side' which eclipses the role of political action and prospects for democratisation (Putzel, 1997). Further criticism suggests that as a conceptual framework, social capital does not accommodate issues of power, representation and exclusionary forms of association, also obfuscating the social impact of 'anti-social capital' and the fact that the mobilisation of local networks does not always yield positive results (Beall, 1997). There has also been disquiet over the use of the term 'capital' to apply to relationships and networks which while undoubtedly social resources, can only contentiously be described as capital (Fine, 1998).

Nevertheless, analytical approaches such as that offered by the concept of social capital appeal to policy makers, because they serve as conceptual grids that contain for them the messiness of social reality. Moreover, the social capital framework is underpinned by an implicit rationale that allows for the unburdening of fiscal responsibility on to lower order institutions and citizens themselves. Thus as an operational framework, social capital becomes functionalist, offering as it does the possibility of social networks being used instrumentally in the interests of development means, rather than ultimate development goals.²

² Along similar lines, gender and development planners (Moser, 1993; Levy, 1998) have shown that the involvement of women in households and communities can contribute to development effectiveness. This point has not been lost on governments and international development agencies pursuing

Many would argue that this is a false construct and that social capital constitutes an asset base that is mutually reinforcing for government and citizens alike. Putnam (1993) for example sees social capital as a public good, while Ostrom (1996) describes the relationships involved as co-production and Evans (1996) talks of the 'embeddedness' of these relations leading to state-society synergy. Moreover, their arguments are supported by detailed empirical studies of positive cooperation and complementarity across the public-private divide (Brown and Ashman, 1996; Lam, 1996; Tandler, 1997), although without historical contextualisation it is difficult to ascertain whether the latter can really be attributed to prior endowments of social capital. With these arguments in mind and drawing on findings from nine city case studies, the paper seeks first to identify what low-income urban dwellers do individually and collectively on their own account. Second it asks whether their collective self-help and reciprocal activities impact on urban governance and third, with what effect. In other words, when there is co-operation across the public-private divide the question pursued is where do benefits accrue?

Before moving on to examining evidence from the city case studies, some definitional clarity is in order. The concept of 'social capital' is largely avoided in the following discussion, except with reference to the debates the term has engendered. Mercedes González de la Rocha (1994) talks of social norms and networks as the 'resources of the poor' and the notion of 'social resources' is used in preference to 'social capital' to refer to the micro-level social relationships and networks that go to make up local level associational life. In terms of the ways in which associational life feeds into interest-based collective strategies, the term 'social action' is used. When this becomes more formalised and sustained forms of civic engagement with the state and other development institutions, the concept of governance is preferred.

This is not to suggest that other concepts such as governance have escaped controversy. The analytical shifts associated with the 'new institutionalism' (North,

efficiency agendas (Pearson and Jackson, 1998; Razavi and Miller, 1995). More recently the sustainable rural livelihoods approach (Carney, 1998; Chambers and Conway, 1992) has provided international agencies with a framework, which claims to be 'building on strengths' (DFID, 2000; UNDP, 1997). Similarly this runs the risk of promoting harnessing the capacities and energies of people in low-income communities towards pre-determined development agendas.

1990; Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom, Schroeder and Wynne, 1993; Tandler, 1997) have been accompanied by a conceptual shift from government to governance. Harpham and Boateng (1997:66) distinguish between government and governance as follows:

... the crucial distinction between government and governance is the notion of civil society, which can be defined as the public life of individuals and institutions outside the control of the state. Government on the other hand, is said to consist of those agencies that make and implement laws.

Leftwich (1993) underscores the fact that there is a political and economic dimension to both, while Mackintosh (1992:2), following Dreze and Sen (1989), extends this line of analysis to the sphere of development policy, arguing that policy-making is embedded in the wider sphere of *public action*, which in turn is a *social* process. It is in this spirit that I use the term 'social action' alongside 'governance', to embrace the ways in which social resources feed into political processes and are harnessed for development.

There are two main standpoints on *urban* governance. One stresses the administrative and technical dimensions and is a virtual synonym for urban management. The other stresses the political dimensions, referring to the relationship between civil society and the local state or with higher levels of government, because cities are not autonomous entities and different tiers intervene in urban areas (Beall, 1996). The second approach is adopted here, asserting that urban governance embraces a complex network of interactions among institutions and groups, with government being only the visible tip of the governance iceberg. Seen from this perspective, social processes and networks at the local level are inextricably linked into urban governance.

