

**INTEGRAL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: 'ACCOMMODATING MULTIPLE INTERESTS'
THROUGH ENTRUSTMENT AND ACCOUNTABLE REPRESENTATION**

Forthcoming in:

International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology

Vol. 1, No. 34

2001

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INTEGRAL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: 'ACCOMMODATING MULTIPLE INTERESTS' THROUGH ENTRUSTMENT AND ACCOUNTABLE REPRESENTATION

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15 January 2001

Many participatory natural resource management and development approaches accommodate multiple interests. But do they do so in a democratic and institutionally sustainable manner? There are numerous local actors who claim to represent or speak for local people: chiefs, headmen, notables, religious leaders, local administrators, forestry extension workers, 'stakeholders', NGOs, and interest groups. Natural resource management policies and programs often empower and rely on these actors as community spokespersons or they create committees that ostensibly represent local stakeholders. In rare instances, they work through a sustainable form of local democracy: elected local government. In lieu of supporting more democratic government, in the current anti-government international climate, participatory projects and policies often empower alternative institutions. The current anti-government choices of local institutions can undermine the emergence of good and representative government and may not be sustainable in the long run.

Many of the actors being empowered in natural resource management are non-representative: few are systematically downwardly accountable to the population as a whole. Non-representative participatory processes, including many stakeholder and joint management approaches, may supplement or complement a democratic system of local governance, but they are not democratic in themselves and they are not substitutes for democratic institutions. In the absence of democratic structures ad hoc 'stakeholder' committees, representation by so-called 'customary' authorities, NGOs or administrators may undermine development of local democracy by obfuscating the need for local democratic reforms.¹ In the presence of democratic local government, empowering alternative authorities may undermine the authority of representative bodies by taking away powers that could help legitimate them. A system is democratic in so far as the actors who have powers over the resources of the community in question are accountable to that community.² In this article, I argue that local representative governments can be a positive and sustainable (i.e. institutionalized) means for integrating across multiple local interests: they can be downwardly accountable and are appropriate repositories of public powers.

States around the world talk of devolving powers over nature to local actors. *Decentralization* is any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Mawhood 1983; Smith 1985).³ Devolving powers to lower levels involves the creation of a realm of decision making in which a variety of lower-level actors can exercise some autonomy.⁴ *Deconcentration* (or administrative decentralization)⁵ happens

¹Although the World Bank (1996) calls inclusion of private citizens, NGOs and corporations 'stakeholder participation', this is simply a way of including privatization (of assets and decision making powers of the state) under the banner of participation. It is also a way of sustaining the status quo. When I use the term participation, I am referring to 'community participation' unless otherwise indicated.

² Following Moore (1997), I prefer to define democracy substantively, rather than using a procedural definition. This highlights the importance of the aspect of accountability. Democratic procedures, such as elections are central to democracy, but they are only part of what makes leaders accountable to their people.

³The formal transfer of power to lower levels of government may sometimes be a centralizing act if the powers being devolved were earlier exercised informally by non-state actors.

⁴Booth's discussion of decentralization in France discusses how it led to greater autonomy for local governments, but at the same time also prompted a struggle for the redefinition of the roles of different levels of government (Booth, 1995:89-105). For a short statement on the degree of local autonomy in several developing countries, and the relationship of such autonomy to the colonial experience, see Smoke, 1993: 901-2.

⁵'Bureaucratic decentralization' is another name given to deconcentration (see Rolla, 1998).

when powers are devolved to appointees of the central government.⁶ ‘Political’ or ‘democratic’ *decentralization*⁷ is different from deconcentration since powers in this case are devolved to actors or institutions that are accountable to the population in their jurisdiction. When powers are ceded from the state to non-state bodies such as private individuals, corporations, or civil society organizations, the process can be termed *privatization*, is not considered decentralization.⁸ Democratic decentralization, deconcentration and privatization follow different logic and are expected to have different kinds of outcomes. As discussed below, there are equity and efficiency and environmental outcomes that theory tells us should make democratic decentralization an attractive option.

