

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AS
SCHOOLS FOR DEMOCRACY?
A CASE STUDY OF THE
SIBANYE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

by

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Declaration of Originality

The opinions expressed in the study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Research Foundation.

Dedication

To God and my family. The community of Lotana in the magisterial district of Qumbu, for its contribution in laying the foundation, may not be forgotten.

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Abstract

This is an empirical study of a voluntary association with a view to interrogate the theories of civil society and participation and their practice. These theories came to dominate debate on African politics and democratisation following disappointment with structural approaches to development and democracy. Disenchantment with the state whose role was emphasised by the structural approach led analysts and technocrats to turn their attention to human agency; hence the salience of the idea of popular participation in the public domain, and preoccupation with the idea of strengthening civil society. This trend gained momentum after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and demise of the communist block, and was accompanied by anti-statist sentiments on a global scale.

Civil society organisations are seen as schools for democracy and agents of democratic consolidation, and are accordingly expected to perform two major tasks, namely instilling and disseminating a democratic political culture in and among participants and society at large, and promoting good governance. The aim therefore is to take advantage of the supposed intrinsic and utilitarian benefits of participation. As evident in a number of policy documents and legislation, the incumbent South African government embraces the idea of participatory democracy.

However, not all analysts share this confidence in the capacity of civil society to perform these tasks. For some analysts public participation does not always have positive intrinsic benefits. Public participation may instead lead to a corrupted political culture deriving from the participants' attempts to survive in a public sphere characterised by manipulation and subtle political control, and it is civil society organisations lacking in organisational strength that are particularly vulnerable.

The study revealed that unity between practice and theories of participation and civil society is a complex matter fraught with a number of ambiguities and contradictions. It revealed that though participation in the voluntary association in question does have educative benefits, those benefits do not extend to all the participants. In addition, the quality of that education is contingent upon a number of factors, some internal, others external. The internal and external factors reinforce one another. The internal factors pertain to the organisational dynamics of the voluntary association itself, and the external factors to the nature of the relationship between the voluntary association concerned and public authorities and other civil society organisations.

CHAPTER 1

1 Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

This is a study of voluntary associations as schools for democracy and as agents of democratic consolidation (Sklar, 1987: 689-690 and Osaghae, 1997: 192). Democratic consolidation is broadly characterised as sustenance and deepening of democracy so as to prevent authoritarian regression (Schedler (1998: 91-92). According to Schedler's formulation, democratic consolidation entails legitimisation of state by the populace, diffusion of democratic values, introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, among other elements. The study is informed by the civil society and participation theories of democracy.

1.2 Definition of the Problem

Following Osaghae's (1997) and Schedler's (1998) characterisation of democratisation as an ongoing process with different phases, South Africa can be said to be in the consolidation phase, which requires nurturing lest 'reverse waves' (Schedler's metaphor) set in. The current view is that a strong democratic culture should prevail in order for consolidation to take root, and that associational life is one medium through which that democratic culture can be nurtured and disseminated. Voluntary associations are thus not schools for democracy to their members only, but to society as a whole. It is therefore necessary to study voluntary associations to see if they are characterised by a democratic culture or not, and if there is potential for that democratic culture to grow and enhance democratic consolidation. This thesis attempts to offer an empirical account of the Sibanye Development Project to test the validity of the assumption that, as a voluntary association, it is a school for democracy, whose existence and activities can contribute towards democratic consolidation.

The study investigates the organisational structure of the Sibanye Development Project, to discover its organisational principles. Ahrne (1996: 110) identifies close affinity between the perceived normative elements of civil society and elements of excellent organisations, and accordingly argues that analysis of civil society cannot be complete without reference to its organisational forms. In this sense, the investigation of the organisational principles of civil society becomes an integral part of its study. Here the Sibanye Development Project is examined in terms of inclusiveness, internal authority structure, decision-making procedures and accountability. The nature and extent of the project's interaction with state organs and with other civil society structures are also investigated in order to determine the level of its autonomy.

At another level, the investigation seeks to establish the political culture of the individual members of the association, which is regarded as a key factor in promoting democracy and determining forms thereof. The study will try to find out if, and how the members of the Sibanye Development Project have benefited from participating in the project; if their participation has increased their sense of dignity and self-worth; whether or not their sense of political efficacy has been enhanced; if their knowledge or awareness of public affairs has increased; and if their involvement in the project has enhanced their civic-mindedness in terms of interest in public affairs and commitment to fulfilling their obligations to the public realm.

1.3 Research Setting

The Sibanye Development Project is run by a group of residents of the Ikwezi Extension Township, a residential area forming part of Ward 24, which falls under the jurisdiction of the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality in the eastern region of the Eastern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. The local council just mentioned has been instituted in terms of the new dispensation concerning municipalities in the country, that is after the 1999 demarcation process. It comprises

the former Umtata and Mqanduli municipalities. Under the old arrangement the Ikwezi Extension Township fell under the jurisdiction of the former municipality. This means that reference to the relationship of the project under study and the local council will be in terms of its relationship with the defunct Umtata Municipality rather than the extant King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality, which was not yet instituted during the period covered in the study.

The Ikwezi Extension is a small township on the eastern outskirts of the city of Umtata. It comprises about three hundred residential sites, and a number of business, church and other sites. Although the area was demarcated as far back as the early 1980s, it still has patches of land that are not developed. A number of residential sites are still undeveloped, and except for two church buildings and a school for the mentally-handicapped which was built by the Roman Catholic Church, all other sites, mainly public property, lie fallow and unkempt. The area shows signs of neglect: weeds flourish on the undeveloped land and along the streets; roads are tarred but are generally in an extremely bad condition.

The population of the area is cosmopolitan, residents come from all over South Africa and from other countries. Many of the residents have a secondary level of education and are employed by the state and parastatals. The number of those in the private sector is also substantial. A handful is self-employed.

1.3.1 The Sibanye Development Project

The project was established in November 1997. According to the informants, the idea to establish the project has its origins in another voluntary association that was active in the area at the time, the Ikwezi Extension Township Residents' Association. This other association was formed in June 1997 as a forum to address and articulate the problems and needs of the community. It dealt with a

wide range of issues and problems, including the upkeep of the area, crime, and development and maintenance of the infrastructure in the area.

Except for the special school built by the Roman Catholic Church and the two church halls already mentioned, the area has no public facilities although there is land earmarked for such purposes. According to the informants, some public property has been rezoned and used for private purposes without the knowledge and consent of the ratepayers and residents. Expectations associated with the adoption of the Reconstruction and Development Programme are not being realised, instead there is a strong perception that the area is being bypassed by development.

An application for a junior primary school was lodged with the Department of Education, whereupon it was learnt that government had shelved plans for construction of new schools for an indefinite period due to financial constraints. The community was encouraged to seek assistance from non-governmental organisations. It was at this juncture that the idea of the Sibanye Development Project was born. Some fifteen individuals who had been forerunners in the residents' association came together and formed the project.

The group runs a pre-school, Success Pre-school, in a rented house in the area. The long-term plan is to construct a suitable pre-school building on the land earmarked for that purpose. The group employs a teacher on a full-time basis. The services of a helper had to be terminated due to financial problems.

The association has also attempted a baking project and a small venture for making and selling fruit juice, which have since fallen through. They also planned a day-care centre, but the project had not taken off at the time of research.

Funding for setting up the pre-school, that is payment of rental, purchase of equipment and other expenses came from members' one-off contribution of R1000 a member. Running of the pre-school

is financed from tuition fees payable on a monthly basis for each child attending the pre-school. Other than a donation of R4000 from an insurance company, Norwich, to purchase learning material, and another of R500 from Mr Tonjeni, a local member of parliament, which appear in the 1998 annual report, the group has had no other funding from government, non-governmental organisations, or the private sector. Minimal donations have been made by private individuals and parents of the children attending the pre-school for specific purposes like tours of the city and the environ, and the annual graduation ceremonies which have become a tradition.

1.4 Research Methodology and Procedures

The research was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes different realities for different individuals or communities or societies (Bassey, 1995: 13 and Connole in Connole and others, 1993: 22-23). This recognition of the influence of historical and social factors has been useful for resolving the tension concerning the universality of the conception of 'civil society'. A number of scholars reject universal application of what they regard as a western perspective of the civil society theory and propose what they call an African perspective (see Osaghae, 1997). While this research assumes relevance of historical and social factors in shaping civil society and its experiences, it does not, however, assume that what happens in Africa is exclusive to this continent, or that Africa is homogeneous so that trends in one African country or region will necessarily be the same in all other countries or regions on the continent. Working within the interpretivist paradigm has also been useful for its recognition of the possibility for subjectivity on the part of the researcher as the researcher becomes a research tool during the research process. This realisation was particularly useful for this research because of the researcher's close familiarity with the subjects of research, due to the fact that they are all part of the same community. Two consequences were possible with this familiarity. The researcher may have not been as incisive or rigorous in the

research. Secondly, it may have resulted in the researcher overly contaminating the study with personal preconceptions and judgements. However, the researcher tried her utmost to remain faithful to the data.

1.4.1 Research Design

The Sibanye Development Project was identified and chosen for case study. The group was chosen for its easy accessibility to the researcher.

In addition to the detailed case study of the project, a survey of the residents of the area was conducted in order to carry out a quasi-experiment. The survey was meant to identify those individuals not members of any voluntary association in order to compare and contrast their political culture with the political culture of the members of the Sibanye Development Project. However, it transpired that only thirty percent of the respondents were not members of any voluntary association. Rather than discard the information contained in the remaining seventy percent of the sample, the survey was also used to reinforce the study, and give it a quantitative dimension as well. The sample was a convenience one in that only those individuals who were available at the time of distribution were served with the questionnaires. Only one questionnaire was served per household. The whole process of distributing and collecting the questionnaires took place over a period of two weeks, from 13 to 29 December 2000; and ended up with forty completed questionnaires being returned, which constitutes thirteen percent of the target population.

The questionnaires received from the twelve respondents not members of any voluntary associations were isolated and their responses compared to the responses of those who belong to one or another association.

1.4.2 Research Instruments

Three research instruments were used, namely interviews, questionnaires and content analysis. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three members of the Sibanye Development Project – two executive members and one non-executive member – to gather information on the group, and to tease out the interviewees' political culture. (The identities of the informants are not revealed for ethical reasons). The first interview took place on Monday, 18 December 2000, from 15h00 to 17h00; the second on Wednesday, 20 December 2000, from 12h30 to 14h55; and the third one on Saturday, 23 December, 2000, from 17h00 to 20h00. The tape-recorded interviews were of an informal conversational nature and were conducted at the homes of the interviewees, and data thus gathered was augmented with information gleaned from the constitution, and the book containing minutes of meetings that have been held by the association from time to time.

In addition, structured questionnaires were served on the residents of the area. The data collected through the three instruments was later consolidated. It is presented later in the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

2 Historical and Theoretical Context of the Study

The theories of civil society and the notion of popular participation in the public sphere have assumed a salient position in the current discourse on African politics. This follows failure of the structural approach to development, and by implication, democracy – Cornwell (1998) gives an elaborate account of the interface between democracy and development. Both modernisation and dependency theorists regarded the state as the central agent of development and unquestioningly accepted the so-called developmental dictatorship as a necessary means to accelerate development (see Sklar, 1987 and Joseph, 1989). In Africa the formal trappings of democracy were abandoned in favour of various forms of authoritarianism like ‘African socialism’, ‘African democracy’, ‘one-partyism’, and so on (see Tordoff, 1993: 4-11 and Ake in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 63& 66).

However, by the late 1970s a number of post-colonial states in Africa and elsewhere were in fact experiencing stagnation and even retrogression in economic terms (Ghartey, 1987: 10ff), despite years of massive financial and technical support given by the West in accordance with modernisation theory. It was apparent and beyond any doubt that sacrifice of democratic ideals had failed to bring about the expected results, instead there was everywhere economic decline and human suffering – in addition to authoritarian rule. A similar situation also prevailed in the countries which embraced Marxist-Leninism and which were dependent on the Soviet Union for financial and other support. In addition, many of these states were beset by political crises, which were manifested in ethnic cleavages, civil wars and military coups (see Owusu in Nyang’oro, 1996: 274).

The source of the problem was initially perceived to be lack of governance, that is, according to Hyden (in Hyden and Bratton, 1992: 7), conscious management of the regime structure with a view

to enhancing the legitimacy of the public realm; hence Hyden's (1996: 95) notion of a regime school of civil society, which is essentially the governance perspective on development. The governance perspective emphasises co-ownership of the public realm by the state and civil society. This requires that each strive for its sustenance and share credit and/or blame for its success or failure. Instead, observers discerned a 'disjuncture' between the state and civil society in the post-colonial state in Africa, which Azarya (in Harbeson and others, 1994) and Hirschman (quoted by Lemarchand, 1992: 186) respectively capture in the notions of 'disengagement' and 'exit-option'. It was a period of withdrawal and cynical apathy as the new state had become just as irrelevant to the ordinary man as its precursor, the colonial state. Citizens of the various African countries accordingly tried to evade the overbearing, predatory but weak state – according to Fatton (1995), interaction with the state was actively sought only in those instances where immediate and tangible benefits were expected. In some instances citizens were engaged in illicit activities in order to cope with economic exigencies brought about by the non-performing state and other factors, activities that served to further undermine the state (see Chazan on Ghana, in Hyden and Bratton, 1992, and Ake in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 67). These economic pressures led to the proliferation of informal voluntary associations pursuing a variety of income-generating schemes and self-help projects (Tripp, 1994: 111).

