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Including Women? (Dis)junctures Between Voice, Policy and Implementation in Integrated Development Planning

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Abstract Integrated development plans (IDPs) are municipal strategic plans designed to bring about developmental local government. They have been criticised for providing insufficient space for democratic participation. This paper explores the extent to which a marginalised group—women—has been incorporated into the IDP process, in response to three questions. First, how have IDP participatory processes incorporated women's voice, and are the new participatory spaces realising their transformative potential? Secondly, how have women's interests and a gender perspective been mainstreamed in the IDP, and has it promoted transformation? And finally, at the interface between officials and women themselves, how are IDP projects implemented and does agency promote or impede the goals of gender equality? A study of three KwaZulu-Natal municipalities reveals some achievements, but unequal gender relations have not been transformed. These case studies demonstrate some of the complexities and difficulties in the practice of democratic governance.

Keywords Gender · Women · Planning · IDPs · KwaZulu-Natal · Municipalities

Introduction

The South African Constitution has given greater weight and autonomy to municipalities than previously. Their mandate has been transformed from a relatively limited and technocratic role primarily concerned with service delivery to that of

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'developmental local government', focused on the social and economic development of communities. In performing this expanded role, municipalities are tasked with preparing integrated development plans (IDPs)—statutory 5-year strategic plans linked to budgets. IDPs are processes through which municipalities, engaging with stakeholders and communities reach consensus about future development in their area. IDPs are expected to provide the space for a range of marginalised groups, including women, to participate in formulating municipal plans and influencing their development practices. This paper explores the extent to which women's voice has been incorporated into these processes and how this has affected the IDP and its implementation through projects.

IDPs often fell short of policy intentions, even if the quality of plans and level of participation were better than before (Harrison 2006). As many municipalities struggled with service backlogs, institutional restructuring, capacity deficits and scarce resources, they found it difficult to produce plans that went beyond organising service delivery (Harrison 2006). Initial critiques of the IDPs highlighted their lack of meaningful participation (Rauch 2002; McEwan 2003) and their centralised, prescriptive application, which stifled the kind of creative input, innovation and learning found in Kerala and Porto Alegre (Heller 2001). Thus, Heller argues that IDPs have been serving largely as instruments for exerting political and bureaucratic control, rather than as institutional spaces for democratic participation. But through a detailed local study, Ballard et al. (2007) find evidence in eThekwini's IDP process that local democracy is being forged in distinctive and vibrant ways. While specific power relations and interests limit opportunities for redistributive and developmental outcomes, diverse forms of representative and participatory engagement co-exist and are forming a complex, multi-layered form of democratic governance. In-depth local studies may reveal more nuanced findings about the inclusionary and democratic potential of IDPs, and provide the basis for more reflexive engagement among citizens, their advocates and the state.

There is a long history of initiatives to incorporate women and to take gender into account in development. In the 1970s, the Women in Development approach assumed that increasing women's access to institutions, resources and socio-economic opportunities would address inequalities. In response, the Gender and Development approach placed emphasis on understanding socially constructed gender roles as the basis of inequality and the importance of redistributing power in social relations (Goetz 1997). This approach has led to the widespread adoption of gender mainstreaming as a tool to embed a gender-aware approach into all aspects of development (Moser 1993). In contrast, political scientists have focused more on women's voice and access to power within formal politics, in everyday life, and through pressure in social movements (Fick et al. 2003; Goetz and Hassim 2003; McEwan 2005; Hassim 2006a; Hassim 2006b). Yet involvement at a political level is not necessarily a guarantee of gender awareness in policy and practice, particularly where the focus lies narrowly on representation.

In the South African context, the literature relating to gender in local government has tended to focus on mainstreaming gender (Van Donk 2003), municipal budgets (Budlender 1999), political representation (Coetzee and Naidoo 2003; HSRC 2004), municipal awareness of gender issues (Marie et al. 2004) and gender-sensitive service delivery (GAP 2002; Beall and Todes 2004). Critical accounts of gender and

IDPs consider gender mainstreaming in IDP processes (Cole and Parnell 2000, Unpublished report), analysis of the IDP process itself (Naidoo 2000), as well as participation (GAP 2000; Mathye 2002; McEwan 2003). Marie et al. (2004) found that local governments had limited awareness of gender issues and dynamics. At a political level, women were comparatively poorly represented in local government compared to other spheres of government. Municipalities have not on the whole paid much attention to gender, and where they have the focus has largely been on the extent of their representation as councillors and officials. Mathye's study of IDPs in nine municipalities found that limited attention had been given to the inclusion of women and women's organisations in the participatory process, gender analysis did not go beyond demographic description, and an understanding of women's interests and needs had not informed the plan. Gender and the other "cross cutting issues"—environment, poverty and HIV/AIDS—were generally neglected or weakly developed in IDPs (Todes 2004).