In the name of decentralization, there are many powers and resources that are transferred to many different entities. Service provision responsibilities, assets of the state, regulatory powers and decision making powers, can be transferred to local branches of the central state, autonomous local state governance bodies, non-governmental organizations, individuals, etc. The political and economic meanings of a given act of ‘decentralization’ depends on *what* is devolved to *whom*. The political valance of these reforms cannot be assumed. Each act of decentralization must be scrutinized to understand its implications. In some instances it can be the extension of the central state, the shedding of what should be central state responsibilities, privatization or enclosure, participatory corvée, etc. Decentralization can also be the creation of local autonomy under locally accountable representation when the right powers are devolved to representative groups. In that case it can be a powerful form of community participation. Decentralization of different powers and things to different bodies serve very different agendas. We need to examine what they are and how they function *case by case*.

In the current era of participatory development, many new NRM policies and projects rely on local institutions and authorities as vehicles for local participation. The meaning of these policies and projects will depend on what powers are transferred to whom. This article explores a basis for creating sustainable, locally accountable and inclusive rural institutions for NRM and rural development. In particular, it examines how participation could become an integral part of accountable local government. The article encourages a move away from participation as simply an externally orchestrated project *component* and toward the creation of downwardly accountable local government representatives as a means of assuring that government serves the needs of its constituents--a much stronger and more durable form of participation. There is no reason that downwardly accountable elected local government cannot be one of the core ‘operational tools’ for accommodating multiple interests (Anderson, Clément and Van Crowder 1999:23).

Rather than delving into case material in this article, I present an argument in the next sections for why local government can be a positive institutional home for sustainable participation. In the following section, I examine why local government has been avoided in recent years and develop the idea of Integral Local Development as a way of thinking about local-government-based rural development. This is followed by a brief section on accountability measures and a conclusion.

From Participation to Rural Democracy

‘But since all cannot, in a community exceeding a small town, participate personally in any but some very minor portions of the public business, it follows that the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative.’

⁶ Adamolekun (1991) points out that deconcentration often takes place in the name of decentralization and that the two are confused.

⁷Political decentralization is also called *democratic decentralization* by some authors (see Manor, 1999). Blair (1998:1) talks of democratic decentralization as ‘democratic local governance.’

⁸When, under governmental supervision, powers and specific responsibilities are allocated to public corporations or any other special authorities outside of the regular political-administrative structure, it is called *delegation* (see Ostrom, Schroeder, and Wynne, 1990). *Devolution* describes ‘the increased empowerment of local organizations with no direct government affiliation’ such as NGOs, private bodies, corporations, community groups, etc. (see Michael Maniates, 1990:1).

John Stuart Mill⁹

If participation is to be more than a temporary component of interventions or projects, if it is to be generalized across space and time, then it must merge with the institutional form known as representative rural democracy.¹⁰

Participatory approaches to natural resource management have popped up around the world over the past decade. Joint Forest Management¹¹ in India and Community Forest Management in Nepal, the CAMPFIRE projects in Zimbabwe, Rural Markets in Niger, and the *Gestion de Terroirs* approach so popular in the West African Sahel, are now familiar examples. 'Participation' of rural populations has become a core principle in natural resource management.¹²

Such participatory approaches to natural resource management are lauded for their potential contribution to economic efficiency, equity and development. In theory, participation can increase economic and managerial efficiency by: 1) allowing the local populations who bear the costs of forest use decisions to make those decisions, rather than leaving them in the hands of outsiders or unaccountable locals (i.e. by internalizing economic, social and ecological costs); 2) reducing administrative and management transaction costs via the proximity of local participants; and 3) using local knowledge and aspirations in project design, implementation, management and evaluation. Participation can redress inequities by helping to retain and distribute benefits of local activities within the community. In this manner it could be a tool of social justice. Participation in the benefits from local resources can also contribute to development by providing local communities with revenues. (See Cohen and Uphoff 1977; Cernea 1985; Baland and Platteau 1996; Peluso 1992; World Bank 1996; National Research Council 1992:35.)

Aid organizations and national agencies charged with managing public resources also often assume that community participation in resource management results in better environmental practices (Poffenberger 1994; Shiva 1989). While such a claim has some logical underpinnings, it is not a demonstrated fact (see Little 1994). More research is needed on this participation-environment link (see Western and Wright 1994). Uphoff and Esman (1974:xvii) point out that participation did not have a strong association with agricultural productivity. Therefore, '...participation may make a positive contribution to raising productivity, and we found no evidence of its impact being negative, but as analyzed in this study it does not appear to be a necessary or sufficient condition for agricultural improvement. The relationship between participation and welfare performance on the other hand was, not surprisingly, greater, with a correlation of .6.' Their indicators of participation included: '...voting, control over bureaucratic performance, influence on rural development policy, and involvement in resource allocations in rural areas.' As Utting (1998:125) shows, '...the effectiveness of policies, programmes and projects that carry the participatory label and promote decentralization depends on numerous variables and is highly context specific.'