Evidence from the Cities

The empirical material drawn on here derives from nine studies conducted between 1998 and 1999 in cities across Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Asian cities are Ahmedabad (Dutta and Batley, 1999), Bangalore (Benjamin and Bhuvaneshari, 1999) and Vizakhpatnam (Kumar and Amis, 1999) in India, Colombo (Fernando, Russell, Wilson and Vidler, 1999) in Sri Lanka and Cebu City (Etemadi, 1999) in Philippines. Santiago (Rodriguez, Winchester and Richards, 1999) was selected for Latin America and the African cities are Johannesburg (Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell, 1999),

Kumasi (Korboe, Diaw and Devas) and Mombassa (Gatabaki-Kamau and Rakodi, 1999).³ These are very different cities and patterns of social action and urban governance are undoubtedly context-specific, although patterns emerge that are comparable and worthy of comment.⁴

The Social Resources of the Urban Poor

For the last 25 years development studies as a discipline, evolving mainly out of a rural context, has recognised the social and political potential of mutual support strategies, with Scott's (1976; 1985) theses on the 'moral economy' and 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' holding analytical centre stage for much of this time. In his wake there has been extensive exploration of reciprocity and risk-pooling and the horizontal and asymmetrical social relations that accompany mutuality, including both critique (Popkin, 1979) as well as efforts to go beyond or scale-up his analysis (Platteau, 1991; Wade, 1988). There was a tendency to assume that reciprocal social networks are not as deeply entrenched in urban contexts, although this has been effectively countered. For example, González de la Rocha (1994:13) has argued with reference to the urban poor in Mexico City that, 'it is precisely because of poverty that individual survival is not possible and people need to rely on others in their households and their social networks to make ends meet'. Indeed, there are a large number of studies from Africa, Asia and Latin America that show evidence of kinship and social networks and co-operative behaviour of various kinds in urban environments and beyond (Beall, 1995; Breman, 1985; Cohen, 1969; Ferguson, 1999; Mitchell, 1969; Moser, 1996, 1998; Roberts, 1994).

If Popkin is to be believed, reciprocity is barely evident in associational life and is more likely to be found in smaller units such as the household. The evidence drawn from the nine city cases offers incontrovertible confirmation that kinship networks are

³ Unless otherwise referenced or stated, evidence and arguments presented in relation to the nine cities are drawn from the country studies referenced here.

⁴ It should be noted that the city case studies were general and more broadly focused on urban governance, partnership and urban poverty, without a specific focus on the social dimensions of urban development. Thus the depth of social analysis is patchy across the case studies and derives from different understandings of what is conventionally but loosely framed as 'social capital'. Moreover, it is important to stress that the comparative analysis employed is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

and remain important in urban areas. Families were identified in a number of the city studies, as vital in confronting vulnerability and in securing weaker kin members against abject poverty. For Africa in particular, the city cases show that extended family networks span the rural-urban divide and are important sources of security and support. The Kumasi study parallels the findings of other scholars working on Southern and East Africa (Ferguson, 1999; Francis, 2000) that migration and remittance flows are not necessarily uni-directional - rural-urban and urban-rural respectively - but flow where they are needed at different times.

However, evidence from Kumasi also suggests that while kinship networks form an important basis of mutual self-help, they can be a mixed blessing for those who are better off but are in fact, just getting by. While close-knit kinship networks have served Kumasi's better off families well, with relatives overseas contributing to gains in overall living conditions through migration and inward remittances, for more marginal households, limited resources can be drained. Borrowing and begging on the part of destitute kin, with no intention or possibility of repayment, becomes highly problematic for relatives who themselves are already on the edge. As I have argued elsewhere (Beall, 1995) and as the evidence from Johannesburg and Vizakhpatnam also confirms, without basic resources and security in place it is difficult if not impossible for poor families to sustain self-help and mutual assistance. A key example from Kumasi relates to the increasing commoditisation of rites of passage, which can lead to them resembling barely disguised extortion rackets. At its worst, deprivation leads to funerals becoming events where family members haggle over the belongings of deceased relatives rather than the important social events they are in Ghanaian society. Under conditions of economic and social stress the evidence from Kumasi suggests that urban funerals have become fractious, contested affairs, often associated with high levels of acrimony and increased inter-personal violence, rather than opportunities to strengthen social relations and consolidate social resources. Clearly, poverty and vulnerability can erode the social resources of the poor as well as the very poor.