Despite some attention to gender and IDPs, there has been relatively limited work tracing the inclusion of women's interests from participation processes to policy formulation and thence to municipal practice. There is often an underlying assumption that these elements follow a linear progression—that voice leads to gender-aware policy and practice or that gaps in voice or policy necessarily mean that practice is not gender-aware. This paper questions the causality of these relationships and explores their disjunctures by examining each of these elements in three different types of municipalities. Its findings suggest that inclusiveness with regard to gender is uneven and partial and that a one-to-one correspondence between voice, policy and implementation does not exist. The outcomes of policy imperatives have been largely mediated through combinations of local politics, technocratic mainstreaming and the exercise of agency.

This paper is based on research in three municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with different politics and levels of capacity and resources: eThekwini, Hibiscus Coast and Msinga. eThekwini is a large metropolitan municipality with relatively high levels of capacity and a history of financial stability and innovation. The area's highly urbanised core is based on industrial and port-related development, and it is flanked by rural settlements. Hibiscus Coast is a medium-sized municipality on KZN's south coast, comprising several small towns, commercial farming areas and rural areas under traditional authority. Msinga is a small, predominantly rural municipality, with scattered settlements under traditional tenure, and a few very small towns. It is one of the poorest municipalities in South Africa, with limited resources and capacity. It is usually regarded as a politically conservative area, characterised by traditional gender relations.

Within each case study, women's institutional presence and involvement in IDP participatory processes, as well as the incorporation of gender equity concerns in IDP documents and in the implementation of 30 municipal projects, were examined. Research was undertaken between 2004 and 2006, and was based on 70 interviews and 51 focus groups with councillors, municipal officials, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and project committees and beneficiaries between as well as with national and provincial government departments, and with feminist activists in government, NGOs and academia. The study investigated water and sanitation, road infrastructure and public works, local economic development and flagship projects that had been identified in the IDPs.

The bulk of the paper is divided into three parts that provide a more detailed discussion about engendering development processes through voice, policy and implementation. Each part considers key themes from the literature, refines the enquiry and summarises the research findings, including quotes from interviews and focus groups. The paper concludes by drawing together the key findings of the study.

Women's Voice

International agencies and gender advocates have highlighted the importance of women's involvement in development processes. On the one hand, the good governance agenda of international agencies stresses that women's representation is a critical mechanism to address poverty and promote sustainability. On the other, gender advocates focus on women's increased participation in decision-making and development processes to transform unequal power relations and introduce gender-redistributive change and gender-sensitive policy and programmes (Beall 2005). Gender advocates emphasise voice, i.e. people's willingness to make demands and influence decision-making. This goes beyond the relative passivity accorded to communities in liberal representative notions of democracy to focus on greater citizen involvement in governance and their empowerment to engage in processes of local development (Gaventa 2007; McEwan 2003). It can be undertaken by opening up new spaces for participation through decentralised processes that facilitate direct engagement with women and their organisations. Cornwall and Coelho argue that for marginalised actors, such as women to participate meaningfully and for their participation to result in actual shifts in policy and practice, three factors need to be evident: involvement by a wide spectrum of civil society organisations, committed bureaucrats and inclusive institutional designs that address exclusionary practices and embedded bias (Cornwall and Coelho 2007).

These prerequisites are clearly illustrated in the Indian state of Kerala, where the People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning showed impressive involvement of women. Through an ongoing exercise, reforms were introduced to maximise the direct involvement of citizens in planning and budgeting at municipal and sub-municipal levels, and citizens are given a direct role in shaping policies and projects (Heller et al. 2007). As part of this process, the state, supported by civil society organisations, undertook an extensive training programme, which became specifically targeted at women and marginalised groups. Citizen participation in the planning process was relatively high and in the second year women represented 41% of the participants. Despite declining levels of participation, a noteworthy achievement has been high levels of activity from women's organisations, which had not been traditionally involved in political activities, supported by the state and women's groups. Women's organisations felt that there had been a marked increase in women's voice and a large proportion of respondents felt that there had been 'drastic change' in bringing women more into the public arena and empowering them in raising development issues. These findings demonstrate that the planning process in Kerala has effectively empowered women through a deliberately participatory, inclusive and redistributive process, and has facilitated women's presence in associational life and increased the political space within which they can mobilise themselves (Hickey and Mohan 2004).