In apartheid South Africa state/civil society relations were different and perhaps even more complex than those explicable in terms of Ekeh's (1975) theory of two publics in Africa. Black people were denied citizenship and concomitant political and civil rights. Blacks living in the designated 'white' South Africa were regarded as temporary sojourners whose place was in the homelands or bantustans. This meant they really had no claim over the public realm. Therefore, there might be theoretical problems regarding the status of associations and organisations comprising

predominantly or exclusively black membership (see Shubane: 1992). This study, however, adopts a maximalist approach and regards such associations and organisations as constituent elements of civil society, and duly characterises apartheid South Africa's civil society in that light.

With institutionalised racial polarisation of society, it can be safely argued that civil society in South Africa was highly heterogeneous (see Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987), and its relations with the state reflected the racial divide. There was generally a highly politicised civil society comprising two main divisions, one which did not question the legitimacy of the apartheid state and sought to operate within the existing institutional framework, and, according to Friedman (1991: 8-9 & 13), another division struggling to capture state power and to establish the hegemony of the African National Congress in the country, what Friedman (1992) calls the "resistance civil society" comprising the Mass Democratic Movement. Civil disobedience in line with the liberation struggle prevailed in many forms. One weapon used by those intent on removing the apartheid regime was to refuse to pay taxes and municipal service charges (see *Munitata News*, volume 3, October/November 2000).¹

After the end of the Cold War a decidedly anti-statist mindset developed almost universally (Ahrne, 1996: 111). This was partly due to disillusionment with the state, and also due to the influence the Bretton Woods Institutions and other members of the Western donor community, notably Britain and France. In the post-1989 era the Western donor community embarked on a democratisation project in the South, a project that was based on liberal principles. There was a bid to strengthen civil society; to curb state hegemony and ensure its accountability (Robinson, 1994: 44 and Friedman, 1991: 16), and this entailed, to use Osaghae's (1997) parlance, decoupling of state and civil society. According to Friedman (1992: 84-5 and 1991), the idea of promoting independence of

civil society from the state, giving primacy to the former *vis-à-vis* the latter, permeated even some sections of the ANC camp, notably the section constituting the civic movement, which had been operating within the country during the latter days of the liberation struggle, that is after the unbanning of the ANC and subsequent disbanding of the United Democratic Front (UDF). According to Friedman, these were the people who felt they were being marginalised from the political scene, and that the negotiations were being dominated by the “core” ANC membership from exile, and that their leadership role could be further undermined in the future dispensation. But it must be noted that these people may not have shared the enthusiasm of the Bretton Woods Institutions concerning the reduction of state activism in the economy. The IMF/World Bank were preoccupied with promoting voluntary associations operating self-help and similar schemes (in order to reduce dependence on the state), which, paradoxically, had multiplied as a result of worsening economic conditions due to the introduction of the structural adjustment programmes. The liberal character of the IMF/World Bank project is explicit in Diamond’s (1997:18) claim that civil society has a duty to provide alternative means for communities to promote material development outside the parameters of the state. Hyden (1996: 99) characterises this perspective on civil society as the associational school.

The incumbent South African regime’s recognition of the importance of civil society is reflected in the country’s constitution (Article 152(1)(e)) and in the document on the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The following excerpts from the latter document (quoted in Bond and Khosa, 1999: 174 & 193) are instructive:

... the RDP vision is one of democratising power. Democracy is intimately linked to reconstruction and development, ... [and] require[s] a population that is empowered ... and an institutional

¹ Munitata News is the official newspaper of the then Umtata Municipality.

network fostering representative, participatory and direct democracy (5.2.1)

and

... local authority administrations should be structured in such a way as to ensure maximum participation of civil society and communities in decision-making and development in initiatives of local authorities (5.12.14).

The present thesis is essentially informed by the associational school of thought, which emphasises human agency, but also takes into account the regime school because, as constituent elements of civil society, voluntary associations operate – theoretically and practically – in the public sphere which they occupy together with the state (see Hyden in Hyden and Bratton, 1992: 6 and Fatton, 1995: 67). State and civil society are therefore inextricably intertwined so that it is virtually impossible to speak about the one and not the other (also see Kasfir, 1998: 6, 9-10). Though implicitly acknowledging the Hegelian state/civil society dichotomy at one level, that is insofar as civil society elements carry out their particular activities, Shils (1991: 4, 15-16) also cogently argues that civil society and the state are not entirely separate. Shils (1991: 4) notes:

...The state lays down laws which set the outermost boundaries of the autonomy of the diverse spheres and sectors of civil society; so, civil society from its side lays down limits on the actions of the state. Civil society and the state are bound together by the constitution and by traditions which stress the obligation of each other to the other as well as their rights *vis-à-vis* each other ...

2.1 Basic Assumptions of Civil Society and Participation Theories

One theory of civil society assumes that civil society can make a positive contribution to the advancement of democracy (Diamond, 1997: 18, Osaghae, 1997: 192 and Kasfir, 1998: 1). According to this theory, democratic consolidation derives from the educative and socialising impact of participating in civil society structures (White, 1998: 3-4). It also derives from the instrumentalist functions of participation, which entail articulation of interests, ensuring

accountability of the state and curbing state hegemony; succinctly, good governance (see Robinson, 1994: 44, Baker, 1998: 84 and Dicklitch, 1998: 123). Gymah-Boadi (1996: 122) cites Bratton's claim that constituent elements of civil society hold a latent promise of political pluralism, which, according to Bratton's (1994: 10) conception, refers to a framework which assumes a society of roughly equal individuals who voluntarily combine into a variety of interest groups with multiple cross-cutting interests that prevent the emergence of monolithic social classes or occupational lobbies (also see Marger, 1981: 36-37). A similar claim regarding women's associations in Uganda is made by Tripp (1994: 108). Tripp posits that voluntary associations of women in Uganda and Tanzania may form a potential basis for institutional reform that would stress greater accountability, pluralising society and instituting more democratic procedures. The view is that government performance can improve when government receives inputs as to policy preferences from the different spectra of the populace (Parry and Moyser in Beetham, 1994: 50). The corollary is the enhancement of the legitimacy of the state so that citizens willingly submit to state authority (Pennock, 1979: 442 and Pateman, 1970: 27). Submission to state authority would be manifest in citizens' obedience of state laws by performing their responsibilities to the public realm, for example, payment for municipal services. The aspects of democracy emphasised – accountability, policy inputs, limited government, etc – give the democratisation project a liberal character in that democracy is viewed in utilitarian terms and politics is equated with decision-making (see Keim in Pennock and Chapman, 1975).

However, as is apparent in the radical theory, democracy goes beyond mere form as would seem to be the case for those with the liberal outlook. Hence participation theorists like Rousseau and John Stuart Mill (see Pateman, 1970: 24 & 28) and Tocqueville (see Pennock, 1979: 443), suggest a further (psychoanalytical) dimension. They consider the psychological and educative benefits of

participation for the individual. These theorists conceive politics as self-realisation; as more than just decision-making, but as a mode of activity whose goal is self-realisation rather than mere satisfaction of wants (see Keim in Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 15), and accordingly advocate participation beyond periodic voting. That kind of participation reduces feelings of alienation and enhances participants' moral and human dignity on the one hand, and their political efficacy, on the other (Pennock, 1979: 438-443). According to Pennock, alienation is a feeling of those who decide that voting is futile because their votes will not affect or influence the election results in any significant way. It stands contrary to political efficacy, which, according to Pateman (1970), is confidence in one's capacity to influence public decision-making through voting and other modes of participation (also see White, 1998: 3).

The educative value of participation derives from the democratic values that participation can engender on the part of civil society as members thereof gain practice in democratic skills and procedures, whilst at the same time they are instructed on public affairs. Sklar (1987) accordingly posits that voluntary associations are 'democracies writ small', and alludes to Kenya's rural development projects as 'schools for democracy'. This is hardly a new idea. Tocqueville (1889: 106) advocated local voluntary associations thus:

...the great is the multiplicity of small affairs, the more do men, even without knowing it, acquire facility in prosecuting greater undertakings in common. Civil associations therefore facilitate political associations.

Participation theorists thus take a radical stance; they view participation as an end in itself, and assume a fundamentalist view of civil society as the embodiment of democratic norms (see Hyden, 1996: 94). A comprehensive and all-encompassing view of civil society is reflected in Diamond's (in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 230ff) list of ten functions of civil society which include limitation

of state power, development of political efficacy, recruitment and training of new political leaders, dissemination of information, and articulation of interests (also see Hyden, 1996: 95). The efficacy of civil society is well encapsulated in the following extract:

... a rich associational life supplements the role of political parties in stimulating political participation, increasing the political efficacy and skills of democratic citizens, and promotion and appreciation of the obligations as well as the rights of democratic citizenship ... civil society can also be a crucial arena for the development of other democratic attributes, ... and organisational participation in civil society provides important practice in political advocacy and contestation (Diamond in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 230-231).

In a similar vein, Hyden (1996: 92) argues that social capital, that is, according to him, normative values and beliefs that citizens share in their everyday dealings, is built through civil society structures. In short, substantial claims have been made by a wide variety of theorists of democracy for the centrality of participation in small local voluntary associations to the robustness and efficiency of democracy.

2.2 Experiencing Democracy Through the Sibanye Development Project

The capacity of the Sibanye Development Project for democratic consolidation was measured by studying the association at an organisational level, that is by looking at its organisational principles; and at an individual level. At the individual level an interrogation of the orientation of the individual members was carried out to see if their participation in the association has imbued them with a democratic political culture.

At the organisational level the conditions and activities of the association were investigated to find out if it possesses the normative features of civil society organisations, namely inclusiveness, a democratic internal authority structure, democratic decision-making processes and procedures, mechanisms for accountability, autonomy, and so on (Diamond in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 228-229). These normative attributes could be important indicators of the prospects of civil society

organisations to instil a democratic political culture in their members. The argument is situated within two contrasting theories of participation on the role of oligarchies or of the elite in a democracy, the radical theory on the one hand, and the elitist or pluralist theory, on the other. Assuming the radical theory, the argument is that associations not run on democratic principles cannot be expected to imbue their members with a democratic political culture, still less to contribute towards consolidation of democracy. Radical theorists, according to Parry (1969: 14 & 141), view elites as the main threat to the survival of democracy, and their existence to be the very negation of democracy. Contrarily, the elitist or pluralist theorists view the elite as the mainstay of democracy (also see Marger, 1981 and Pateman, 1970). The group's capacity for democratic consolidation was also assessed in terms of its relationship with the community, other civil society structures, and public authorities.

2.2.1 Inclusiveness

One of the normative features of civil society organisations indicative of their 'democraticness' is inclusiveness (see Diamond in Diamond and others, 1996: 228-229). By implication an exclusionary organisation is not expected to be democratic and may not be regarded as a civil society organisation by some theorists of civil society.

2.2.2 Decision-making Procedures

Decision-making is one of the central issues in democratic theory; its procedures could serve as one indicator of the existence or non-existence of democracy in any organisation. Democratic theory requires that everyone concerned be involved in the decision-making process, whether through representation or direct participation, and that when decisions of major importance are binding on

parties not directly involved in decision-making, the decision-makers should be accountable to those affected.

2.2.3 Accountability

Schedler (in Schedler and other, 1999: 26) broadly characterises accountability as a two-dimensional concept encompassing answerability and enforcement. According to Schedler, answerability refers to the obligation of those holding office to inform the others about their activities and to justify them, and enforcement is the capacity to impose negative sanctions on office-bearers who violate certain rules of conduct. Concern with accountability, however, does not end with the accountability of office-bearers but extends to everyone in an organisation; hence the notion of reciprocal accountability whereby those involved ‘check and balance’ each other (Schedler in Schedler and others, 1999). According to Ahrne (1996), this is in line with the view that participants in voluntary associations essentially create a system of rules for themselves, and each one of them is expected to abide by those rules and to respect others’ rights, thus cultivating a democratic political culture. A written constitution is one basic mechanism for ensuring accountability in that everyone can be expected to adhere to its provisions.