Achieving many of the theoretical equity, efficiency, environment and development benefits of participation is predicated on transferring decision-making powers and responsibilities to some

⁹Quoted in Green, 1993:3.

¹⁰ In 1811 De Tracy pointed out that 'Representative democracy...is democracy rendered practicable for a long time and over a great extent of territory' (Dahl 1989:29). Jeremy Bentham gave us the distinction between direct and representative democracy, arguing for the latter since, in Raymond Williams' (1993[1976]:20) summary, representative democracy '...provided continuity and could be extended to large societies.'

¹¹ Joint management is now being promoted across Africa in Guinea, Cameroon and Zimbabwe.

¹² Participation in development has been expressed as a principle for a long time. U.S. Public Law 95-424 of 6 October 1977 required of United States bilateral development assistance that: 'Activities shall be emphasized that effectively involve the poor in development by expanding their access to the economy through services and institutions at the local level, increasing their participation in the making of decisions that affect their lives....'

individual or body representing or within the local population. This assumes there are existing authorities or groups to whom powers can be devolved or the need to create such authorities. Some of these may presume to represent the population as a whole, such as a village chief or an elected rural council. Others, such as a forestry cooperative or a woman's association, NGOs, represent only a sub-set of the community—their members.¹³ Decisions over resources like forest and grazing commons or development affect the population as a whole. For these decisions to internalize costs they *must* be devolved to a body representing and accountable to the population as a whole.¹⁴

Different jurisdictions regroup diverse people, identity groups even when they include only a single village. Rural populations and villages are usually highly differentiated. Representation, then, is even necessary in 'a small town,' or a village 'community'. While planners have treated them as uniform in the past, this is rarely the case (Painter et al. 1994; Agrawal 1997; Berry 1989;1993; Sharpe 1998; Ribot 1995,1998).¹⁵ Painter et al., (1994:455) describe the interacting factors in Sahelian communities as including: terms of access to land; the size and quality of land holdings; gender; seniority; the ownership of livestock; participation in off-farm income-generating activities; status as founding member of the community or as an outsider; the size and maturity of households; access to domestic and extra-domestic labor inputs; wealth; political power; links with the state; access to credit and materials; types of production systems; membership of chiefly or noble lineages or of caste-like categories (such as ex-captives); and the nature and effectiveness of diversification strategies.' Sahelian communities are highly stratified. Indeed, it is due to this diversity—these 'multiple interests'—that questions of community representation arise.

Accountable representation could be a means for integrating across and mediating among these differences. In many of the countries in which participatory projects are being established, however, there is no form of accountable local representation. Without well established locally accountable representation many objectives of participatory approaches are unlikely to be met. There are no guarantees that the economic, social or ecological externalities of commercial forestry will be internalized, and there is a great risk that the benefits will not return to the community as a whole. Much of the efficiency-increasing and equity-generating potential of community participation may be lost.

In some countries, such as India, Mali, and Uganda, local government is representative in form. Whether it is accountable in practice is yet another question—even when stating otherwise (Ribot 1995a,1999; Crook and Manor—in Parker 1995; Mehta 1996). Governments generally create institutions that are upwardly accountable to the central state. For reaping the theoretical benefits of community participation, however, accountability needs also to be downward toward the local

¹³I generally prefer to use the term 'population' rather than 'community', which is too problematic a term. Further, I believe residence-based citizenship to be a form of identity with territorial districts that is most conducive to inclusive and broad-based democratic process (cf. Mamdani 2000). For an excellent discussion of the idea of 'community' see Agrawal, 1997.