However, across the world, women remain under-represented as leaders, decision-makers and elected officials, and they continue to be marginalised in political and development processes. Apart from a lack of political will, this situation highlights the many obstacles to women's engagement in public life, which are greater at the local than the national level as competing interests remain clustered around power and resources in ways that exclude women. Thus, women's voice in local participatory spaces can be silenced or muted due to the presence of unequal social relations and informal institutional practices, such as patterns of male dominance in collective action and customary practices by traditional authorities (Beall 2005).

The question raised is how have IDP participatory processes incorporated women's voice, and are the new participatory spaces realising their transformative potential?

The structure of these findings draws on Cornwall and Coelho's three factors for substantive participation, and includes an additional factor, that of political support.

The wide involvement of women's organisations is seriously constrained by the limited extent of civil society organisation around women's issues across all municipalities, and is almost absent in Msinga. While there is a plethora of micro-groupings serving to address local women's needs, they are characterised by isolated operations, lack of capacity and resources, and limited understanding of gender issues. They are often unaware of IDP processes and the possible benefits of participation.

NGOs are more capacitated and articulate, and several well-established organisations operate in the Hibiscus Coast, while many are based in eThekwini. Although they network with one another around gender violence, women's rights and HIV/AIDS at provincial and national levels, they have not cohered at a municipal level to form a unified sector or to formulate collective agendas for engagement with local government. By their own admission, they recognise that they have become "a bit invisible" at the local level and have not sufficiently understood the value of engagement with municipal processes.

In terms of committed bureaucrats, gender has been intermittently championed by high-profile personalities in both eThekwini and Hibiscus Coast. However, these associations have produced limited results as they are vulnerable to loss of continuity when other interests and responsibilities demand the attention of these people.

Generally, however, gender has not received priority attention in any of the three municipalities. While it is usually regarded as a peripheral concern, gender has received some consideration in eThekwini and Hibiscus Coast, but it is usually interpreted as improving levels of employment equity and efforts have been taken to appoint women to senior management positions. Given the extremely low levels of capacity in Msinga, paying attention to gender is seen as a luxury and it has not been addressed at all.

eThekwini has begun to institutionalise gender through the creation of two committee structures although they are "not doing much". A gender co-ordinator has been appointed, a Gender Forum formed, a Gender Policy Framework prepared and gender training workshops introduced for councillors and officials. It has begun placing gender focal points in each department although there are concerns that these are at too low a level and may have less impact than intended. Hibiscus Coast has a gender committee, but its members admit that they are "not where they want to be and we are not really functioning yet." The municipality also runs several small-scale women's projects, but there is neither a policy nor dedicated personnel. It lacks capacity around both gender and the IDP and one person is fulfilling both functions,

which has meant that gender dimensions have been given less attention. In eThekwini, gender structures are far removed from decision-making structures and IDP processes, and generally operate on the margins of the municipal policy and operations. While many felt that "the traditional mindset is changing [and] women are beginning to be recognised as human beings", they also pointed to resistance and hostility from men. A senior official noted that gender transformation will be a "slow process" because men regard it as interfering with "their comfort zones".

Some thought has been given to gender-sensitive institutional design. Although women have not been invited to participate in IDPs as a distinct constituency, participatory processes nevertheless have provided a new arena in which women's voices can be heard. National legislation, IDP guidelines and facilitation are designed to provide a legitimate, invited space in which women can engage with development issues. Women's attendance at meetings and workshops is noticeable in all municipalities and women are often in the majority in eThekwini and Hibiscus Coast. These trends are even evident in Msinga despite a traditional leader's assertion that "women are not involved in the IDP process because it is not driven by *amakhosi* [traditional leaders]."

While women often remain passive observers in meetings, and they "still need to be encouraged to stand up and speak", a facilitator noted that they would "come and approach you after the meeting" to express their specific concerns. In a context of extremely conservative cultural norms in which it is common for women to be silenced in meeting with the reprimand, "we are not talking to women, but to men", giving expression to their needs marks an important watershed for women.