2.2.4 Autonomy

Ekeh (1994: 2-3) regards theories of civil society as an expression of individual liberty. According to Ekeh, civil society has tended to gain prominence in periods of revolutionary change and transition from undemocratic political conditions, for example, during the French Revolution in the West, and during Gorbachev’s era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Ahrne (1996: 109) similarly conceives of civil society offering the potential for individual liberty, although he focuses on individual autonomy within the association to which the individual belongs, and society in general rather than individual liberty within a broad political system, as Ekeh does. Ahrne characterises

civil society as a 'precarious balance between individual participation and social obligations'; as a sphere where 'private interests coincide with those of society'. According to Arhne, civil society cannot rely on coercion and/or manipulation and monetary rewards to enhance participation. Arhne's and Ekeh's formulations require that the autonomy of the individual within civil society organisations be given due attention; hence this study deals with autonomy at two levels – the autonomy of the individual within the project, and the autonomy of the project in relation to the state and other civil society elements. The last category of autonomy has always been emphasised as a prerequisite for the success of democratic consolidation as it prevents possible political domination and/or co-option of civil society by the state or its agents, thus weakening its capacity to check the excesses of the state.

However, state/civil society relationship is subject of ongoing debate. Although there is a broad consensus on the need for civil society to be autonomous of the state, the notion of a state/civil society dichotomy is debatable on practical as well as on theoretical grounds (see Kasfir, 1998: 6, 9-10, Hyden in Hyden and Bratton, 1992 and Fatton, 1995: 67). Friedman (1992: 90-91) is concerned about possible practical consequences of reducing state activism. Firstly, it could be wrongly perceived to mean that civil society has no claim over the state, meaning that it may not agitate for resources from it, or call it to account. According to Friedman, it can also be (mis)interpreted as a demand for freedom from the laws of the country. These misconceptions would be contrary to the governance perspective on development (see Hyden in Hyden and Bratton, 1992) and the Lockean constitutionalism delineable from Shils' (1991) thinking on the state/civil society relations alluded to at the beginning of this discussion; hence the importance of engaging both the governance and the associational schools of civil society. Furthermore, the governance perspective assumes a

dialectical relationship between civil society and the state, a relationship that is sometimes oppositional or co-operative, depending on the conditions at hand. However, the tendency is sometimes to emphasise opposition to the exclusion of co-operative because civil society activism is usually pronounced when, as Ekeh indicates, there is a struggle for liberation. In the case of South Africa, the argument in some quarters is that civil society must only play a 'developmental' role now that the struggle for liberation is over (Friedman, 1992).

2.3 Diffusing Political Culture Through Voluntary Associations

As has already been intimated, participation in voluntary associations is expected to imbue participants with a desirable kind of political culture. Almond and Verba (1963: 13 & 14) define political culture as 'specific(ally) political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system'; they define it as a psychological phenomenon signifying the political system as internalised in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of the population. In their study of the political culture of five nations, Almond and Verba identified an alienated political culture amongst the Italians, political detachment and subject competence amongst the Germans, a participant civic culture amongst Americans, a deferential civic culture amongst the British, and a political culture of alienation and aspiration amongst the Mexicans. According to Pye (in Lipset, 1995: 966), political culture includes a high level of political awareness, a strong sense of competence, and considerable skill in civic co-operation, combined with rational participation in civic and political life. Pye (in Lipset, 1995: 967) further goes on to enumerate what he considers the most fundamental cultural values for a stable democracy, namely tolerance and trust, and points out that the latter is necessary for reinforcing a people's sense of political efficacy. The view is supported by Lipset (in Lipset, 1995: *lx*), who

points out that democracy requires universal respect for the institutions and processes of political life such that the laws, regulations, policies and election results thus created are respected and obeyed even if they are disliked. One element of political culture is civic culture, which, according to Almond and Verba (quoted in Pateman, 1970 and White, 1998), refers to interest in public affairs. Montesquieu calls it virtue or public spiritedness or devotion to the common good (see Shils, 1991: 3 and Lowenthal in Strauss and Cropsey, 1981: 491). Active citizenship is extolled, and the citizen is regarded as the key participant in creating political life (Keim in Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 17). Civic culture would entail attending community meetings and fulfilment of citizens' mandatory obligations to the public realm, like payment for municipal services.

As was stated earlier on, political efficacy is one of the intrinsic benefits supposed to derive from public participation. According to Parry and Moyser (in Beetham, 1994: 50), voting is not a sufficient measure of political efficacy. Other modes of participation like contacting public representatives, party campaigning, involvement in protest demonstrations, and so on, should supplement voting.

In the republican tradition, political activity is essential for self-fulfilment; and political activity is regarded as a creative activity valuable for its own sake, without regard to eventual policy results, and as a means of realisation of latent human potentialities (Keim in Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 16-18).

The educative function of public participation is not confined to the realisation of human potentialities and acquisition of a civic culture. This function also entails the creation of public awareness on the part of the participants; hence Mill speaks of the 'instructed' and the 'wisest' and 'best' men (see Pateman, 1970: 31). Participants gain deeper insight into the political processes and

learn about prevalent public debates, and this enables them to make informed decisions on public issues and to assess the activities of elected and non-elected public officials and accordingly hold them to account. This dimension of the educative benefits of public participation is identified by the proponents of industrial democracy (see Blumberg, 1968). These analysts argue that workers learn about the operation of markets and other economic matters, and are as a result able to make informed demands to their employers, thus eliminating unnecessary labour strife

2.4 State/Civil Society Relations

State/civil society relations constitute the core of the current debate on democratisation and the role of civil society in that process (see Friedman, 1991 and 1992; Kasfir, 1998). Arguments center on the extent of the autonomy of civil society from the state, and on whether civil society must play an oppositional or a developmental role. What appears to be undisputable is that interaction between the two is inevitable.

CHAPTER 3

3 Civil Association *qua* Political Association?

3.1 The Organisation of the Sibanye Development Project

3.1.1 Inclusiveness

The project's written constitution stipulates that membership will be limited to the fifteen members who initiated the project. However, the three informants claimed that membership is open but limited to twenty for management purposes. According to the informants, the limit on the number of members is to ensure that the project is manageable, especially because monies are involved. There is fear that things may get out of hand with a very large group.

The Sibanye Development Project's membership profile reflects some inclusivity insofar as demographics are concerned: of the fifteen founding members of the association, three are men. The age group of the members, which is mostly about forty years and above, reflects the area's demographics – eighty-two percent of the area's population is above forty years, according to the survey conducted as part of this research. Seven members are educators with tertiary education, one an education development officer, one a priest, one a nursing sister, one a civil servant, while two are self-employed – the second self-employed member was employed by a parastatal at the time of the establishment of the association. Two are housewives with a secondary school level of education.

The constitution also reflects the inclusiveness of the association in terms of the nature of its interests, some of which are of common nature encompassing the community as a whole. The aims and objectives of the project as spelt out in its constitution reflect a commitment of the project to

the common good rather than pure self-interest of members. In addition, the association does engage non-members in some of its income-generating activities.

3.1.2 Internal Authority Structure

As indicated earlier, the founding members of the Sibanye Development Project recognised a need for a formal organisation to create a vehicle for its aims and objectives. True to the thesis of the inevitability of a leadership structure in any formal organisation (Piven and Cloward, 1977: *xiii*), the Sibanye Development Project has, in terms of its constitution, an internal authority structure in the form of an executive committee.

According to the constitution of the association, there will be a management committee comprising four members, with powers to act on behalf of the association. There will be a chairperson and a vice chairperson, a treasurer and a secretary. The committee is elected at an annual general meeting. However, no elections have taken place since 1997 when the association was formed, so that the incumbents of the committee elected at its inception have never been replaced. The only replacement was temporary in respect of the secretary who could not perform her duties optimally at the time, due to a family problem, and the secretary has since resumed her duties. Contrary to the stipulation of the association's written constitution, the informants claimed that the tenure of office is three years, and that the next elections are accordingly due at the beginning of 2001. The constitution is silent on whether the incumbents qualify for nomination in the next elections or not, or whether there is a limit on the number of consecutive terms of office that may be held by an individual.

The constitution also requires that there be a governing body for the pre-school, but, according to the informants, the governing body has never really taken off because parents failed to constitute a

quorum during the several meetings called to hold elections. The functions of the governing body are performed by the executive/management committee.

3.1.3 Decision-making

In the Sibanye Development Project, 'decision-making is collective', to quote one informant. The informants stressed that they have never had any serious disagreement over any issue; that they have never had to resort to voting on any issue; all their decisions are reached by consensus. 'Collective decision-making' notwithstanding, the informants expressed concern about apathy amongst the ordinary members of the association, which may make it appear as if decision-making is not always democratic in that everybody is not always part of it. There have been a number of instances where certain individuals have had to make important decisions without mandate, in order to meet time frames. Attendance at some of the meetings of the association bears testimony to the apathy cited by the informants. For instance, at the meetings held on 9 August 1999, 18 November 1999 and 14 April 2000 attendance stood at four, three and five, respectively. The concern about attendance was also addressed at the meeting held on 28 March 2000, according to the minutes.

Although the constitution vests the power to call meetings with the management committee, the informants stated that any member of the association has a right to propose a meeting. Allusion to that right is made in the minutes of the association's meeting held on 7 August 1999. The informants also stated that though setting of the agenda is the responsibility of the secretary, everyone in the group has a right to propose an item or items for the agenda.

3.1.4 Accountability

The project has a written constitution, but the three informants acknowledged that they do not religiously adhere to its provisions because 'everyone is still on a learning curve'. According to the third interviewee, there is realisation that at this stage of trying to build up the association they 'cannot afford to be too strict about rules'. Besides that, the constitution itself appears to have some serious omissions. For example, it does not address certain issues, like the quorum and how to deal with continued absenteeism from meetings. One informant mentioned that the close-knit nature of the community and the small size of the association makes it possible for everyone to know about one another's problems like retrenchments from work and transfers of family members to other parts of the country due to the ongoing transformation process in the country – problems which presumably lead to loss of interest in community affairs by those affected. This tends to evoke empathy among fellow members that in turn leads to laxity in the application of rules and regulations. As a result, the association has not penalised or called to account those who fail to attend meetings, and still regards even those who have not attended a single meeting for a continuous period of two years as members.

The two other informants were however not so benign about the possible reason for the tacit withdrawal of other members, and speculated that it lies with the delayed fulfilment of expectations of making some profit from the venture. It also transpired that there has been a formal resignation from the project due to a misunderstanding between member who resigned and another member.

It is in the sphere of finances that accountability and transparency are emphasised. The constitution requires that books of accounts be maintained, that there be preparation and submission of annual financial statements, and that a copy of each financial statement must be made available to each

member of the association. The association's funds are kept in a bank account and withdrawals from the account can only be made by two signatories. In addition, all books belonging to the association are accessible to all members, according to the informants. A copy of the constitution, the minute book (albeit scrappy), and the 1998 financial report were readily made available to the researcher for the purpose of this study; and minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 1999 reflect a report on salary payments. These attest to the transparency claimed by the informants.

3.1.5 Autonomy

According to the information obtained from the three interviewees, the Sibanye Development Project is affiliated to the O. R. Tambo District Development Forum (formerly known as the Kei District Development Forum).² The project is not affiliated to any political organisation or party, and all the informants did not perceive the association to be political in any way. While the constitution is silent on affiliation to political organisations, it does provide for the affiliation of the pre-school to forums with similar objectives to the group's pre-school, and stipulates that it be registered with the Department of Education. The pre-school is indeed affiliated to the Umtata District Pre-schools Forum, which is made up of pre-schools that fall under the Umtata magisterial district, and is registered with the Department of Education. The informants affirmed that they have no problem abiding by the guidelines concerning pre-schools set by the Department of Education, and did not think the autonomy of the association may be compromised by its relationship with the public authority or with other civil society structures, in this case the O. R. Tambo District Council and the Umtata District Pre-schools Forum. However, it did come out clearly from the interviews that the project's relationship with the local council is ambivalent.

Although there seemed to be general co-operation between the two, it was apparent that the relationship was sometimes characterized by disagreement and tension. This will be clearer when the interviewees' political efficacy is discussed below.

At the time of research the association was actively seeking funds to help sustain the project, and, according to the informants, was prepared to accept funding from any quarter, even political parties. In response to a question, one member expressed her confidence in the capacity of the association to maintain its autonomy on the basis of the fundamental and guiding principle of independence espoused by the association; and the fact that members belonged to different political parties. There was no fear that acceptance of funds from donors could compromise the association's autonomy.

The informants did not perceive their inability to secure financial assistance all these years to be in any way related to their non-alignment, but attributed it to their own failure to conform to guidelines set by the various donors when applying for funds, and their lack of time and resources to follow up their applications. All the active members of the association, that is the members of the executive, are in full-time employment; they have families and most of them are single parents. Furthermore, the association lacks networking capacity because it does not have essential equipment like a typewriter or a computer, a fax machine or a telephone. Sometimes the association missed deadlines for submission of relevant documents to prospective funders, and meetings held by the Umtata District Pre-schools Forum in which development issues are usually discussed. One main reason advanced by one informant regarding their failure to obtain funds from the government's RDP programme was that government was at this stage concerned with rural pre-schools, which were only part of a pilot project.