In the Latin American context, the centrality of household strategies was shown to be important too. However, here the Santiago case suggested that poorer households have abandoned broader associational life in favour of individualistic strategies linked

to seeking reinsertion into labour market and monetary exchanges. Social support networks were reportedly only really strong among middle income groups. In a context of relative deprivation and high levels of inequality where the urban poor are excluded and stigmatised, people take refuge in tight family and close friendship networks. Immediate families appear to have become havens in a heartless world (Lasch, 1977) characterised by decreased levels of social contact. The evidence from Santiago also suggests that the strong bonds of kinship do not provide the information flows and access to resources and decision-making arenas that broader networks provide. Thus the conclusions to be drawn suggest, therefore, that exclusive reliance on close family ties can reproduce vulnerability as much as reduce it.

The argument presented in the Santiago case study and Popkin's arguments notwithstanding, in other contexts broader social networks and connections with friends and neighbours were reported to be of vital importance in both softening and lubricating the experience of urban life. Echoing Granovetter's (1973, 1985) argument about the strength of weak ties, the evidence from Cebu City shows that social networks beyond the family are an important way for people to glean information about employment opportunities as well as access to goods and services. In Bangalore it was found that customary savings mechanisms such as *chit* funds constitute a critical resource for the urban poor and feed into complex informal markets of one kind or another. In Colombo, traditional funeral societies (*Maranadara Samiti*) and savings groups (*sittu*) exist along side sports clubs, trade unions and community development organisations. The same patterns are observable in Johannesburg, with *stokvels* or informal savings clubs, bulk buying schemes, communal eating arrangements and burial associations existing side-by-side with church-based and religious organisations in what is a city that exhibits an active civil society (Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell, 2000). In the African context, urban social groupings can coagulate around rural linkages and identities such as hometown associations or job-securing networks. This was the case for Kumasi and Mombassa, for example, where rural-urban linkages are assiduously nurtured. In Johannesburg too, many migrants to the city maintain close links with people from their places of origin. Even for Santiago, evidence was provided of broader social networks in operation, such as the *allegados* committees. This is a Chilean practice and term applied to extended family or friends living in households where they do not pay rent but contribute in non-

monetary ways. As shown by the cases of the *allegados* committees in Latin American and hometown associations in Africa, social networks often become semi-formalised and in turn, constitutive of a more complex web of associational life.

Despite extensive associational life reported for many cities there is also concern on the part of a number of case study authors not to over-romanticise social networks, reciprocity and support. The case of Johannesburg is particularly redolent with examples of anti-social behaviour such as criminal gangs, prostitution networks and the erosion of social resources borne of lack of social homogeneity and social divisions, fuelled by state repression, political factionalism, social deprivation and dependency. In many parts of the city, gangs, shacklords, drug lords and pimps intimidate neighbourhoods, while the streets are dominated by rival taxi operators engaged in violent competition over control of lucrative routes. The high levels of crime and inter-personal violence such as rape and murder mean that people across all social classes in Johannesburg do not venture out of their homes at night. Such conditions erode any sense of public safety and challenge community cohesion.

The presence of urban mafias, destructive social networks and what I term 'anti-social capital' are not confined to Johannesburg. In Colombo, for example, one of Russell's (1999:114) community level informants cited in the case study report said, 'Today there are three ways to progress in Sri Lanka. One is to sell drugs, another is to run an NGO, and another is to be in tow with the underworld' In Santiago whole neighbourhoods and areas are stigmatised by their reputations for being sites of crime, violence and drugs. Although there is little information on actual rates of violent crime and although levels are lower than elsewhere in Latin America, the issues of theft and armed robbery receive extensive media attention and there is a pervasive sense of insecurity across the city related to delinquent violence. In the case of both Johannesburg and Santiago, it was reported that fear and unease have resulted in the privatisation of space with the consequence of limiting the possibility of interaction between neighbours and friends.

Although a study of this nature cannot establish definitive causal relationships, it is interesting that of all the cities studied, Johannesburg and Santiago have the strongest economies while also exhibiting particularly high levels of inequality. The

coexistence of urban mafias and urban inequalities is also a feature of Bangalore where increasing social polarisation is evident. This is founded on the juxtaposition of the high-rise and high-tech of the city's software industry alongside urban slums and urban unemployment. Interestingly too, it is pointed out in the study of Cebu City that an unfortunate by-product of the city's boom years was a rise in street children, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and vandalism. During this time it was observed that inter-personal violence in the form of child abuse and domestic violence were also on the increase.