However, while inputs may have been made by women, there has not been "a time where there was a discussion on any gender-specific issue" in Hibiscus Coast workshops, and "no specific gender issues" were recorded at eThekwini workshops. If they are not engaged with or recorded, there is a slim chance that women's issues will be reflected in the IDP itself or influence implementation processes.

Over time, even the most comprehensive participatory processes have become diluted. For several years, eThekwini implemented an extensive system of community participation, but changes in municipal management have reversed this process. In all municipalities, these processes seem to be undertaken for legislative compliance or political mileage rather than any meaningful interaction with stakeholders. Recently, these processes have been characterised by top-down technical presentations that allow little opportunity for discussion. A traditional leader in Msinga complained that "it's a bit difficult; it's all in English and it's hard to understand". A councillor criticised the Hibiscus Coast workshops as being the "lowest form of participation" and "very intimidating" for women. She suggested that "smaller and friendly environments" could "deepen democracy" and allow women to "voice what they need to". Similarly, civil society organisations condemn the methods employed in recent IDP processes and "feel left out of the process."

Political support is limited. Women councillors were outnumbered by their male counterparts in all three municipalities. Some attempts had been made to ensure that women were represented in Council decision-making arenas. Despite the Executive Committee's assertions, a respondent observed that its commitment to gender is one of "lipservice". A councillor noted that the gender committee is "treated as a joke" or "tolerated by the rest of Council." Thus, it is difficult to find evidence that the influential positions of women councillors were having beneficial impacts on women.

While some women councillors indicated that their male counterparts "listen to us and take our advice", others were sceptical: "men are defensive" and "get angry when you raise gender issues". When the research was conducted, these tensions were heightened by the ruling African National Congress's (ANC) attempts to institute gender parity in council representation, which constituted a direct threat to men's prospects in the upcoming local government elections. As a result, women councillors in eThekwini felt that they were "afraid for their lives".

International opinion suggests that increasing the number of women councillors is of some importance to improving inclusiveness, but there is no guarantee that they will support gender issues. Many women councillors were familiar with the needs of poor women and were committed to addressing them. In Hibiscus Coast, women constituents often feel "at ease to share certain issues that they would not have shared with a man" as women councillors are regarded as "more understanding, see the issues as a priority and know how to act". Other women councillors appeared reluctant to be seen to be associated with gender structures or with women's issues, and preferred to invest their energy in more influential committees and gender-neutral concerns.

Many women councillors preferred to become practically involved in resolving constituents' needs at a ward level rather than pursuing them at a more strategic level through time-consuming and ineffective municipal structures. Women councillors in all three municipalities felt highly constrained in what they could do and derived little support from municipal structures. Woman councillors complained that "men have no passion or understanding about gender or women's issues" and "soft issues such as violence against women" receive no support from them as "they think infrastructural issues are more important."

The IDP participatory process clearly represents a space for structured participation, which has been provided by the state backed by legal or constitutional guarantees and regarded by state actors as their space into which citizens and their representatives are invited (Cornwall and Coelho 2007). Within this state-sanctioned space, it is apparent that women's voice is being increasingly heard in the public domain. However, this space reflects inherent constraints in which forms of overt or tacit domination may silence some actors or keep them from entering at all. Unequal power relations and local politics account for many of the factors necessary for substantive participation not yet being fulfilled: weak levels of women's organisation, partial levels of political support and municipal commitment and often inappropriate institutional design. Thus, despite greater apparent voice, transformative potential has not been realised, and women's participation remains uneven and partial.

Gender in Policy

To ensure that a gender-blind approach was not reproduced in policy-making, gender advocates introduced gender mainstreaming, which is a set of tools and processes designed to integrate a gender perspective into policies. It seeks to engage with and transform them so that they better represent women's interests (Squires 2007). With the institutionalist turn in dominant discourse, the "expert-bureaucratic" or integrationist model of mainstreaming has been favoured. It entails employing gender experts, establishing special units, collecting gender disaggregated data and

conducting gender impact assessments in order to integrate a gender perspective into existing policy. This approach has been criticised as amounting to a recipe in which an extra ingredient is added ("add women and stir"); being politically conservative and ignoring unequal power relations (Jahan cited in Porter and Sweetman 2007). An alternative approach to mainstreaming aims to transform the existing development agenda by increasing the space for social dialogue with women's organisations. "Participative-democratic" or agenda-setting mainstreaming aims to facilitate the representation of women's interests through the institutionalising consultation, strengthening women's organisations and empowering women's representatives to participate in policy-making (Squires 2007).