² The O. R. Tambo District Council is an umbrella body comprising the magisterial districts of Umtata, Mqanduli,

Non-alignment with political organisations notwithstanding, two of my informants were actively involved in electioneering for the recent local government polls. One informant even hosted meetings run by an ANC candidate. However, it must be stressed that the same individual had hosted several other community meetings in her home before. The researcher was a participant observer at one house meeting addressed by this candidate who had subsequently won councillorship of the ward. Although the meeting had been called as a community meeting, its content was ANC business. The councillor gave a report on the plans of her party, which though generally a dominant party in both national and provincial politics – in numerical terms – had lost overall control of the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality to a rival party, the United Democratic Movement .

The interviewees did not see the hosting of party meetings to be in conflict with the association's non-alignment stance. They intimated that they were only trying to stimulate public participation in the elections, and affirmed that they have no fear that the situation might lead to co-option of the association by the political party concerned, or alienation of other members of the association not sympathetic to it, because, they claimed, their involvement in the electioneering was in their individual and private capacities, not as members of the Sibanye Development Project. The hostess, however, did have some misgivings that the ANC councillor seemed to have assumed that every person attending the meeting was an ANC member or supporter. In response to further probing by the researcher, the informants argued that their interest in this particular councillor was not because she represented a political party that happened to be in power nationally and provincially, but because she has always been in the forefront of development in the region, that is the former Transkei, both during the apartheid era and now.

Tsolo, Qumbu, Port St Johns, Ngqeleni and Libode, and is one of the main conduits for development funds in the region.

At the individual level, it was evident that the members of the Sibanye Development Project participated on voluntary basis, and thus enjoy unlimited levels of autonomy. Errant attendance of meetings is only one reflection of a high degree of laxity regarding fulfilment of the members' obligations to the association.

3.2 The Political Culture of Members of the Sibanye Development Project

The investigation further looked at the political culture of the members of the association. It attempted to assess the members' orientation to see if they have reaped the putative intrinsic benefits of public participation, namely self-realisation of citizenship or acquisition of civic culture, enhanced political efficacy, self-realisation of human potentialities and enhancement of self-worth and dignity, and increased knowledge or awareness of public affairs. Although these attributes are inextricably intertwined, they are distinct and are therefore dealt with separately.

3.2.1 Civic Culture

It was learnt from the three informants that the members of the Sibanye Development Project have always been at the forefront of their area's public affairs. Almost all of them were instrumental in the establishment of the area's residents' association referred to earlier on. True to one of the association's objectives listed in its constitution, which is 'to act as the pioneers in the Kwezi ext community' (*sic*), the informants and other members of the association were involved in a number of civic affairs. They have taken it upon themselves to see to it that street lights are working at all times in the area, and that the area is kept clean, for instance. They have also been part of the community involved in attempts to establish a community police forum in the area. The idea of house meetings for the community was developed by individuals within the association to try and fight the general poor attendance of community meetings usually held at the nearby health centre,

'by bringing the meetings closer to the people'. Further evidence of the public-spiritedness of the members of the association was the participation of their pre-school in the Masakhane Week for 1998, a programme run by government to mobilise popular support for payment of service charges. This is recorded in the association's annual report.

Besides the pre-school, the group has been involved in other development efforts in the area. They have run a baking project and a small enterprise making and selling fruit juice, in which some unemployed members of the community not members of the association were also involved. Through the endeavours of the association, some resident non-members were sent for training in these enterprises in Butterworth. The day care centre had not yet taken off at the time of research.

It is in the area of fulfilment of mandatory obligations to the public realm that the interviewees' attitudes were rather ambivalent. Although the informants realised and affirmed the need to pay for the services rendered by the municipality, for example, two of them admitted that they did not pay for these services regularly due to financial problems (interviews at 12h30 on 20.12.2000 and at 17h00 on 23.12.2000). The married informant affirmed that her husband paid for municipal services on a regular basis (Interview at 15h00 on 18.12. 2000). Asked if they ever encouraged their colleagues in the association and the community in general to pay their municipal dues, one informant said she was in no position to do that because she herself was guilty of this failure, and knew that other residents faced similar financial problems to those she was facing, and were thus not in a position to pay regularly. Probed further, the informants responded that dissatisfaction with the municipal services was no justification for non-payment; that so long as residents fail to pay it would be impossible to measure the local council's performance, and to take it to task for non-performance.

The public spiritedness of other residents of the area who are members of one or another voluntary association was established through a survey, and appraised in relation to that of those residents who did not belong to any voluntary association. Public spiritedness was measured in terms of their attitude to paying public service charges and whether they regularly paid these charges or not; their attitude concerning tampering with electricity and water meters, a malpractice that is rather rife in the city of Umtata; and whether they regularly paid their radio and television licences.

According to the survey conducted, ninety-six percent of members of voluntary associations affirmed the importance of paying for municipal services, in contrast to ninety-two percent of non-members. It was further established that seventy-one percent and eighty-three percent of members and non-members, respectively, paid for municipal services on a regular basis. Reasons for not paying amongst members were a combination of financial problems and dissatisfaction with the services – none thought these services should be free, or did not pay because public monies were perhaps embezzled by the municipal employees, or by local councillors. Among non-members one respondent thought municipal services should be free; other non-members gave the same reasons as members for not paying. It is noteworthy that when questions and comments were invited from the floor during the report-back house meeting addressed by the newly-elected ward councillor already mentioned, the only remark that came up concerned the issue of debts to the municipality. One individual implored the councillor to ensure that existing debts were written off, even if only partly; and approval on the faces of most other residents at the meeting could not go unnoticed.

Attitudes to tampering with electricity and water meters also showed some variations amongst members as compared with non-members. While the majority, sixty-one percent of members and fifty-eight percent of non-members, would not condone the malpractice under any circumstances,

twenty-five percent and eighteen percent members respectively claimed that excessively high rates and financial problems could be a justification for tampering. With non-members eight percent, thirty-three percent and eight percent respectively justified it on the grounds of dissatisfaction with services, excessively high rates, and financial problems.

The frequency of attending community meetings also differed amongst members as well as amongst non-members. Amongst members forty-eight percent said they always attended community meetings, while forty-four percent only attended when matters of personal interest were to be discussed, and seven percent never attended such meetings at all. Amongst non-members forty-two percent always attended, and twenty-five percent never attended, while thirty-three percent attended when matters of personal interest were to be discussed. The researcher also witnessed the poor attendance of meetings. Attendance at the house meeting addressed by the newly-elected ward councillor referred to earlier was attended by fourteen individuals only, who were all women; another meeting scheduled to take place at another house for the same purpose did not take place because no-one was there except the hostess and the ward councillor herself.

The investigation further established that amongst members forty-three percent and fifty-seven percent respectively paid and did not pay their radio and TV licences, while fifty percent of non-members paid. Again, the majority of both categories of respondents cited financial problems as reason for their failure to pay. The number of members who thought these services should be free stood at three (out of twenty-eight), and at one out of twelve non-members.

3.2.2 Political Efficacy

The interviewees were all confident of their political efficacy, that is the capacity to influence public policy. Although very much aware and critical of government's general insensitivity to their needs

and aspirations, citing some instances where the former Umtata municipality acted without consultation with, and consent, of ratepayers and the community in general, or contrary to their expressed wishes, or despite their objections, they were confident that they were 'a force to be reckoned with', to use one informant's idiom. For example, they reported that they were now regularly consulted concerning recruitment of workers to clean the area through a local councillors' project, a job-creation programme run by the former Umtata council to alleviate unemployment in the municipal area; and have been able to exploit this for the benefit of the residents of the area. The informants were quite certain that this could not have been the case before, that is before the council's awareness of the association's existence. One informant related how they put so much pressure on the former ward councillor on a particular issue that he decided to invite them to a city council meeting where the matter was to be discussed – perhaps to share the blows with his fellow councillors (Interview at 12h30 on 20.12.2000). Another informant also referred to the efficacy of the local government system because it has provided an accessible channel to articulate community needs and interests (Interview at 15h00 on 18.12.2000). The informants also enumerated areas in which they had successfully engaged the state: the transfer of ownership of the pre-school land from the provincial Department of Local Government and Housing to the community; the consideration of adult residents of the area who are not ratepayers or property owners for a land redistribution programme carried out by the erstwhile Umtata City Council; and improved street lighting.

The informants also expressed their sense of political efficacy by actively taking part in the recent local government elections, not just by casting their own votes on voting day. During the pre-election period the informants mobilised the community to vote; and facilitated report-back meetings in the post-election period – the house meetings referred to earlier on are an example. It

was learnt from the interviewees that they did not participate in any significant manner other than casting their own votes in the 1995 local government elections, which was prior to the establishment of the Sibanye Development Project. (The hostess of the house meetings reported that she did not even vote then). One informant went on to explain that it was important to vote even if one was not satisfied with the existing state of affairs, 'in order to bring about change, to have your voice heard' (interview at 17h00 on 23.12.2000). To this informant the very membership and participation in the Umtata District Pre-schools Forum was an expression of political efficacy, otherwise if they did not have confidence in their capacity to influence public policy, they would not be taking part in any of these public forums; and as members of the forum they were able to influence public policy on early childhood educational and other matters, albeit indirectly.

Political efficacy of the other respondents, that is residents of the Ikwezi Extension Township in general, was measured by whether they voted in the last local government elections or not, and by whether they have ever contacted the ward councillor.

It was found out that thirty-six percent and thirty-three percent of members and non-members, respectively, did not vote. The reason given by the majority who did not vote was absence from home on the polling day for both categories. However, one of the members and two non-members did not vote because voting was 'a waste of time'; and one from each category did not vote because of 'lack of time', while yet one other member did not vote because she or he 'was not registered as a voter'.

The survey further established that fifty-seven percent and seventy-five percent, respectively, of members and non-members had never consulted the ward councillor. Fifty percent of members who had never consulted the ward councillor said it would be waste of time. None of the non-members

gave this reason. Twenty-five percent of members and fifty-two percent non-members who had never contacted the ward councillor did not know where to find him, while for twenty-five percent of members and thirty-three percent of non-members there had never been a need to do so. Furthermore, the survey revealed that thirty-nine percent of members and sixty percent non-members did not even know the name of the current ward councillor, that is the one who won in the recent local government elections; and two of the members who claimed to know gave the wrong name.

3.2.3 Enhancement of Self-Worth and Dignity and Self-Realisation of Human Potentialities

The interviewees expressed pleasure at their success in providing services that were of benefit to the community. One specific area of contentment and pride was the running of the pre-school, thus relieving parents in the area of financial and other pressures related to taking their young ones to pre-schools in other areas.

The interviewees were also content with their efforts at creating employment for some individuals in the community through the various projects they have attempted, although they could have been happier if their efforts were sustainable; hence their pre-occupation with securing financial assistance to run the desired projects. The informants expressed satisfaction that through their efforts some members of the community have received training in baking, making fruit juice, running of pre-schools, and acquired some entrepreneurial skills.

The informants were also proud that their public activities and efforts to develop the community were being recognised, not only by the community itself, but by important public figures as well. Members of the community have come to them in their private capacities to seek help or advice when faced with problems like dark streets and cutting off of the electricity supply to their homes;

the ANC candidates came to them for assistance to facilitate community meetings during the recent local government elections. The key role played by these individuals as leaders in the community was underlined by nomination of two of them to represent the community in the committee for ward 24 following the year 2000 local government elections.

Practical skills of negotiation were also gained through participation in the project. The interviewees successfully negotiated with the provincial departments of local government and housing and of education, and the city council to run the pre-school. The informants further learnt about the processes and procedures of government, such as the steps to follow when applying for permission to run a pre-school and what procedure to follow in order to access public land for development purposes. Nonetheless, the idea that they could stand for public office in future seemed to be far-fetched and amusing to two of my informants. One chuckled and said she would consider it, while the other said she definitely did not have aspirations nor capacity for public office, intimating there was one member who could qualify for such public duties in the Sibanye Development Project. The third interviewee took the question very seriously, saying she would rather work at grassroots level, to strengthen the 'political muscle' of the community. This informant did not think anyone possessed qualities for public office in the group as yet.

3.2.4 Awareness of Public Affairs

One informant asserted that she has become politically aware since her membership in the association. Participation in the project has enabled her to interact with other individuals, agencies concerned with development, and public officials. Other informants explained how their interaction with state agencies had made them appreciate the extent of lack of functional capacity on the part of many public officials, and the callousness with which the citizenry continued to be treated by public

officials. One informant referred to a sense of lack of accountability of the local council, which she described as being 'oblivious' of the existence of ratepayers in some respects. This informant cited the local council's surreptitious attempt to sell the pre-school site as one testimony to this lack of sense of accountability. Another informant referred to the rezoning of a residential property to a trading one that the local council approved despite the objections of the ratepayers, objections that were invited by the local council itself, in the first place. Unfortunately, no comparative data on the community's general perceptions regarding the level of the local council's accountability came out of the general survey as no in-depth enquiry was made in this regard in the general survey. The respondents were only asked to give the name of the newly elected ward councillor to test the probability of their public participation by contacting elected officials.