This said, similar patterns could be discerned in poorer cities. For example of Kumasi it was reported that rising levels of youth crime, particularly burglary, was associated with unaffordable consumerist values and escalated at certain times such as before Christmas. The study on Vizakhpatnam points to the negative social impact of high levels of inter-personal violence associated with increased consumption of alcohol and drugs in the city. In the case of Mombassa the research report laments that the youth remain idle and loose morals prevail, associated with the erosion of 'traditional values'. Whether linked to inequality or to growth or decline, and without recourse to normative social analysis, there is a clear link across many of the case studies between perverse social relations and networks and youth unemployment.

Thus 'anti-social capital' and the erosion of social resources cannot simply be attributed to the exercise of contemporary, local level dynamics. This conclusion is supported by evidence from Ahmedabad which has a nasty history of caste riots and where caste-based social discord has long characterised relations in the city. Similarly, race politics in Johannesburg cannot be ignored when trying to understand both associational life at the community level and social action more broadly. Alongside the broad view, the long-view suggests that patterns of poor urban governance over many years as well as the erosion of trust in government more generally – born for example of evictions, demolitions, removals and resettlements - have all served over time, to undermine the establishment of settled and psychologically secure communities. Together with rising land prices and poor quality and crumbling services, they have given rise to a sense of insecurity and social exclusion, which erode not only social connectivity but also social action and civic engagement.

The question is whether, as some would have it (Putnam, 1993; Scheper-Hughes, 1992), this leads to the erosion of trust, an atrophying of associational life and a failure of civic engagement. In Santiago as in Johannesburg and Ahmedabad, the picture painted hints at social disadvantage and blatant injustice actually giving rise to social action. As Schneider (1991:241) has argued in relation to the *coup d'etat* of 1973 that overthrew Allende and brought in the military dictatorship of Pinochet, although every aspect of associational life came under attack during this time, the groundswell of quiescent resentment was ignited into conflagratory action. When peace came, 'shantytown residents returned to the safety of their homes'. The contemporary case study evidence from Santiago confirms this observation and presents a picture of the waning of social action among the disadvantaged population of the city with the return to democratic government. The study of Johannesburg too, questions how long Johannesburg's impressive record of oppositional politics under apartheid and its on-going reputation for a vibrant and well-organised civil society can be sustained, now that the role of community organisation is more ambiguous and channels of communication with government are increasingly structured. Clearly any study of urban associational life and civic engagement needs to be contextualised both historically and in terms of wider social relations at work such as those based on class as in Santiago, caste as in Ahmedabad and race as in Johannesburg.

Social Action and Civic Engagement

This section considers processes by which the associational life of poor urban communities is formalised, scaled up and harnessed in the interests of urban governance. The city case studies revealed that a wide range of collective activities are engaged in by the urban poor, from *susus*⁵ to *sangas*.⁶ However, it is only in some cases are these scaled-up or captured for more generalised goals. One reason is that social action is expensive on time, energy and resources and yields often small and slow results. As such it is frequently left to women or older people, who in turn often do not have the time, energy, skills or confidence to take organisation beyond addressing immediate needs and concerns. This is not to suggest that such

⁵ West African revolving savings and credit organisations.

organisations are not highly effective and capable of having a wider political impact. Indeed the communal kitchen movement in Latin America is founded precisely on the time and energy of busy women addressing immediate needs and has made its mark more widely as well (Lind and Farmelo, 1996). However, the value placed on social networks and associational life can be tainted and constrained by gender dynamics and stereotypes underpinning them. This renders gender and generation equally significant variables in understanding social networks and social action.

In their individual capacities, such community level organisations are invariably associated with meeting immediate felt needs. However, if they or their federations go beyond addressing concrete issues they face problems because such informal organisational networks have no social, legal or political status. As a result, they can claim no right of access to decision-making forums, as is pointed out in the report on Vizakhpatnam. The Bangalore study also argues that the experience of such local representative structures is one of being relatively powerless in the larger more formal political arena. Not surprisingly, therefore, such organisations tend to be short-lived or fluid in the way they emerge, disappear and reform themselves. It is often argued, as is the case with the Colombo case study, that lack of sustainability in community level organisation constitutes a problem. However, this is not necessarily so and disbanding or becoming quiescent is often a sensible organisational response to the social and political context (Beall, 1997).