While the latter approach has yet to be adopted, evidence indicates that integrationist gender mainstreaming has had limited success and "business as usual" continues (Squires 2007; Mukhopadhyay 2003). Reeves (2002) identifies three ways in which gender is overlooked: "strategic filter" which regards gender as too detailed for inclusion in the strategic plan; "implicit factor" or gender-neutral approach in which women are deemed to be covered by all policies; and "unidentified priorities" where such issues were not raised in the consultation process.

The factors accounting for the gap between the rhetoric of policy and actual practice range from a lack of political commitment and local support, unclear institutional responsibility, to the confused understanding and attitudes of policy-makers. In particular, the technocratic orientation of integrationist mainstreaming has been identified as a key concern. Mukhopadhyay (2003) and Beall (2005) argue that a preoccupation with technocratic structures and procedures for engendering governance has given rise to an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualised and technical project that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations intact.

The question raised is how have women's interests and a gender perspective been mainstreamed in the IDP, and does it promote transformation?

In 2002, national guidelines for mainstreaming gender into the IDP process were framed. They diluted the suggestions of an earlier agenda-setting approach in order to reduce the complexity of the IDP process and prevent additional costs from being incurred. Instead of a focus on the gender analysis of key issues, emphasis was given to the representation of women in the participatory process. The guidelines indicate a methodology for including gender in each of the four stages of the IDP process, and an output is a poverty reduction and gender equity programme that should function as a mainstreaming tool for the IDP. A later guide provides slightly more substantial treatment of gender mainstreaming. It is clear that an integrationist perspective has informed the approach to gender mainstreaming in the IDP.

Research has indicated that gender has been weakly developed in IDPs themselves, and similar to other cross-cutting issues, it has been marginalised or not addressed at all, and very little capacity or support has been devoted to incorporating gender equity concerns (Todes 2004). This is borne out in the three municipalities as attention to gender in the IDP has been limited and sporadic and where present it has remained a side issue. There are, nevertheless, significant differences between municipalities.

Although eThekwini officials adopted a "strategic filter" and stressed that the IDP "has to be sharp and to the point" and that "it can't get down to the nitty gritty detail" of impacts on women their IDPs have shown some gender awareness. The

initial IDP included a commitment to establish special structures, develop guidelines for incorporating concerns into plans, and partnerships with key stakeholders. In addition, a set of women's needs based on consultations with community groups were identified. These included gender equity, equal opportunity and personal safety, education on women's rights, skills training, protection against abuse, access to social support, targeted support for women's groups and working women, crèche facilities, counselling for abused women and people with HIV/AIDS, health services, child support funds and access to job opportunities. These needs are consistent with those identified by women's organisations. Gender is taken up to some extent in recent rounds of IDPs with non-sexism included in city values, an interest in engagement with women's organisations, attention to affirmative procurement and inclusion of women in enterprise support. Service delivery is the most significant element in the IDP, but it is treated in a gender-blind manner, and for the most part the IDPs do not respond explicitly to the range of women's needs they identify.

In Hibiscus Coast, an initial IDP included gender in the sustainability framework and incorporated parameters derived from the national guidelines. A checklist for decision-making, a departmental scorecard and gender key performance indicators were included. In setting priorities, however, gender was allocated a low priority and thereafter neglected. The inclusion of gender reflected the efforts of the IDP manager at the time, but once he left, "the priority accorded to gender has somehow vanished." More recently, attention to gender "became a non-issue" as service delivery became the primary focus.

In Msinga, attention to gender in the IDP was negligible and generally coincides with poverty alleviation projects.

Despite attempt to mainstream gender into the IDP, it has received little attention in municipal policy-making processes. However, the technocratic orientation of the integrationist approach is evident in the manner in which gender has been added into the IDPs, and gives rise to its subsequent limits. Women's issues such as gender equity, empowerment, personal safety and protection against abuse, equal opportunity, access to employment and social development are not the focus of IDPs. Taking up these needs could provide the basis for transformative strategies as they challenge unequal gender relations. IDPs instead concentrate largely on service delivery. It can be argued that the provision of household services is of importance to the daily domestic responsibilities of many women, but if treated in a gender-blind manner it is unlikely to address the specific experiences of women. Thus, in the IDP women's needs are still largely unmet as other issues claim priority in the policy-making process, and a gender-blind manner overlooks the specificity of these needs. Further, the approach has made it difficult for IDPs to undertake deep analysis and participatory strategising and decision-making required for transformation.