3.3 The Relationship between the Sibanye Development Project and Other Civil Society Structures and Public Authorities

The process of running the pre-school inevitably requires the group to interact with the local council, and the Departments of Education and of Local Government and Housing. The group therefore does engage the state. In addition, the group's pre-school is affiliated to the Umtata District Pre-schools Forum, and members of the group attend workshops and other meetings under the auspices of this forum. According to the informants, the group is also affiliated to the O. R. Tambo District Council Development Forum. As is apparent in the discussion of the interviewees' political efficacy, the relationship between the project and public authorities is both co-operative and conflictual. The nature of the project's relationship with the state and other civil society organisations is also clearly illustrated under its autonomy and need not be further elaborated on now.

3.4 Conclusion

The investigation revealed that the Sibanye Development Project does embrace democratic organisational principles: it appears to be an inclusive organisation; it has a system of rules in the form of a constitution; its decision-making processes are based on consensus; members have an equal status; all members have a right to take part in the setting of the agenda for the association's meetings; and so on.

On the other hand, the interviewees were found to have in many respects reaped the educative and psychological benefits of public participation. They showed a highly developed civic culture that is accompanied by a realisation of human potentialities and enhanced public awareness. In addition, they appeared to have assumed a high sense of political efficacy and self-worth and dignity. As expected, their political culture generally did not seem to be very different from the political culture of the other members of the association and of the members of the community who are members of other voluntary associations. However, it did not seem to be very different from the political culture of those who do not participate in any associational activities, either. It is in respect of civic culture that sharp variations were observed between the interviewees and other members of the association and members of the community at large. Finally, the group was found to have close working relations with public officials and with other civil society organisations involved in projects similar to those it is involved in.

CHAPTER 4

4 Paradoxes of Participation

4.1 Introduction

The following discussion seeks to interrogate the potential of the Sibanye Development Project for democratic consolidation on the basis of its organisational structure and the political culture of its members that has been teased out during the fieldwork, with reference to existing literature on promotion of democracy through popular participation in voluntary associations and documented experiences of other voluntary associations. An attempt will be made to unravel theoretical and practical issues arising out of the empirical study of the Sibanye Development Project, and to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of this voluntary association in relation to the task of consolidating democracy.

4.2 Organisational Dynamics

Although the Sibanye Development Project appeared to be run on democratic principles, some factors underlying its organisation could be problematic and need further interrogation. For instance, the inclusiveness of the association in terms of membership cannot be taken for granted; there may be other dynamics at play. For instance, the fact that those who wish to affiliate to the association have to subscribe to the (undefined) values of the association and to the rules and regulations set out in the association's constitution, in addition to monetary subscriptions, could be suggestive of exclusivity. Those who do not embrace the values of the group, and/or those who cannot meet the financial obligations concomitant to membership, cannot be included – perhaps this explains why the project has never attracted meaningful membership in numerical terms. In addition, the limit on the maximum number of people who may join the project may seem to suggest

some exclusivity, but the experience of other voluntary associations on the continent seems to support this rationale. The practical need to contain the size of voluntary associations came out strongly in the case of the Six-S Movement that operated in West Africa from the early 1970s to 1995. According to Haynes (1997), this conglomeration of voluntary associations grew unmanageable in size and became a complex bureaucratic structure that was ultimately crushed under its own weight. Thus the decision to limit membership seems to be justifiable.

Besides the question of inclusiveness, there seems to be some gaps between some of the association's principles stated in the constitution and by the informants, and their fulfilment. Two interrelated problems were identified with the association, namely, existence of oligarchic tendencies and apathy amongst the ordinary members. The two problems have implications for decision-making processes and accountability within the project, and for the putative educative functions of the Sibanye Development Project as a civil society component. Financial constraints and what Ekeh (1992) calls the 'apolitical nature' of African voluntary associations in general, have also been identified. The latter problems have implications for the instrumentalist functions of the Sibanye Development Project as a constituent element of civil society.

4.2.1 Oligarchic Tendencies

High levels of apathy amongst the ordinary members of the Sibanye Development Project, and its dominance by the few individuals who are members of the executive committee were established by the study. What is not clear is which one of the two situations heralded the other, but it seems as if the two reinforce each other. The preponderance of some over others serves to validate elite theory, which assumes the inevitability of elite rule in any social organisation (Michels in Etzioni-Halevy, 1997; Marger, 1981; and Parry, 1969). Both sociological and psychological factors seem to be at

work in this situation. In addition to the apathy of the ordinary members of the project, which in practical terms could translate into non-cooperation in the pursuit of the project's aims and objectives, the individual members of the executive work against a background of several other constraints: temporal, occupational and otherwise, yet display high levels of determination and commitment in the execution of the association's programme. They seem not to be deterred in their endeavours even by the financial problems besetting the project. Their perseverance places them in a class of their own in psychological terms: they are certainly a highly motivated group of individuals. From the sociological point of view, this group of individuals performs the function of giving cohesion and direction to a disparate social structure; or, as Parry (1969: 13) puts it, they constitute the integrating force in the community without which it may fall apart. This observation is made on the basis of the fact established during the study that the Sibanye Development Project is the only organisation that meaningfully mobilises common activity in the area. For all intents and purposes, the Sibanye Development Project performs functions that would ordinarily be the responsibility of a residents' association. The activities of its executive overlap with these members' duties as leading members of the residents' association, which is in fact inactive or overshadowed by this project, in the researcher's impression. The value of the contribution of this group in this regard comes out clearly in the discussion of its political culture below. The members of the executive have assumed the identity of an elite in that they play a highly influential role, not only in the affairs of the association, but in the affairs of the community at large (Parry, 1969: 13). The significance of the oligarchic situation lies in its implications for democratic consolidation. As has already been stated, for some theorists it would spell a threat to democracy, while for others it serves to reinforce the democratisation process.

In the case of the Sibanye Development Project, the situation is rather paradoxical – it could be seen as both desirable for and detrimental to the democratisation process. On the positive side, the group performs the crucial function of engaging the state – at a local level at least – by articulating the interests and the needs of the association, most of which coincide with the common good. In that case the individuals concerned fulfil the instrumentalist functions of civil society, which are crucial for good governance. Their inputs may serve to promote responsiveness of government to popular needs and improve its performance. Secondly, this group of individuals enhances the legitimacy of the state by making the local council answerable, and by rendering a public service, which the state is unable or unwilling to provide, thus distracting the attention of the community from this important failure of the state. It could be argued that had it not been for the perseverance of these few individuals, the project might have already disintegrated and dissolved, and the state would be under the spot light for its failure to provide a pre-school for the Ikwezi Extension Township community. This project has also contributed towards creation of employment and has brought some relief to the unemployed in the community by providing opportunities for some people to participate in its income-generating activities.

On the other hand, the oligarchic tendencies render the expressed organisational principles of the project meaningless, and could be seen to be to some extent negation of the putative socialising function of civil society. The tacit withdrawal of the other members of the project could be a function of alienation obtaining from the oligarchic propensities of the executive committee.³ In that case, the emergence of an elite within this association can be perceived as detrimental to democracy. The association can be expected to transfer the oligarchic tendencies and alienation to a

³ It is noteworthy that the general apathy reported seems to have affected largely the ordinary members of the association.

wider public sphere and to the polity in the same manner that it is expected to spread a democratic culture to a wider public sphere. In addition, no educative benefits can be derived from membership of the voluntary association, if not accompanied by meaningful participation in its affairs. Although the interviewees have certainly benefited from participation in the project, a similar assertion cannot be made about the other members of the association. Moreover, with the dwindling active ordinary membership it can be safely predicted that executive positions within the association will rotate among the few individuals presently holding office. Related to this situation is the inconsistency between the information given by the informants and that contained in the written constitution of the association concerning the tenure of office for the executive. The constitution provides for yearly elections, whereas the interviewees claim the tenure of office is three years. It is rather inconceivable that professionals such that the members of the association are, could have overlooked such a serious 'error' in the constitution. This discrepancy could be inconsequential, but, considering experiences of other voluntary associations on the continent, could also be very significant. For instance, Bratton (1994) contends that regular elections of leadership are evaded in the case of the Zimbabwe's farmers unions. Barkan and others (1991) report similar experiences in respect of Nigeria's voluntary associations. Hamer (1981) attributes emergence and persistence of such a situation to what he calls a deferential (and patriarchic) culture typical of African societies. In the case of voluntary associations in some Gauteng townships, White (1998: 28 & 32) attributes the situation to the primacy generally given to task performance over representation functions of office bearers. Members of the voluntary associations studied seemed to be more concerned with their smooth running rather than with who performs the function. White also found out that the 'exit option' is the most preferred way of expressing dissatisfaction with elected representatives, which can also explain the 'permanence' of elected positions in most voluntary associations. The

significance of this kind of scenario is that it generally informs national politics as well; dominant party politics characterised by uncompetitive and semi-competitive elections seems to be generally the order of national politics in Africa (see Daniel and Southall in Daniel *et al*, 1999). Very few African leaders and regimes have been removed from power as a result of an election, even in cases where elections took place amid high levels of disaffection like in Kenya in 1992 and Zimbabwe in the year 2000. Dominant party politics have also been observed in the newly democratic South Africa by Southall (1998) and White (1998), and the situation could result in uncompetitive elections already being experienced in other African countries with dominant ruling parties. Prevalence of dominance at associational level can only serve to reinforce it at the national level.

The apparently oligarchic situation in the project seems to be at odds with the assertive response that decision-making in this association is collective. Even if no oligarchic tendencies were discernable, such a state of affairs can be regarded as extraordinary or improbable, except where there is serious dominance or some gate-keeping. In addition, that the only formal resignation to have occurred was a function of a misunderstanding between the member who resigned and another member of the association negates the statement; instead one is inclined to think that gate-keeping must have been introduced or tightened after the said resignation. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is only natural that the interviewees may not wish to let go of some of their 'control', lest the project falls apart, which would be a pity after so much sacrifice and hard work on their part.

4.2.2 Accountability

All members of an organisation, any organisation, should in principle, be accountable to that organisation (Ahrne, 1996: 113). The Sibanye Development Project accordingly has mechanisms for accountability in place on paper. But, as has already been observed, the written rules and

regulations seem to be insufficient – the constitution does not address matters like the quorum and penalty for failure to attend meetings, for example. Consequently, no one has ever been penalised for failing to attend a meeting, and most meetings have apparently taken place without the quorum ordinarily expected for any meeting. This situation has both practical and theoretical implications. On a practical level, the situation could open way for more serious anomalies. Complacency could develop; decisions and actions could become arbitrary and accountability of those involved eroded. Actually, with dwindling active membership, the incumbent executive is virtually not answerable to anyone but to itself. The situation could be aggravated by decision-making based on consensus and the apparently close relationships between the members of the project. Some feminist analysts recognise that such decision making procedures could suppress dissent and give a false impression of harmony and agreement, especially where there are significant close ties of friendship amongst the participants (see Phillips, 1991: 130-131). According to Phillips, fear of offending friends could combine with fear of non-conformity to produce a false consensus. In the case of the Sibanye Development Project it can be expected that members would be wary not to offend one another after the ‘ugly’ experience of a resignation resultant from conflict.

Laxity with the self-imposed rules and regulations has also theoretical implications. It serves to highlight the tension between the optimism of many civil society theorists and organisation theory. Civil society theories emphasise voluntariness within particular civil society organisations, which contradicts the organisational principles of obligation and order. Civil society is supposed to be a sphere of persuasion and consent rather than domination and coercion. That means civil society organisations cannot enforce their rules and regulations on their members willy-nilly. Although civil society is a domain where citizenship is practised, fulfilment of duties related to it cannot be

enforced like they would be in an organisation such as the state. Ahrne (1996: 113 & 118) recognises this dilemma for civil society organisations.⁴ He juxtaposes the notions of flexibility associated with civil society and of order associated with organisations, pointing out that the two are not quite reconcilable. If civil society is about individual liberty, then it means members of civil society organisations cannot be forced to participate in the activities of the associations concerned. This means no punitive measures can be taken to enforce attendance of meetings, for example. Although this situation is acceptable insofar as it is in sync with the idea of individual liberty, it borders on incivility and creates a bottleneck for the smooth and successful running of the project. The democratic ideal of (reciprocal) accountability is also undermined in such a situation. The practical implication of this tension is on the viability of voluntary associations. Voluntary associations must find a way to reconcile the principles of organisation and those of civil society, or face disintegration.