The city reviews yielded significant evidence of local organisations forming themselves into loose but wider federations. Examples include a network of *sangas* in Bangalore, of 'caste-based organisations' in Vizakhpatnam and of committees for local improvement and development in Santiago. The studies also revealed more formally constituted federations of community-based organisations, such as the Homeless People's Federation in South Africa and the Home Owners' and the Water Users' Associations in Cebu City. As illustrated above, the scaling-up and scaling-out of urban social action often occurs in the context of protest politics. This was certainly the case in Johannesburg during the rents and rates boycotts of the 1980s, where organised township residents refused to pay what they saw as illegitimate apartheid

⁶ Women's community based organisations in India.

structures for sub-standard services. It is often the case that when neighbourhood or community-based organisations are scaled-up to city level collective action and especially in less turbulent times, various forms of capture come into play. Most obvious is capture by political parties, as seen through the studies of Vizakhpatnam and Bangalore. In the other Indian city, Ahmedabad where there are over 1,200 community level organisations, the report argues that ideological homogeneity or a strict focus on bread and butter or basic needs issues can better guarantee independence.

Another problem is where local level concerns become subverted to national level ambitions of federations. In Johannesburg, for example, the local level branches of the South African National Civic Organisations (SANCO) have to balance their accountability downwards towards their membership of local residents, alongside their accountability upwards towards the broader aims and objectives of the national organisation. This has been made difficult given the institutional complexities facing SANCO as it positioned itself in terms of post-apartheid politics as a national movement sympathetic to the ANC but potentially and actually in opposition to aspects of government policy. Moreover, in the period of post-apartheid reconstruction in Johannesburg, SANCO along with a range of other community based organisations has been dragooned into participatory planning processes, which although impressive and well intentioned, have in some cases been initiatives that have depleted the organisational capacity of what are basically local level and voluntary organisations.

A number of the city case studies provided evidence of community-based organisations not simply being diverted from their own concerns but actually being created by the state or other developmental institutions for project-based and sometimes political purposes. For example in Kumasi, local level Unit Committees are intended to mobilise the community towards the goals of local government and are far more effective at this than at channelling community level priorities or grievances to government. In Johannesburg there was some anxiety that the Community Development Forums, which were set up as part of the consultative process accompanying the establishment of Local Development Objectives by the

Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, would undermine existing community-based organisation.

An alternative scenario is where community members deliberately form themselves into organisations in response to potential opportunities they identify or which require community participation. They then become formal channels for the delivery of local level services and as such, the state through sectoral agencies or municipalities plays a direct role in managing and offering incentives to local community organisations. This can be most clearly illustrated by the case of Santiago. Here large numbers of organisations have been formed to support community projects related to state programmes for poor areas. In some cases organisations are a direct product of these programmes, which in turn fund and help maintain the organisations. *Juntas de Vecinos* or Neighbourhood Boards are the dominant organisational form in cities and, endorsed by their legal and formal status, they apply on behalf of their areas for the finance to install light infrastructure. There is some evidence to suggest that in this process the *Juntas de Vecinos* have lost both their representative nature and their importance in spearheading urban demands, through becoming both bureaucratic and devoid of power. Other more autonomous neighbourhood organisations in Santiago are usually more active and flexible but they are informal and have no legal status. Moreover they are also more fluid and transient, organised as they are around concrete and often finite problems.

In both Bangalore and Colombo the Urban Basic Services Programme (UBSP) established Neighbourhood Committees and Community Development Councils respectively, in order to ensure consultation and participation in service delivery. The analysis of the UBSP in Colombo is very revealing of how incentives to community participation on the part of local government or other development institutions can lead to very diverse results. In the late 1970s policy initiatives to solve urban housing, environmental health and other community problems in Colombo recognised the importance of local participation. In 1979 the Ministry of Housing and UNICEF launched the UBSP and to facilitate greater participation the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) established Community Development Councils (CDCs) in almost all of Colombo's low-income settlements, using government officers as community

organisers.⁷ In addition to the CDCs being conduits through which local authorities and other institutions of government could communicate with representatives of low-income communities, so community members could approach the CDC with problems or request and after review the CDC could pass these on. By the mid-1980s CDCs were firmly entrenched as the main instrument through which urban development programmes were to be implemented in low-income settlements of Colombo.

A high point of urban participatory development was reached in the early 1990s but since the mid-1990s many CDCs have collapsed and out of the more than six hundred registered in Colombo, only 30 are thought to exist and still be active. While many argued that they could and would reform themselves if the need arose, it is interesting that the research on which the Colombo report drew, found that other less formally constituted community-based organisations, such as traditional funeral societies, savings and credit groups, youth and sports groups, continue to exist. Russell (1999:97-98) who is cited in the report gives the following reasons for CDC inaction and collapse. First, government rather than local people set them up, 'which raises the question of whether they are 'community-based' or 'government-based'. Second, they were used instrumentally by government for community labour and cost recovery more often than for genuine community consultation and priority setting. Third, CDC leaders were often supporters of the ruling party. Thus the selection of projects and beneficiaries often became politicised; de-legitimising the CDC structures themselves. Fourth, local activists argued that CDCs did not have the capacity to perform basic functions, making them vulnerable organisations which lacked resilience in the face of challenge, whether as a result of declining resident support, poor leadership, unresponsive bureaucracy or political interference.