Gender in Implementation

Agency is a determinant of social change. The significance of agency has focused mainly on the presence and effect of organisations and social movements exerting pressure on the state. Other work has considered the role agency plays in mediating policy outcomes as they are implemented on the ground, giving focus to individual

agents and everyday practices, both within and outside the state. The notion of radical political citizenship emphasises the transformative potential of purposive agency and raises the possibility of invited spaces for subversion, appropriation and reconstitution by marginalised groups (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Cornwall 2004). The interface between institutions and local communities is not simply given as a site of control, but may also reflect choice and agency of officials who may conduct themselves in an active, interpretative manner rather than in a predisposed, repetitive one (Jackson 1997; McNay 2000).

Agents do not passively respond to policy directives, but they bring individual ideologies and behavioural patterns to their work in ways that can eventually change practices and structures (Goetz 1997). This perspective allows for the possibility of more contingent, variable outcomes. This means that individuals may override and redirect progressive project intentions, or conversely that gender-biased projects do not necessarily result in equivalently gender-biased outcomes (Jackson 1997). Thus, officials' empathy could result in their becoming "champions of change" for gender equality, but citizens' capability to engage in a progressive manner or sustain engagement may falter resulting in policy outcomes that are intermittent and partial, processes of implementation that are not entirely controllable or predictable, and gender equality gains that may easily be halted or reversed (Cornwall 2004; Cleaver 2001).

Thus, at the interface between officials and women themselves, how are IDP projects implemented and to what extent does agency promote the goals of gender equality?

Despite the lack of explicit attention that has been paid to gender in the IDPs, municipal projects often involve and benefit women. This confirms the success of national programmes in securing gendered requirements at the local level, but it also highlights the role played by individual agency among women and officials in interpreting these parameters and taking opportunities in terms of their own interests and values.

Most of the projects examined have been informed by targets and quotas set by national guidelines. Their application has resulted in women's involvement in projects being increasingly regarded as routine. Officials revealed a high level of acceptance of women's involvement and men's tolerance and respect for women's growing voice. Project managers (usually men) consistently argued in favour of women's participation and leadership based on their experience of women's reliability and hard-working contributions to project efforts as well as their willingness to work for low levels of remuneration. They frequently stated that "women's performance is better [and] more committed than men."

In eThekwini and Hibiscus Coast, officials have been innovative in their attempts to address development challenges. Their efforts to promote more cost-effective, environmentally sustainable, commercially viable and gender-sensitive approaches to service provision indicate that some officials are not simply being coerced into compliance with national guidelines, but that they are responding creatively to problems. Some have assisted women members in accessing further benefits, such as training and leadership positions. They have also explored further avenues to expand the project to more fully accommodate the needs of women. The room to manoeuvre that these agents exercise can assist in shifting state programmes towards more progressive results. However, their personal values tend to reinforce the triple burden of women, especially their reproductive role, which counters more transformative outcomes.

Further, the extent of their agency is constrained by institutional parameters which they prefer not to actively challenge. Thus, the women's project involvement continues to be strongly associated with traditional roles and poverty alleviation.

Women become involved in projects partly because of the opportunity created by national requirements, but also because they suit their own pragmatic interests. In particular, they involve themselves in projects that are closely linked to their household role. Infrastructure and service projects hold a great deal of significance as they assist others in fulfilling their domestic responsibilities and alleviating the difficulties often associated with them. Income-generating and subsistence farming projects offer women benefits that are close to home and promote food security. The additional income has "helped them to feed their families", "buy household furniture [and] school uniforms", "own cell-phones" and "pay school fees".

Women's agency is felt in their willingness to become involved in projects, particularly those in traditionally male-dominated sectors from which they had previously been excluded, and their ongoing commitment to these projects despite limited monetary benefits. They have been able to ensure women's specific needs are met by, for example, selecting the best locations for water connections. Evidence has shown that in some projects they exercise agency to expand the trajectory of projects in order to obtain additional assets. In two eThekwini projects, they have utilised access to land and municipal resources to improve their food security. Women have also seen opportunities to empower themselves by acquiring new skills in management, leadership and the construction sector. This has made many of them feel "more confident" in the public realm and some have gone on to start their own businesses. In addition, some women councillors have played an important role in driving projects to benefit the lives of women, such as crèches and community halls which can be used as a venue for women to undertake sewing activities. Similarly, some projects have benefited from the leadership of highly motivated women who mobilise others to take action.