4.2.3 Class Dynamics

The above organisational dynamics could create fertile ground for the entrenchment of the dominant position of the elite group and the emergence of class division within the Sibanye Development Project and the Ikwezi Extension Township community in general. According to Michels (in Etzioni-Halevy, 1997: 246), experience and relative expertise in public affairs further sets elites apart from the led. The elite's relations with the led become asymmetrical as the elite gain deeper knowledge in public affairs, and this serves to make them more and more indispensable, and the more indispensable they become, the more improbable their removal from office becomes. The fact

⁴ This does not necessarily mean that the leeway generally allowed the members of the Sibanye Development Project is as a result of the awareness of this tension; the study did not reveal concern with the ideal of voluntariness. Instead, reasons of emotion and expediency seemed to be paramount.

that some of the executive members of this project have been nominated by the community to represent it on the ward committee is illustrative of Michels' point. If these individuals are ultimately elected to the ward committee, they will have certainly cut a niche for themselves in the conventional political sphere; confirming the view by elitist theorists that power breeds power (Parry, 1969: 43). However, at this point the researcher would be wary of taking an extreme view and perceive them as a class-for-itself. Their current pursuit of matters of common interest testifies otherwise. In addition, the association's constitution is explicit on its commitment to build universal ties in the community. Moreover, there seems to be a skewed balance between the association's purely income-generating activities and non-commercial activities encompassing the whole community in favour of the latter. For instance, most of the association's stated aims and objectives embody the common good: establishment of a pre-school, prevention of child abuse and rape, youth development, development of unity in the neighbourhood, affiliation to other forums, and co-ordination of the activities of the project with those of other similar projects.

On the other hand, the possibility for the development of class-consciousness and cohesion cannot be ruled out because conditions for such developments do exist. For example, the stated objective 'to act as pioneers in the Ikwezi Ext Community' (*sic*) can be perceived as an explicit expression of a desire for hegemony. This objective seems to suggest an ambition to monopolise the role of being heralds of development in the community. Secondly, the interface between primordial or associational activities and civic activities (through participation in local government structures, granted some members' nomination to the ward committee mentioned earlier on leads to their election), coupled with the conception of democracy mainly in material terms (see White, 1998: 32 and Osaghae, 1996), could create a situation where these individuals are seen as agents for accessing

public resources, and this would buy them loyalty of the led, and consolidate their privileged position. According to their own account, the elites in the Sibanye Development Project have already tasted some success in bringing material benefits to the area: they attribute employment of some residents through a local councillors' job-creation project to their endeavours, for example. In addition, one has to take into account the experiences of the South African citizens who were domicile in the homelands before the advent of formal democracy in the country, if the thesis of a positive correlation between the historical development of a society and the life experiences of individuals on the one hand, and their political culture, on the other, is anything to go by (see White, 1998: 32 and Osaghae, 1996). The dynamics of the political economy and social relations that existed in the former Transkei, which constitutes the research setting, must have been crucial in shaping the political culture of the subjects of this research.

Some parallels can be drawn between the former homeland's political economy and that of the post-colonial state in Africa. State/society relations in the former Transkei were generally informed by patron-clientelism (Southall, 1983: 126 & 188), which thrives on corruption, elements which are inimical to democratisation. Women's organisations that were relatively successful, like the Zenzele and the Transkei Union of Women's Organisations (TUWO), had patrons like the respective presidents' and cabinet ministers' wives and other eminent women from urban centres. Their scope and character were almost national like that of Ghana's December Women's Movement (see Haynes, 1997). In addition to the said patron-clientelism, the vibrant democratic political culture which is supposed to have characterised South Africa during the liberation struggle was not manifest in the Transkei until after the unbanning of the liberation movements in the early 1990s.⁵

⁵ Anyway, one would not have expected it where there was patron-clientelism because the two are mutually exclusive; a truly democratic culture could not have been found in a milieu of patronage and clientelism.

The conclusion is that Transkei therefore offers fertile terrain for the reactivation of patron-clientelism, which already exists in some of the black townships in the Gauteng Province, according to White (1998). Class formation would be a function of power deriving from political connections rather than of ownership of capital as assumed by orthodox Marxism (see Diamond, 1987). This would certainly have negative implications for the autonomy of the Sibanye Development Project *vis-à-vis* the state and/or its agents. The financial constraints besetting the Sibanye Development Project, the increasingly close links between its elite and the incumbent ward councillor, and the possible election of some of these elites to the ward committee, may combine to undermine its autonomy and its capacity for making a real contribution to democratic consolidation.

The relationship between the elites within the Sibanye Development Project and the ANC councillor may signal the onset of the politicisation of social life, which, according to Diamond (1997: 19), is one of the greatest threats to democracy in Africa. It could also, as already intimated, be an indication of the beginning of the personalisation of politics. In such a situation success of social or community activities would seem to depend on 'correct' political connections. It seemed that the newly elected councillor's decision to inform the meeting of the ANC plan to accelerate development in wards under ANC councillors was a deliberate attempt to tempt those present, especially the members of the voluntary association being studied, to seek to forge closer ties with the ANC in the hope of securing some future benefits. Furthermore, the impression created was that the plan was to exploit incumbency at national and provincial levels to frustrate would-be efforts of a rival party in power at local level; that the ANC would use its dominant position to compete with the UDM for the position of a harbinger of development. This does not only suggest a blurring of the lines between state and civil society, but between party and state. It also illustrates

very well over-emphasis of the materialist dimension of democracy, which entails voting for a candidate with a potential to deliver public goods rather than voting according to some abstract principle of democracy. That is why the explanation regarding the support given to the ANC candidate by the Sibanye Development Project's elite in the recent local government elections could be problematic. While material security is a legitimate concern, it becomes problematic if individuals' and/or organisations' decisions and actions are shaped exclusively by material concerns. In such circumstances some individuals and organisations could mischievously sacrifice democratic principles in favour of immediate material benefits, at the expense of marginalised groups and those lacking the necessary clout to stand in the political turf. That would be a survival-of-the-fittest scenario, which would derail the whole democratisation project. Were these trends to take root, they would combine and result in patron-clientelism, and would result in imbalances in development in favour of those with strong links with political powers, thus creating a fertile ground for disaffection of the disadvantaged, or those who view themselves as being discriminated against due to having no political connections or due to having wrong ones. Although involvement in development would necessarily require some interaction with the ward councillor, the relationship between the incumbent councillor and the Sibanye Development Project is rather disquieting because it grew even before the incumbent won councillorship of the ward. Although the meetings hosted by one of the informants on behalf of this (would-be) councillor were explained as a drive in the hostess's private capacity to mobilise the community to participate in the local government elections, candidates representing other political parties were not accorded the same treatment. (The hostess could perhaps not be blamed because other political parties probably did not approach her to make a similar request). What would be of concern is that the close co-operation between the leading members of the Sibanye Development Project, who have always worked together on a

number of community matters, in the planning of these meetings, was a coincidence that could have served to attach the meetings to the association. The relationship of the Sibanye Development Project's elite with the ANC councillor could be seen as cross-cutting personal political relations, serving to blur the boundaries of state and social organisations as exemplified by the case of the merger of farmers' unions in Zimbabwe (Bratton, 1994: 32), that is why the explanation regarding the support given to the ANC councillor by the elite of the Sibanye Development Project could cause some concern. According to Bratton (1994: 12), this merger demonstrated that 'neopatrimonial practices pervade the deep politics of society as well as high politics of state'. Kasfir (1998) argues that even if civil society organisations were financially independent, they would not be impervious to the blandishment of patronage, meaning that they are not beyond state influence and subtle political control. Hence the criticism of the associational school of civil society for its underestimation of the autonomous power of the state and the advantages enjoyed by state elites in using its resources to pursue their own interests (see Gyimah-Boadi, 1996 and Hyden, 1996: 95). In the case of South Africa one can discern further blurring of state/civil society boundaries in the form of the incorporation of civil society organisations in government-sanctioned institutions as will be discussed in the following section.

With its financial constraints and other problems, the Sibanye Development Project could be particularly vulnerable. Patronage could be successfully dangled as bait to entangle it into the ruling party's web. This prognosis is made against the background of the historical experiences of South African citizens domicile in the former Transkei discussed above, and of claims of existing patronage in South Africa, which can be entrenched as a result of the supposedly dominant position being enjoyed by the ANC in the country (see White, 1998: 2). The blatant promise of increased



efforts at development in ANC-controlled wards within the UDM-controlled King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality made by the incumbent councillor adds substance to these observations. If tangible material benefits are seen to be coming the way of the association and the Ikwezi Extension community as a result of perceived connection of the Sibanye Development Project's elite to the ANC councillor, the councillor and the elite within the association could assume a benefactor status in the eyes of the rank and file (and this perception could be reinforced if some elites from the Sibanye Development Projects ultimately serve in the ward committee), leading to political domination and circumscription of the capacity of the Sibanye Development Project to check on state excesses. This would not be a new phenomenon. For instance, analysts like Kasfir (1998) and Markovitz (1998) have convincingly illustrated the propensity of many incumbent African governments to use patronage as a tool to retain power; and, as already been intimated, patronage is inimical to democracy. The resiliency of authoritarian states in countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe, despite the ubiquity of associational activity, could be explained in terms of patronage and other forms of exploitation of the advantages of incumbency by the ruling parties in those countries. Nonetheless, one must hasten to point out that the 'clients' are not always passive victims of the circumstances. Sitole (1985), for instance, argues that even the subaltern classes do exploit the situation to their own advantage; hence Fatton's (1995: 68) argument that both classes are interested in the hypertrophy of state, thus diminishing the probability of reduced state activism in the economic sphere advocated by the international donor community and by those disenchanted with the state. The failure of the hostess of the report-back meeting on the recent local government elections to remind the ANC councillor that the meeting was a community one rather than an ANC one could be instructive in this respect. It could be that the hostess was being careful not to antagonise the councillor and jeopardise their future relations and possibly accompanying benefits –

one informant expressed their preparedness to seek financial assistance from any quarter. This desperation for funding is recognised by Piven and Cloward (1977: xii) in their work on poor people's movements. Piven and Cloward make a bold statement that leaders of such movements are driven to the elite not only for tangible support, but for symbolic support which may enhance the image of the movement and its sustenance. They also assert that it is only those movements which are subservient to the elite that survive.⁶

4.2.4 Incorporation or Bureaucratisation of the Sibanye Development Project?

In addition to the probable election of some of its elites to the ward committee, the Sibanye Development Project is affiliated to other development-oriented forums, the Umtata District Pre-school Forum and the O. R. Tambo District Development Forum. It is through these forums that the Sibanye Development Project and other voluntary associations in the area are supposed to engage the state on development matters and broader policy issues. It remains to be seen if the project can maintain its identity and autonomy within these forums, and meaningfully participate in them. Indications are, however, strong that its participation is not so meaningful at present, because it is not regularly represented in these forums' meetings and workshops due to structural constraints involving occupational commitments of its members, and other factors. In those circumstances it cannot be expected that the voluntary association will maintain its identity and have its voice heard within these forums, and the chances of realising the 'latent promise of political pluralism' supposed to be held by voluntary associations begin to fade insofar as the Sibanye Development Project is concerned. The project could be expected to carry out its programmes according to the framework

⁶ A broad distinction between the strata of the elite as advocated by some elitist theorists (see Parry, 1969: 33) is being used here to separate the elite within the Sibanye Development Project and the elite with overt political power as is the case with the ward councillor.

and guidelines set by these forums, even if it was not party to their formulation. Besides that, the Sibanye Development Project would not have any real influence on the forum, even if circumstances were favourable for its members' regular attendance of meetings, granted the forum is some kind of a bureaucratic setup as would be argued in terms of Friedman's and Reitzes' (1996) and Tessendorf's (1996) formulation, and the supposed autocratic authority of bureaucracies (see Parry, 1969: 41). Even if the association were regularly represented in these forums' meetings, its elite would still have to accept the 'technical' leadership provided by those in authority within the forums. Generally speaking, the envisaged pluralism could be seen to be pluralism of forums made up of a conglomeration of smaller voluntary associations rather than of the component voluntary associations themselves, as the individual voluntary associations become 'swallowed up' by the forums. This would seem to give credence to the claim that the incumbent government tends to circumscribe rather than expand the civil society space in the public domain (Friedman and Reitzes, 1996 and Tessendorf, 1996), and that it seeks to define civil society according to its own terms (Friedman, 1991). Friedman's claim coincides with Kasfir's (1998) and Markovitz's (1998) contention that governments generally emasculate or exclude civil society organisations that are seen to be problematic, and allow only those that pursue programmes acceptable to government, especially, according to Dicklitch (1998), those which perform 'gap-filling' services governments are unable to render due to rigours of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF/World Bank. South Africa may not have these programmes thrust upon it, but it certainly embraces neo-liberal principles through its GEAR economic policy, and, like all those countries operating within this paradigm, is unable to service the needs of its populace satisfactorily. With these (government-sponsored) forums the problems of oligarchy associated with the hierarchical ordering of all organisations would emerge. Furthermore, in a situation informed by competing and

conflicting interests, in addition to probable unequal capacities of the component associations, power relations would certainly be at play, shaping these forums. It can be safely argued that it is those power relations that will determine whose voice is heard and prevails, and which association gets what in terms of financial resources distributed through these forums. It is interesting that the project has failed to secure financial assistance despite the association's affiliation to the O. R. Tambo District Development Forum. An even more interesting question is how voluntary associations not affiliated to these forums access state funding.