However, the picture was not completely bleak, with positive examples reminiscent of Tendler's (1997) findings in Brazil, of effective state-society synergy emerging in some communities and often arising out of the work of dedicated government

⁷ Although when the CDCs were newly established the government community organisers ran and then participated in the CDCs, now all members and office bearers are members of the community.

officials. As one CDC member told Russell (1999:107) in relation to the government officials charged with implementing CDCs in his area:

I think that community action planning had a big influence on the people (government officers) who came to these meetings – they were different from the usual person. I think these officers had not been trained before they came and so were more concerned about the people ... The officers who came to us were pro-poor. They would bring their sarong wrapped up with them because it was not possible for them to go back in the night ... They worked outside the institutional framework. It was very successful. There are a few who understand development ... we have to safeguard them like gems and pearls. The day they are gone, only the businessman will be left behind.

A key insight in this assessment is that such government animators ‘worked outside the institutional framework’. It can be concluded from this that without the institutionalisation of inclusive forms of development practice such as those alluded to here, community level organisations seem condemned to remain small-scale, ineffective and excluded from decision-making arenas. Alternatively, they appear destined to be used instrumentally by governments and development institutions concerned more with implementation and delivery than with genuine pro-poor processes of urban governance.

This said it is important not to over-romanticise the role of community organisations either. They too are underpinned by the fragility of members and actors, often bound together in vertical social relationships, as evidenced not least of all, by the report on Colombo itself. While CDCs are designed to make government policy more participatory and equitable they are located, nevertheless, within established power structures and social relations. These in turn generate vertical patron-client relations. For instance, both in the Kumasi and Mombassa studies evidence is presented to show how traditional structures and ethnic politics serve to gate-keep opportunity, promote nepotism and corruption and foster insecurity. Clearly the social resources of the poor are frequently embedded in asymmetrical social relationships and engagement with government simply means reinforcing or exacerbating existing hierarchies or inequalities.

In many of the city case studies, private sector coalitions are shown to be involved in civic life and to influence government, for example the textile mill owners in Ahmedabad, hotel owners in Mombassa, the Aboabo Talia Producers' Association in Kumasi and the taxi owners' associations in Johannesburg. Such organisations are unlikely to include the poorest operatives in their sectors, or to represent the interests of the poor in any way. They are more likely to seek ways of mutually reinforcing their interests alongside those of local government. In the case of Ahmedabad, a fairly successful partnership seems to have been constructed between local government and the business community, while in Colombo the business community and professional groups were recently involved by the mayor in a range of city level activities and decision-making forums. Nevertheless, that the operation of social action and civic engagement cannot be considered outside of a consideration of issues of power and representation is confirmed by the effectiveness with which better off urban citizens organise themselves in relation to urban governance.

It is no doubt the case that as with communities of the poor and disadvantaged, coalitions of the better off and more powerful are motivated by self interest, albeit of a more NIMBYish variety. Moreover, their involvement in local government especially, is as likely to be driven by pork-barrel politics as by civic duty or concern for the urban poor, with whom they are as likely to clash as to collaborate. To the extent that there is a relationship between local governments and entrepreneurs and business coalitions among the urban poor, this depends on the strength and organisation of the latter. From our city case studies the most impressive example comes from Ahmedabad where the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has engaged successfully on behalf of its constituency with local authorities and businesses. SEWA was created in 1972, initially as a response to loss of jobs in the city's textile industry. Today it runs credit, health care and social insurance programmes as well as engaging in policy lobbying. It is successful partly because of its celebrated international reputation as a union of the self-employed but partly too, because of its firm and solid roots in a grassroots constituency and its defence of this constituency in the face of more powerful forces in Ahmedabad itself.