National guidelines for project implementation create the possibility to challenge unequal social relations and cultural attitudes. Women have noted the break with the past: these meetings are "for everyone" unlike the previous ones that "were attended by men and addressed by the chiefs." They have meant that there is a strong presence of women in project committees, and even if men are in leadership positions women's voices are heard. As committee members women received training and were able to undertake a range of responsibilities that included providing direction and support to the project, recruiting local labour, addressing difficulties as they arose and co-ordinating the ongoing maintenance of infrastructure. These experiences have encouraged them to establish their own enterprises and initiate income-generating projects, and have represented an important turning point in their lives.

However, these achievements need to be seen in terms of their broader social impact. Projects tend to reinforce the domestic and survivalist activities that poor women traditionally undertake (household services, farming, informal trading and home-based activities), and as "women's work" they are usually not contested by local elites or men. Despite a few charismatic women, and those who become involved in construction projects and decision-making spheres, most women do not actively challenge socially constructed gender roles and continue to focus on their households. Many do not want to assume leadership positions, and are afraid that other women will "pull them down" for being "successful". Tangible benefits are

limited and projects often simply supplement other livelihood activities or social grants. Even if business and management skills are offered, women are not always in a position to acquire or apply them. Due to a lack of exposure to information, many women remain reliant on the support of project managers or government departments for providing projects with direction and advice. As a result, most of the local economic development projects have remained largely subsistence activities and are unlikely to transform into commercially viable enterprises that give women economic independence. For these reasons, the effect of women's agency remains muted or retrogressive.

Entry into traditional male-dominated sphere of construction has been an important achievement, but its implementation has often fallen short of intentions. While men and women are both included as workers on projects, a division of labour occurs as women are often in more menial positions. Specific targeting of women has occurred in some projects, but in the roads maintenance projects women have been reluctant to participate as manual workers because it is "low type of work" that "does not pay well" and not respected by the community. Others who have been involved as co-ordinators, contractors or through small contractor learnerships feel more positive, and many feel that they have benefited significantly in terms of income, skills and experience, improved economic opportunities and self-confidence, and feel that their involvement has "opened doors for them". These women have become role models in the community, as others "want to follow in their footsteps and become involved in the construction industry". But large-scale construction exercises, such as municipal flagship projects continue to overlook women's involvement. Projects of this sort tend to be based on highly sophisticated capital-intensive technologies making involvement almost impossible for small and emergent contractors, and project managers are unwilling to take risks. Instead attention is given to using large companies, where there are limited opportunities for women.

Implementation benefits for women appear to be dependent on careful project conceptualisation, design and management. It would appear that the greatest potential for addressing women's needs is found in those projects in which women's empowerment is deliberately prioritised. While the national guidelines require that targeting, capacity-building and support are incorporated into municipal programmes, the way in which they are interpreted through the agency of officials and women are critical determinants in promoting gender equality outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the extent to which women's voices have been mainstreamed into IDP participatory processes and how this has affected municipal policy and its implementation in projects. It has shown that the addition of women and gender within IDPs has been partial and uneven, showing differences between municipalities and disjunctures between voice, policy and implementation. The IDP process is imposed on pre-existing social relations and political dynamics, which shape the way in which women's voice is heard, policy is formulated and then translated into projects. In revealing discontinuities and gains, unintended consequences and opportunities, the findings from the three municipalities present a complex, frustrating and slow process that nevertheless shows some potential for social transformation.

Despite greater apparent voice in the public domain, women's participation remains uneven and partial and the transformative potential offered by the new spaces for participation has not been realised. Women were very present in all the IDP participatory processes, but local politics shapes the extent to which they can meaningfully engage with these processes. A key factor is the lack of a strong women's movement making coherent demands and influencing the municipal agenda to act in their interests. Several elements already exist: gender structures, participatory procedures, sympathetic women councillors, as well as the presence of numerous active women's groups operating at the community level and well-capacitated and networked NGOs. It is these women's organisations that represent important sites of collective action, although they have a long way to go, not least in scaling up and asserting their agendas in broader organisations of civil society (Beall 2005). At the same time, as McEwan (2003) suggests, the IDP might become more inclusionary if it works with and develops these existing capacities, rather than imposing models of participation from above. Thus, more efforts are required in strengthening collective organisation of women, obtaining deeper political support and municipal commitment, and devising more appropriate invited spaces for citizen engagement. In this respect, participation can be understood as a contingent, contested process in which invited, structured spaces can be transformed to take a more gender-redistributive form.