Although forums may generally be necessary to give a stronger and a more effective voice to civil society, which could help enhance its capacity for democratic consolidation usually weakened by fragmentation (Haynes, 1997: 171-174 and Ake in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 68), these forums could result in the homogenisation of the voluntary associations concerned, thus negating the very essence of civil society, whose basis is competing interests. In his elucidation of the essence of civil society, Friedman (1992: 92) contends:

... this realm [civil society] is fully represented only when all its different interests and values are independently represented; and it is strong enough to resist colonisation only when all of these independent organisations are strong enough not only to defend their independence but to compete for influence ...

These forums could therefore also serve to limit the space and independence of their constituent elements, in direct conflict with the present government's expressed commitment to expand it, in the same manner in which Kenya's *harambee* projects were turned into 'miniature government bureaucracies', according to Hamer (1981: 124). The possible consequences would not be encouraging, as is illustrated by the resilience of authoritarianism in Kenya, the ubiquity of associational life in that country notwithstanding. It is also apparent that the organisational aspects

of these forums are not very sensitive to the needs and particular circumstances of their component associations, otherwise it is not quite conceivable that it seems so difficult for the elite of the Sibanye Development Project to attend meetings and workshops conducted by the forum – not with the kind of passion for development and dedication to their project they have displayed.

Added to the loss or limit of independence deriving from the homogenisation associated with affiliation to other bodies, the Sibanye Development Project can be compromised by its ‘apolitical’ character professed by the informants. If the association is viewed as apolitical it cannot really be expected to address issues that are explicitly political, even though its activities are politically significant. The association cannot be expected to challenge government, for example, on its policy on early childhood education through pre-schools so that all communities are provided with this essential service. Besides early childhood education being an essential service, from the point of view of the country’s apartheid history and political economy, Umtata is essentially rural itself; it is part of the third world component of South Africa’s dual economy, and has suffered immensely in terms of public services under the apartheid (and homeland) system. On that score, the Ikwezi Extension Township community deserves to be treated in exactly the same way as the other rural areas of the Transkei and the country in general. The complacency displayed by the Sibanye Development Project in this respect serves to portray a situation similar to the one alleged to be prevalent in respect of Uganda’s non-governmental organisations. The Sibanye Development Project seems to be content to work within the framework of the standing government development programme, to render ‘gap-filling’ services. The very referral of the Ikwezi Extension Township Residents’ Association to NGOs for assistance in setting up a school in the area seems to be problematic in terms of constitutionalism and of the theory that civil society are forums for agitation (see Hamer, 1981). It could be suggestive of the (mis)perception that autonomy of civil society

from state implies that civil society has no claim over the state (Friedman, 1992), and could be construed as an attempt by the state to shun some of its responsibilities in order to reduce state expenditure in line with the currently dominant liberal orthodoxy.

4.2.5 Gendered Participation?

Gender dynamics also seem to be at play in the organisation of the Sibanye Development Project. The executive and the elite group within this association comprise women only. Although there are men amongst the founder members of the project, they are all inactive. A number of factors could explain this situation.

Firstly, it could also be indicative of a gendered outlook on the activities of the project such that they are perceived to be womanly (or motherly) and therefore not politically significant and threatening to male dominance. According to Mansbridge (in Chapman and Shapiro, 1993: 345), community activities have always been perceived to be the domain of women due to the engendered division of labour. According to this perspective, women were seen as caretakers of local community life while men were traditionally seen as wage earners; and this continues to be the case even now that women are also wage earners. In predominantly black communities it could perhaps be further reinforced by the fact that many households are headed by women (see White, 1998: 29). This conception of community activities as women activities could also explain why the informants, who were all women, were at pains to explain that the project is not political in any way, and seemed to lack confidence in their capacity to take higher office. Secondly, it could be a reflection of pervasive sexism in the South African society in general (see White, 1998). Men usually occupy leadership positions even in organisations like the church in which members are usually predominantly women (Tripp, 1998). In that case, female leadership could tend to have an alienating effect on men, hence

their inactivity. At the same time, it could be indicative of the empowerment of women and of a community that has transcended gender stereotypes and biases such that men are happy to let anyone lead so long as the person is competent at the job. Nonetheless, it is still very remarkable that it is women who have been resilient and relentless in the pursuit of the project's activities, considering the odds against which the project has had to operate. Experience shows that women have always been on the receiving end of all human suffering because of their multiple roles in society; roles which were assigned to them through a socialisation process combined with structural dynamics that left them with a disproportionate share of social responsibilities *vis-à-vis* their male counterparts (see Phillips, 1991: 96-97). It is women who would have been hardest hit by the absence of a pre-school in the area; it is they who have to feed the unemployed, and so on. In other words, it is they who, because of the way in which society is structured have the most (or perceive themselves as having the most) direct material interest in doing so. It is therefore not surprising that they are at the forefront of the efforts to ameliorate the welfare of this community.

Another remarkable aspect about the women constituting the elite in this project is that they are all, except one, single. They have thus exceptional family circumstances, which, paradoxically, provide both a constraining and an enabling environment which respectively minimise and optimise their participation in public life. Constraints associated with familial commitments and single parenthood on the one hand, and their negative impact on the progress of the Sibanye Development Project, on the other hand, have already been alluded to. The same constraining marital condition could be responsible for these women's active public participation. These women's relatively active public life could be attributed to absence of marital demands and possibly male domination at home.

The significance of family circumstances for this study lies in its relevance for some feminists' argument for redefinition of the public sphere so as to do away with the private-public sphere dichotomy, and for a shift in intra-household power relations (see Phillips, 1991: 115-116 and Cornwell, 1998). The gendered division of labour in the household has negative implications for democracy, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it negates the democratic ideal of equality. On a practical level, it results in unequal distribution of responsibilities in favour of men and at the expense of women, and the corollary is limitations on the opportunity for women to participate optimally in the conventional public sphere. If there is no equality in the conventional private spheres, then there can be no equal opportunity in the conventional public domain as well. Realisation of human potentialities and harnessing of skills are limited in the process.

4.3 Political Culture and Democratic Consolidation

4.3.1 Members of the Sibanye Development Project Virtuous?

There is no doubt that the informants evince high levels of public spiritedness, but it is debatable if this claim can be made about the other members of the association being studied. As a result of their public activities, the informants have become distinguished members of this small community, even though the community is not highly stratified. They could perhaps be regarded as agents of change in this community, through which entry to the community by outside development agencies and public authorities is likely to take place. In that case they can be regarded as a bridge between the core or the periphery of the core of the decision-makers and the community (see Parry, 1969: 33). Their power within the community has created possibilities for the extension of that power to a wider scope, thus confirming the elitist theory that 'power gives access to more power (see Parry, 1969: 32). It remains to be seen what effect that power will have on the political culture of these

elites, whether it will result in its enhancement so that it further promotes democracy or its corruption.

The informants' participation in public affairs began with the formation of the Ikwezi Extension Township Residential Association, and has been expanding since then, culminating in their endeavours to mobilise public participation in community activities in general, and in the recent local government elections in particular. This link between the residents' association and the establishment of the Sibanye Development Project confirms the assumption about the socialising benefits of participation in voluntary associations, that it promotes increased public participation.

However, the tacit withdrawal of the other members of the Sibanye Development Project from its activities serves to negate this assumption of civil society and participation theories; it suggests that this assumption may not be generalised. This is a situation in which individuals demonstrate lack of commitment to their own voluntary association, which they joined (and possibly helped establish) by their own volition. It can therefore not be expected that they could be interested in wider public activities. This means that the survey result showing that forty-eight percent of members of voluntary associations are interested in public affairs, measured in this study by the rate of attendance at community meetings, must be viewed with circumspection. The very idea of house meetings was to improve attendance of public meetings, and indicates general lack of interest in public affairs in this community. Observation during the fieldwork confirmed general poor attendance of community meetings. Attendance at the one house meeting attended by the researcher stood at less than fifteen, while a second one in another house was cancelled because no-one was there except the hostess and the guest-speaker, the newly elected councillor – the researcher arrived as the hostess was seeing the latter out.

This situation seems to be a justification of the so-called realist theorists' dissenting views on the intrinsic benefits of public participation and the practicability thereof. Realist theorists repudiate the assumption that public participation is practicable. They identify structural problems relating to lack of time and occupational commitments as some of the constraining factors. The research has indeed revealed how these factors have hindered the progress of the Sibanye Development Project; and it must be borne in mind that participation in voluntary associations constitutes public participation at a very minimal level *vis-à-vis* participation in wider public affairs, say at community level or at national level, yet maintaining it at a reasonably satisfactory level appears to be so difficult. Then, if participation is so limited at the lowest level of public life, it becomes a very serious question how it can be extended to the wider public sphere so that it contributes to democratic consolidation in the end. It remains to be seen if the two members of the Sibanye Development Project nominated to the ward committee will be able to honour their obligations attached thereto, if elected, considering the structural bottlenecks to their pursuit of the activities of the Sibanye Development Project.

Dahl (see Keim in Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 4) identifies psychological factors for apathy (also see Parry, 1969: 44 on Michels). He looks at what he perceives to be selfish human nature and concludes that the individual is not generally interested in public matters, except for specific reasons or gains, like when he/she wants to articulate particular interests or preferences, or when he/she wants to protect some interest perceived to be under threat due to government action or inaction. According to this view, the ordinary individual will not participate in public affairs unless the expected benefits thereof exceed the cost in terms of time and other factors; and will withdraw from public participation immediately that particular issue has been resolved. Similarly, Smith's (in Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 126) observation is that very few people attend community meetings

in his hometown, and that the few that attend do not ordinarily take part in the deliberations. He accordingly concludes that, to quote him, 'the town meeting serves to ratify the plans of the select men' (Pennock and Chapman, 1975: 127). Dahl's and Smith's observations can be delineated in the case of the Sibanye Development Project and the Ikwezi Extension Township community in general. The current study has also revealed general lack of interest in public meetings on the part of the residents of the Ikwezi Extension Township, including the majority who profess to be involved in associational activities and the few who are not active in associational life. For instance, those who attended the house meeting addressed by the newly elected ward councillor simply listened to her and did not question or comment on any of the plans of the ANC provincial structure. In addition, the survey of residents of the area showed that forty-four percent of residents who are members of one voluntary association or another attend community meetings only when matters of personal interest are to be discussed, compared to thirty-three percent of non-members. I am not sure if the difference of eleven percent is significant, but it seems that the attitude is more or less the same with members and non-members alike. Moreover, granted the assumptions made by the informants during the interviews, participation in the Sibanye Development Project was reduced by deferred fulfilment of expectations and as a result of unfavourable personal circumstances of those involved. If that is really the case, it is then true that selfish interests have primacy over public interests with the majority of members of the Sibanye Development Project and the community of Ikwezi Extension Township, and that membership in a community structure has done little to change this.

Public spiritedness of the respondents was also measured in terms of their commitment to regular payment of municipal service charges. Goodin (in Hamlin and Pettit, 1989: 125) distinguishes

between 'perfect' and 'imperfect' public obligations, examples of which would be contractual and charitable duties, respectively; and affirms that it is perfect duties that are mandatory and enforceable. The public duties that have been alluded to thus far could be regarded as charitable. Examples of contractual duties would be payment of taxes, payment for municipal and other related services, and payment of radio and television licences.

Fulfilment of these mandatory obligations is usually regarded as an indication of the legitimacy of the state; of acceptance of state authority. Hyden (in Hyden and Bratton, 1992), and Ekeh (1975: 108) conceive authority as legitimate power, that is voluntary acceptance of an asymmetrical relationship (between state and civil society). This is essentially a reciprocal relationship, where each contributes to the welfare of the other on the expectation that the other will do likewise. According to this formulation, which evinces Lockean strains, civil society has certain rights and privileges which it may claim from the public realm, while it has at the same time duties and obligations to perform and fulfil in the interest of the public realm (see Hyden in Hyden and Bratton, 1992).

According to Ekeh (1975: 107), there has been an over-emphasis of rights over concomitant duties in Africa, due to the distorted conception of citizenship as a result of colonialism; and to the lack of legitimacy of incumbent regimes, both in the colonial and the post-colonial state. The general view is that the latter lost its legitimacy because of its failure to service the needs of the populace (see Ake in Diamond and Plattner, 1996: 67).

South Africa has had a similar experience of an illegitimate apartheid regime and distorted citizenship. During the apartheid era black people living in urban townships, that is outside the designated homelands, were regarded as temporary sojourners whose place was in the homelands or

bantustans. They were not regarded as citizens of the country and had therefore no reason to wish to commit themselves to the sustenance of the public realm – except perhaps to the sustenance of the primordial public realm assumed by Ekeh's (1975) classical theory of two publics in Africa. The so-called black local authorities established by the then Pretoria regime to appease blacks were such an anathema to the black population that they only served to escalate political instability and various acts of incivility in the country (see Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987).