Particularly in the absence of strong associational life but more generally too, people in poor urban communities assign a high value on external agents. In this regard NGOs play an important intermediary role in the relationship between civil society organisations and local government. Where they are absent or weak, such as in Vizakhpatnam, Mombassa and Kumasi, the resources of the poor remain operative at the micro-level but are not effectively scaled out or harnessed into civic engagement. As a result, the evidence suggests that they do not generate responsiveness to the plight of the poor on the part of city governments. Where they are strong, synergistic relationships are more likely to emerge. The report on Cebu City, for example, suggests that the liaison forged between organisations representing the urban poor and local government has evolved into a serious partnership. However, even here, participation by NGOs in city planning is ultimately more form than substance. Moreover, as with other organisational forms in civil society, the role of NGOs can be fluid and fragile. In Johannesburg, for instance, there is a genuine engagement between NGOs and governments borne of the historical moment, with many of those currently in the new post-apartheid government having come out of the NGO movement. However, state-society synergy in Johannesburg may be eroded as a rift inevitably widens between government and advocacy NGOs over issues of policy, while other NGOs seem set to become no more than an extension of the service delivery repertoire of the state and local state.

Responsive Government: Providing Enabling Environments

This final section considers ways in which city authorities can value the social resources of the poor and engage with associational life at the community level in ways that are not instrumental. Here too, evidence from the city comparisons is mixed. The urban Poor People's Council, a coalition of organisations of the urban poor in Cebu appears to have been able to hold government agencies accountable in a number of instances. As a bottom-up federation not afraid of public action and political engagement, it seems certain that in consultation or decision-making processes, government cannot simply ignore the Council. By contrast, the Association for the Defence of the Revolution in Kumasi is party politically driven from above and therefore less acceptable.

Evidence from Colombo presented above demonstrates that twenty years of community action planning has led to forms of patronage and capture not anticipated in the design and indeed the execution of the UBSP in that city. Nevertheless, the institutionalisation of CDCs has also given rise to progressive practices such as local level consultation, mobilisation and empowerment, community contracting and using local skills and labour in provision of services and infrastructure at the local level. For some communities, it has also succeeded in providing a significant organisational enclave outside the usual bureaucracy. It is asserted in the report that positive outcomes have depended as much on individual government animators and community activists as anything else. This echoes Tandler's (1997) conclusions in respect of northern Brazil, that with the right incentives and autonomy, government workers can be efficient and effective partners in participatory processes. Similarly Evans' (1996) has argued that social capital is a product of embedded relations at the very local level, that straddle the public-private divide.

There has also been synergy between local government and NGOs in some cities such as Cebu and Johannesburg, where some NGO activists have in fact crossed over to government. In Cebu, by actively networking with NGOs, city government has been able to mobilise their support for project planning and implementation, while in Johannesburg NGOs have been firmly drawn into service provision, as actual service deliverers or as community mobilisers or both. While it is true that their involvement can ensure that state-society relations are not simply a one-way street in the direction of city-hall, we have to ask whether complementarity or synergy between the state and NGOs means anything more than efficient delivery and project sustainability. In other words, what happens to processes of public action and broader advocacy issues in this relationship?⁸ In other words, to what extent do NGOs themselves forget to value social networks and social action and as a result collude in capitalising on the resources of the poor?

⁸ The same question can be asked of international agencies and donors working in cities and again, the evidence from the city studies is mixed. It is argued in the report on Vizakhpatnam, for example, that DFID physical and social infrastructure projects have strengthened 'social capital' by giving rise to increased use by households of public space for social activity. However, the report is silent as to whether this has led in turn to civic engagement and effective urban governance. By contrast, it is argued in the case of Kumasi that NGOs funded by international agencies exist mainly on paper NGOs and have little impact in reality.

The question most often asked in relation to civic engagement and concomitant responsiveness on the part of government is whether 'social capital' can be constructed. The case of Colombo shows us that it can although not universally and not necessarily in sustainable ways. However, the experiences of Colombo, Santiago and Johannesburg also demonstrate that the artificial imposition of community level structures can equally serve to neutralise other areas of associational life and can actually erode social participation and social equity. One conclusion that might be drawn from the comparative exercise undertaken here is that some of the best examples of 'constructability' relate not to the imposition of artificial channels of communication between government and society, which as we have seen can seriously disrupt spontaneous organisation and participation. Rather they relate to the fostering of an environment that enables social action. Ultimately whether that turns into committed civic engagement and orchestrated public action will depend on the objective conditions within communities, cities and indeed more broadly than that.

Some interesting pointers emerge out of the city case studies as to how social networks and open channels of urban governance can be fostered more indirectly, through the creation of an enabling environment for social action. One example is the encouragement of an open and engaged media, which was evident in a number of the cities. In the cases of Cebu and Johannesburg the role of community radio was reported to have played a particularly important part in fostering civic engagement at the local level. This is most effective when radio is used not only to deliver public education messages and public service programmes but also to provide the space for the exchange of personal messages as well as providing opportunities to vent complaints and safely critique the *status quo*. In Johannesburg, for example, the role of local 'talk radio' and phone-in shows has done much to air and debate local issues and to shift public attitudes in the context of post-apartheid reconstruction. While community and local radio stations have played an important role at the community level, to make the most of this vehicle in terms of public action and urban governance, it is not trite to say that government should also listen.