Although women's voice was apparent in the IDP participatory processes the IDPs themselves are largely silent on gender. Only some of the issues raised by women and women's organisations are reflected. This disjuncture is in part due to delinking of participation to the actual production of IDP documents (Harrison 2006). It is also the outcome of the difficulty of "engendering" highly aggregated documents in the absence of substantive analysis. Sectoral policies and strategic decisions about how needs are to be met are also not interrogated from a gender perspective. Nor are decisions about these aspects necessarily open to influence by women through other channels.

Despite an attempt to mainstream gender into the IDP, it has received little attention in municipal policy-making processes. The choices made in determining the nature of the policy-making process at the national level set in train the rolling-out of a technocratic exercise. Focus was placed on women's integration in participatory processes rather than critically engaging with other aspects of the IDP from a gender perspective. At the local level, the limited attempts to adopt a gendered approach can be largely explained in terms of the absence of strong agency in the form of internal champions and ongoing, external pressure exerted by women's organisations. While mainstreaming gender into the policy process through the integrationist approach will produce some benefits, international experience indicates that these will be limited. Instead, an agenda-setting approach requiring ongoing engagement with civil society organisations and the use of a gender perspective in municipal policy-making is necessary.

Despite the lack of explicit attention that has been paid to gender in the IDPs municipal projects often involve and benefit women. This apparent disjuncture confirms the success of national programmes in securing gendered requirements at the local level, but it also highlights the exercise of agency at the interface between project managers and women in interpreting these parameters and taking opportunities in terms of their own interests and values. Women are seen as the stable base by project managers, and they and communities frequently see women's involvement in projects as an extension of their traditional roles (Beall and Todes

2004). In addition, women's domestic interests have encouraged them to become involved in these kinds of local projects.

Although there is evidence of progress, the situation should not be overstated as women continue to remain in marginal positions in development projects. Women and small contractors are hardly present in large flagship projects, and most projects associated with women's traditional roles or designed to facilitate their economic empowerment have displayed disappointing results. To a large extent, the farming activities and crèches have not transformed the lives and opportunities of women, and many are not even sustainable. Nevertheless, they do contribute in some way to reducing the vulnerability of poor households and improving quality of life at a basic level. Thus, while these projects address women's needs to some extent they do not necessarily serve to transform their position. As the domestic and survivalist activities of poor women are reinforced, and their incursions into male-dominated large-scale projects remain minimal, the transformative potential of agency remains muted. Increasing this potential requires that agency acts to bring about the deliberate targeting, capacity-building and support of women in project implementation.

Women are being included in IDP processes. In spite of its centralising and authoritarian tendencies, the state has provided structured spaces for women's voices to be expressed and to participate in arenas often previously closed to them. The findings, however, confirm Gaventa's point that it cannot be assumed that the institutional design of new democratic spaces will mean that these automatically become spaces for change (Gaventa 2007). IDPs are not fundamentally changing pre-existing gender relations nor resulting in programmes that address many of the deeper gender issues that affect women at the local level.

There are disjunctures between voice, policy and implementation. The technocratic requirements of the IDP process are often manifested at the municipal level as a disjointed and somewhat contradictory exercise, often lacking the integration and strategic nature of its intentions. In the implementation of the IDP process, actual outcomes have been mediated by local political culture and the exercise of agency. This finding confirms Gaventa's observation that these potential spaces for change may interact with different histories, cultures and forms of power to produce radically different outcomes across various settings, and thus the micropolitics of engagement can subvert the best intentions of institutional design (Gaventa 2007).

Thus, the South African exercise of participatory democracy in its IDP processes may not necessarily represent the fall from grace described by Heller (2001). Instead, it may be argued that these case studies represent more "ordinary", everyday examples of the exercise of citizenship in new democratic spaces, and thus demonstrate some of the complexities and difficulties in the practice of inclusive participatory governance. These examples add to the body of empirical work that suggests some sense of optimism through their accounts of incremental change, of a growing sense of entitlement to participate and of slow but real shifts in political agency (Cornwall and Coelho 2007).

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