What is significant about the question of rights over obligations in the case of South Africa is the persistence of what has become known as the 'culture of non-payment' even after coming to power of a legitimate ANC-led government, prompting the government to launch the Masakhane Campaign. According to official and media reports (*Munitata News*, October/November, 2000 and *City Press* editorial opinion, 10.12.2000), a number of municipalities all over South Africa are owed millions of rands in arrear service payments, and very little progress has been made to recover same, despite the national Masakhane Campaign preaching the philosophy of citizenship, and other measures. Mayekiso (1996: 10) attributes the continued boycott of rent and bond payments to stagnation of household incomes against a backdrop of economic growth since 1994, and to dissatisfaction with the quality of houses and services in the case of Alexander Township in Gauteng.

In the case of the members of the Sibanye Development Project and the residents of Ikwezi Extension Township in general, the investigation revealed a situation no different from the one just described – lack of commitment to regular payment of municipal service charges. Although all the informants in the interviews conducted as part of this study, and the majority of respondents in the survey conducted (ninety-six percent members and ninety-two percent non-members) recognised

and affirmed the importance of payment of service charges, the percentage of those who actually pay on a regular basis was less, and even smaller in the case of members (seventy-one percent) *vis-à-vis* non-members (eighty-three percent) – even these percentage figures seem to be incredibly high considering the reports of high rates of non-payment. For instance, the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality was recently in the news headlines for its failure to pay its employees' and councillors' salaries due to a cash flow crisis, and the situation was attributed to non-payment for municipal services by both private households and enterprises and by public institutions (see "Daily Dispatch" dated 26.06.2001). Another important finding was that a quarter of members of voluntary associations in the survey sample would not unconditionally condemn tampering with electricity and water meters (as against eighteen percent of non-members), a further indication of lack of commitment to the sustenance of the public realm, even for those who would be expected to have acquired a democratic political culture in terms of the civil society and participation theories. It is noteworthy that the councillor failed to come out clearly on the question of writing-off of municipal debts raised by one resident at a meeting, by either explaining the improbability of such an arrangement, or rejecting the suggestion, and her response could be seen to suggest that the matter could be negotiated. She failed to state the mandate from the central government to local councils to take necessary credit control measures against defaulters in municipal service charges. This failure seems to validate Mosca's and Michels' (see Parry, 1969: 41 & 43) thesis that the elite have sometimes to tone down or abandon (even if temporarily) certain principles in order to appease the led who have an indirect influence on them.

While it could be gratifying that no evidence of illegitimacy of the state in the eyes of the respondents could be discerned, that may be only short term. Failure of citizens to fulfil their

mandatory obligations to the public realm is indicative of ineffectual citizenship, casts a shadow on the country's rule of law and may have negative implications for the legitimacy of state and for the democratisation process in the long run. The fact that most defaulters on municipal services charges pleaded economic hardships suggests some relevance of social and economic conditions for the exercise of citizenship and sustainability of democracy. Przeworski (1995: 35) compellingly argues that the exercise of citizenship depends on the material security of those concerned, among other conditions. Yet, in the case of South Africa (and some other new democracies in the South) economic growth has not been accompanied by economic development, leading to a deterioration of the economic circumstances of the majority. Accompanying this scenario has been a decline in the capacity of most municipalities in the country to render even basic services satisfactorily. The former Umtata municipality has been no exception, although few of the respondents cite unsatisfactory services as a reason for not paying. Future developments from a combination of these conditions seem portentous for democratic consolidation. We could end up with a vicious cycle of non-payment for services and a non-performing state due to the failure of the other to fulfil its obligations; hence the need to balance the associational school with the governance school of civil society.

4.3.2 Self-Worth and Public Awareness

In addition to their high levels of public spiritedness, the interviewees displayed a high sense of self-worth and dignity, and professed political awareness they had not had before their involvement in the Sibanye Development Project. The informants' sense of contentment and pride lay in their success at providing some useful services to the community. The informants were proud that their

endeavours were being recognised by the community as well as by some public figures. However, they were not so confident about their readiness for public office.

4.3.3 Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is another yardstick that was used to assess the political culture of the members of the Sibanye Development Project and other voluntary associations in general, and the results showed a community with a very high sense of political efficacy, when measured in terms of voting. Except for one interviewee, the other two and almost all respondents in the survey did vote in the recent local government elections, and the few of them who did not were mostly prevented by absence from home on the polling day. But then the rate was similarly high for non-members as well, and this makes it difficult to attribute political efficacy conclusively to the influence of associational life.

Political efficacy in terms of the confidence of individuals in their capacity to influence public policy through other public activities was also high in the case of the interviewees, but the same could not be definitely said about other members of the Sibanye Development Project and members of other voluntary associations in general. For instance, half of those who said they have never contacted the ward councillor (amongst members of other voluntary associations) viewed the exercise as waste of time, whereas none of the non-members thought so. The high level of political efficacy demonstrated by the interviewees could have been expected because of their high level of educational qualifications. But then there were still some individuals who participate in associational activities, and who also possess similarly high levels of education, who yet displayed some sense of lack of political efficacy. While one would have expected greater variations in the political efficacy of members and non-members in terms of the civil and participation theories, the

findings were nonetheless not very surprising, considering the relatively high level of homogeneity of the community in question. Secondly, it could be that the positive spirit deriving from the new political experience is at play. The 1994 elections ushered a democratic order for the first time in the country, and everyone has had a reason to rejoice and wish to participate in it. Public participation through voting may have had an enduring psychological impact on the formerly marginalised population groups.

4.4 Conclusion

An analysis of the findings of the research was carried out in this chapter. Public participation through the Sibanye Development Project seems to have had an impressive educative impact on the interviewees; it seems to have laid a relatively solid foundation for wider public participation, and that gradual and ultimate dissemination of a civic culture is possible, though there appears to be formidable structural and financial bottlenecks. These factors serve to cast doubt on the nature of the political culture that will take root, and it is on this factor that democratic consolidation will depend. Some of these unfavourable conditions are manifest in the organisational aspects of the project and are can thus be regarded as internal, while others are external, obtaining from the political milieu within which the project operates. Internal problems include existence of possibilities for emergence of oligarchic tendencies and class divisions, which can have a negative impact on the socialising function of public participation through civil society structures. These could also lead to emergence or strengthening of skewed power relations within the project and the community at large, and such power relations may not be favourable for the democratisation process. Secondly, the financial predicament of the project seems to create a fertile ground for its co-option and loss of autonomy, which may in turn undermine its capacity to perform its

instrumentalist functions. The apparent external constraints seem to have a potential to compound the internal weaknesses of the association. In addition, the combination of external and internal constraints may distort the political culture of those involved, so that public participation does not always result in a desirable political culture.

CHAPTER 5

5 Striking a Balance

This was a case study of the Sibanye Development Project, which operates from the Ikwezi Extension Township, an area under the jurisdiction of the newly established King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality comprising the erstwhile municipalities of Umtata and Mqanduli. The study aimed to find out if the project validates the assumptions of civil society and participation theories that voluntary associations are schools for democracy and agents of democratic consolidation. The study sought to interrogate both the instrumentalist and intrinsic functions of public participation through civil society structures. The assumption was that the organisational structure of the association and the political culture of its members would be indicative of the association's potential to perform the role expected of it as a civil society organisation. The case study was supplemented with a social survey that was carried out in Ikwezi Extension Township, which constituted the research setting. The social survey was used to carry out a quasi-experiment to compare and contrast the political culture of the members of the project to the political culture of those who are not members of any voluntary association. In addition to the quasi-experiment, the survey was used to reinforce what was essentially a qualitative study, by giving it a quantitative dimension as well, thus making it possible to make some generalisations regarding the findings of the study. The data concerning those who are engaged in one or another form of associational activity was used to identify common aspects between their political culture and orientation and the political culture and orientation of the members of the Sibanye Development Project.

The findings from this study are inconclusive such that a bold statement regarding the potential of the Sibanye Development Project for democratic consolidation cannot be made, on the bases of both

the supposed intrinsic benefits and instrumentalist functions of participation in civil society structures. Although the project seemed to satisfy criteria for being a school for democracy on the whole, it cannot be said to have instilled a democratic political culture durable and widespread enough (within its membership) to withstand negative influences that could impede the promotion of democratic consolidation, now and in the future; and this situation was found to be the same with the respondents who are members of other voluntary associations. In the case of the Sibanye Development Project, this is due to a combination of internal organisational problems, on the one hand, and external structural constraints that then hinder maximum participation of its members in its activities, on the other hand. The internal problems serve to make the position of the association tenuous to the extent that the very survival of the project seems to be at stake. The precarious position of the association in turn makes it susceptible to latent external influences, which could reduce its capacity to perform the instrumentalist functions expected of it as a civil society element. However, the probability that the interviewees may not be passive victims in this situation is there. The corollary is the corruption of the political culture of those concerned, and the erosion of the content of democracy, even if the form remains intact.

As an organisation, the Sibanye Development Project has problems of order in terms of the fulfilment of obligations concomitant with membership by a majority of its members. The problem is that participation in civil society structures cannot be enforced given the emphasis on the norm of voluntariness. The problem highlights the tension between how we understand civil society and how we understand organisation.

In the circumstances, the running of the project is left to a few individuals who do not seem to be free from the structural constraints usually cited by realist theorists as one basis on which the basic

assumptions of participation theory are rejected. It is quite obvious that structural problems, especially temporary constraints facing the respondents due to occupational commitments, play a significant part in hindering progress of the project. It could also be inferred that similar structural constraints are partly responsible for the apathy generally characterising most of the members of the voluntary association in question. With this kind of situation the idea of participation in the conventional public sphere being nurtured by participation in voluntary associations becomes debatable. As has already been stated, participation in a voluntary association cannot be really expected to lead to participation in a wider public sphere if it is so unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the oligarchic situation signifies a hiatus between democratic theory and its practice as democracy and oligarchy are theoretically mutually exclusive concepts, according to participation theories of democracy. Yet, paradoxically, the oligarchy has been efficacious not only for the sustenance of the project itself, but for some democratic development as well. The dominant elites within this project have played a very crucial role of engaging the state at a local level, thus ensuring some semblance of accountability at this sphere of government. In addition, these elites have done a lot to promote the common good, though this does not necessarily preclude pursuance of self-interests concurrently with or to the exclusion of the common good in future, especially considering that members of the association have invested financially in the project, meaning that the project is essentially a profit-driven venture – Bratton (1994: 23) alludes to ‘intermediate leaders’ seeking personal gains through associational activities. Democratic consolidation therefore becomes contingent on the balance of these ambiguities and contradictions.

One other significant problem confronting the project is in regard to finances. The project is financially constrained, and could consequently be susceptible to subtle overtures of colonisation by

stronger forces as its members go about seeking financial assistance. It is in this context that the growing relationship between some of its elites and the new ward councillor should be regarded with some caution. While the councillor could exploit the plight of the association to extend influence of her political party, its elites could in turn exploit the relationship for immediate practical ends, in order to extract material benefits for the project, and/or for the community and themselves. The end result would be corruption of the political culture of everyone concerned, and reduction of this voluntary association's capacity to ensure accountability of the state as its autonomy becomes compromised. The capacity of the Sibanye Development Project to perform its watchdog duties on the state also faces the danger of being eroded by its incorporation into the state through participation in development forums endorsed by the state. The situation would be aggravated by the professed apolitical nature of the association, as an apolitical association cannot be expected to challenge government on issues that are overtly political.

A further aim of the study was to interrogate the political culture of the members of the Sibanye Development Project, which would in turn give some indications as to the prospects for the project to contribute towards democratic consolidation. Two variables were used to measure the political culture of the members of the Sibanye Development Project: the level of the members' public spiritedness, and their political efficacy. The political culture of the subjects of this study seemed to be ambivalent, to be fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. While a strong argument can be made about the correlation between participation in voluntary associations and in the conventional public sphere on the basis of the leadership's political culture as assumed by civil society and participation theories, such an argument would not be convincing in respect of the majority of the members of the association. Meaningful participation in the project was lacking on the part of the

majority. While the leadership showed a highly developed civic culture marked by equally high levels of aspiration, the ordinary members of the project and members of other voluntary associations can be regarded to have a detached political culture that borders on apathy.

The study further revealed no substantial variations in the political orientation of those who participate in associational activities and of those who do not. For example, poor attendance of community meetings proved to be prevalent amongst members and non-members of voluntary associations alike. Likewise, the attitude of members of voluntary associations did not differ from the attitude of non-members in respect to fulfilment of mandatory obligations to the public realm, which is indicative of the level of legitimacy of any state. Such attitudes do not augur well for exercise of citizenship, and may have negative implications for the democratisation project, though at the moment the legitimacy of state does not seem to be questionable. The conclusion could be that participation in civil society structures can have a definitely positive impact on the civic culture of those who occupy leadership positions in those structures. Nonetheless, structural constraints to meaningful participation of the leaders themselves cannot be ruled out. At the same time, it seems that the dynamics on the conventional political arena can serve to distort the political culture of those concerned as they learn the 'rules of the game' in order to survive, meaning that public participation may not yield the expected positive education sometimes, resulting in distortion and erosion of democracy rather than in its consolidation.

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