A number of the studies pointed to the fact that a lack of public safety and feelings of fear and insecurity decrease social engagement and threaten associational life. Public

safety is an important urban issue, not least of all because the relationship between spatial issues, the built environment and associational life is important. There is a body of evidence to suggest that low levels of 'social capital' constitute a strong predictor of high levels of crime and violence in urban centres (Moser and Holland, 1997; Kawachi et al, 1997). Cebu provides an illustration of the positive impact of effective policing, where crime in the city has declined as a direct result of the upgrading of the police department, thus providing an enabling environment for social action. However, it is acknowledged that this can be difficult when the organisational mechanisms that have acted as a restraint on violence and crime have weakened, as was the case in Santiago.

Similarly in Johannesburg, law and order has until very recently fallen outside the competencies of local government, making it difficult for the city to do much more than provide tacit support for the establishment of neighbourhood watch schemes and community policing initiatives. This of course has its own risks. In Kumasi, for example, responsibility for public safety and order has become increasingly informal, with the mayor running personal 'macho' forces and public safety often falling by dint of state neglect, into the hands of community 'watchdog committees'. As in Johannesburg, these are often loose associations of young people who patrol neighbourhoods at night without pay but in full expectation of being rewarded for their efforts. There is a thin line in such cases between these efforts being positive social resources and a more perverse form of vigilantism. Moreover, there are also examples from our case studies where city governments have a directly negative impact on associational life and are destructive of the social resources of the urban poor, either through active interventions or neglect.

Conclusions

One problem of trying to analyse social networks and social action and their impact on city governance is that we are dealing with issues that are difficult to define, let alone measure, even in a single context. What is attempted here is to draw some general conclusions from the evidence emerging out of the nine city case studies reviewed, that can contribute to the debate on social capital and the benefits accruing

to the urban poor from social action and urban governance. As such a number of familiar questions are posed and answered.

Is social capital a public good? The balance of the evidence suggests that the social resources of the poor constitute more private than public goods as social networks exclude as much as they include. At the same time, if the benefits accrue to groups, then those who enjoy them may fare better than those who do not and as such it is perhaps safe to call them semi-public goods. However, these in turn reflect and promote the corresponding social structure, for the social resources of rich families in Kumasi, networks of businessmen in Ahmedabad or ethnic groupings in Mombassa clearly far exceeded those of many groups of the urban poor, even when the latter were far greater in number. There are class and educational differences in the measures of social resources on which people can draw and the efficacy with which they can employ them in relation to urban governance. Moreover, as observed elsewhere (Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Julius Wilson, 1996) and in the city studies where family ties were shown to be key resources, the poor have weak bonds which while providing some semblance of security in times of need, serve to exclude them from broader social processes. Thus in terms of causal pathways, social capital understood in terms of social resources is not necessarily a good predictor of poverty reduction strategies or pro-poor urban governance.

Is 'social capital' constructable? While from a policy viewpoint the notion might be useful for informing inclusive planning strategies and micro-interventions, it is not clear that in practice that social resources which operate at the local level for one set of purposes can be funnelled into governance processes for another set of purposes. The evidence drawn on suggests that social action can become civic engagement only with great difficulty, only under particular context specific circumstances and not necessarily with any guarantee of long-term success or sustainability. At the same time, the distinct danger exists that efforts aimed at constructing or channelling one set of social resources can at the same time destroyed or undermined another. If 'constructability' is about long-term civic engagement and the building of local level democracy, rather than instrumental synergies directed at short-term project delivery, then there is a huge imperative to 'get the institutions right' including the informal institutions which go to make up what is conventionally understood as social capital.

This means nurturing not only high trust societies where governments can command respect but also high confidence societies, where citizens can demand it.

What does this mean for responsive urban government? The city level evidence suggests that the effectiveness of city government, in terms of performance of its key functions does not seem to hinge on a vibrant associational life. However, social action is important in terms of ensuring local democracy. What has emerged from the above discussion is that the urban poor value the role of outside agents and do not always have the energy, skills or inclination to participate in governance on terms set by government or other development institutions. What is most vital, therefore, in the provision of an enabling environment, which can ensure the ability of the disadvantaged as well as the advantaged, to lobby for resources. This in turn relates not simply to management efficiency and effective service delivery, but to the distributional dynamics of urban governance.

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