¹⁴In this discussion I am referring to the population of a given territorial jurisdiction. When that is a political jurisdiction, it may not always match the scale of the resource—bring larger or smaller or simply containing a portion of the resource in question. Further, it may regroup multiple peoples living in different villages who do not consider themselves part of the same community. While boundaries are often problematic, jurisdictions can be joined together when larger scales are most appropriate (see Ostrom, Schroeder and Wynne 1993 on special districts). When the population is diverse within a given jurisdiction, that is exactly the reason that some form of broad representation is important. The purpose of this article is not to problematize the boundaries and scale of districts—which may not always be appropriate—rather, it is to explore the problem of representation within the boundaries that exist.

¹⁵The *gestion des terroirs* approach—one of the cutting edge donor-sponsored natural resource management schemes in Francophone West Africa—implicitly acknowledges the population of a *terroir* to be a community. '*Gestion des Terroirs* refers to the activities of community members as they go about using natural resources within the *terroir* for their livelihoods. By definition, they have a sense of collective claim on the *terroir*, and exercise some degree of social and politically sanctioned control over the terms of access to the resources by community members and outsiders.' (Painter et al., 1994:450). Painter et al. (1994) also provide a well developed analysis of the limits of the *terroir villageois* concept, pointing out how *terroirs* are embedded in multiple relations that exceed their boundaries.

population. Elected local representatives are not always downwardly accountable. In countries where candidates can only be chosen by political parties, they may be more accountable to the parties than to the local populations that elect them (Hesseling, n.d.: 17; Ribot 1999).¹⁶ Further, even when independent candidates are admitted to local elections, there are many ways that local elite or political parties are able to capture the electoral process, bringing the local accountability of leaders into question. Nonetheless, elected representatives are one important building block in the construction of accountable local government. Crook and Manor (Parker 1995:27) indicate that locally elected representatives can make central government more responsive to local needs.

Participatory forestry projects and recent forestry laws in Senegal, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have established institutional structures for local participation in forest management. Some of these structures integrate 'interested' parties, others village chiefs or elected rural councils to represent rural communities. In other places, programs depend on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Participatory Mapping. The different ways these rural communities are represented in natural resource management has implications for the ways in which efficiency, equity and development concerns are addressed and internalized in practice. They also have consequences for participation's sustainability. These cases have been developed in detail elsewhere (Ribot 1999; 1999a; Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Suffice it to say, many so-called 'participatory' and 'decentralized' policies and programs structure situations which lack powers, downward accountability, or durable institutional forms.

From Integrated Rural Development to Integral Local Development (ILD): Representation, Entrustment and Accountability

By moving from forms of participation orchestrated from the outside or 'above' (joint management, stakeholder approaches, participatory rural appraisal, etc.--see World Bank 1996; Chambers 1983) to forms that are built into local government, participation can merge with decentralization and democratization to become one--participation through rural democracy.¹⁷ NRM has important roles to

¹⁶As Hesseling (n.d.:17) writes based on her research in Senegal in 1983, 'They are at times nothing more than sections of the Socialist Party....' Further, few parties have the resources to organize Local Government slates, so there is little competition in local elections.¹⁶ In 1977, when Senegal's Rural Council system was just being established, it was already evident to one researcher that party politics would undermine popular participation.

The Rural Community could be a body that would organize and steer desired auto-centric development. But for this, it must be removed from political controversies. Unfortunately, it is already becoming a stake for the political parties who are trying to control its executive institution. A politicized Rural Council is at risk of not serving the interests of the community, but those of the party(ies) from which its members are derived. In this manner popular expression is at risk of being strangled, one more time. (André Carvalho, 1977 cited by Hesseling, n.d.:43).

Indeed, in 1994 over 300 of Senegal's 317 rural councils were of the ruling Socialist Party.

¹⁷Meister (1977), for example, defined five types of participation: by fate, voluntary, spontaneous, provoked or imposed. Fate is participation by dint of membership in an inherited identity, such as age, gender, caste, etc. It is not voluntary per se, but rather a form of expected activities for the given group. Voluntary participation is by interest groups who come together to pursue a common interest, as in unions, cooperatives, NGOs, political parties, etc. Spontaneous participation occurs under circumstances where people come together due to locality or other affinities such as friendship. Provoked participation is when an agent encourages collective action around activities she or he deems important for the community. Imposed participation is when is when a group is impelled to act in a particular manner via the edicts of outside actors or by the imposition of regulations. All of these types of participation are ways in which different groups come to engage as groups in particular processes.

When groups are left out of the planning phase and impelled to participate in projects as laborers in the implementation phase, Assogba (1994:84) calls this form '*deterministic participation*.' Similar to what Ribot (1995) has called '*participatory corvée*.' When participation '...integrates the concerned populations in every phase of the project from the identification of needs, the definition of objectives to the follow up and evaluation, including the phases of design, implementation, management training and maintenance of the project' Assogba (1994:85) calls this '*interactionist participation*.'

Oakley and Marsden (1987:27) define participation, however, as 'achieving power...in terms of access to, and control of, the resources necessary to protect livelihood' (quoted in McIntosh, 1990:28). McIntosh (1990:28) points out that this is *not* about local populations having input into or collaborating with government development plans or establishment of organizations and structures that give local population voice in development programs (McIntosh, 1990:28). Rather, it is about local power or empowerment.

I distinguish beneficiary and stake holder participation from democratic participation. Beneficiary and stakeholder participation are about target groups selected by their relation to a given set of interventions. Democratic participation is about popular or community participation. I take democratic, community and popular participation to be synonymous. For an excellent critique of 'participation' see Hildyard et al., 1999.

play in this transition. It can empower and legitimate local government by serving as a source of revenues for local representative government and by entrusting local governments with powers of decision over resources that affect the everyday lives of their constituencies. The revenues from and powers over natural resources can combine with the other revenues (such as tax revenue and grant income) and powers (over development decisions in other arenas) of local government so that local authorities can integrate across and invest in environment and in development as their local communities require.

Where representative government is in place participatory methods can be a means to enhance inclusion. But, when they are absent, these methods lack the checks and balances that ensure that the needs of local populations will be honored by those who claim to speak and act on their behalf. Further, even where representative local government does exist, empowering project-created committees, stakeholder committees, or any other body to speak, negotiate or act on behalf of the local population on matters of public concern (i.e. public natural resources) takes away valuable assets that could serve to legitimate and build stronger representative local government. A plurality of governance mechanisms may undermine representative forms the non-representative means are in competition with representative authority for resources and legitimacy. Non-representative bodies should not have powers over public-resource decision making except when delegated such powers by a local representative authority. When under representative oversight, participatory methods can be a tool of representation rather than an alternative to it.

I call the local representative government approach *Integral* Local Development. It is useful to look at its predecessor, Integrated Rural Development, to better understand why Integral Local Development (ILD), rural or otherwise, is an appropriate and timely approach. ILD is based on allowing rural communities to integrate across community differences through decisions made by locally accountable local authorities—representative bodies who are downwardly accountable to the local population. It is *integral* rather than *integrated* since it depends on authority that is integral to the community, rather than being the product of outside agency, *integrated* before delivery. It is also *integral* because in this model of rural development, ecology and environment are not separate from other matters of local government, rather they are part of a more organic or integral whole. That whole is the realm of decision making under the jurisdiction of locally accountable authorities. It is integral since all sources of community revenues (taxes, stumpage fees, central government grants, loans, financial development assistance) are pooled and are allocated not according to their origins, but according to the needs and aspirations of the community as expressed through locally accountable representative government. ILD is the creation of a domain of local autonomy in which local representatives can act on the integrity of local resources and local needs and desires.

Integrated Rural Development was based on providing an array of interventions at multiple levels supporting the productivity of the farm household and the development of agrarian economies. The Integrated Rural Development approach became cumbersome quite quickly, leading to large, costly, top-down projects, given the name 'Christmas tree projects' since there were always more components that could be hung on the Integrated Rural Development frame to assure success. After much criticism Integrated Rural Development was, by-and-large, thrown out. The theory of Integrated Rural Development, however, was not wrong. It was the mechanism of integration that was wrong. Integrated Rural Development was based on a farm-systems model of local needs, usually designed in far away places to be flown in and set up around rural communities who had little influence on the process. Participatory approaches to rural development have improved the situation, mostly by soliciting local input into decision making processes. However, they have not systematically increased local control by representative local authorities. ILD, on the other hand integrates through local representative bodies. This is its principal difference from the Integrated Rural Development approach.

Participatory approaches promoted by the development community have generally avoided the state, attempting to go directly to 'the people'. In doing so, they have often circumvented representative

bodies or failed to work with the state to make its institutions serve the purposes of greater participation. Instead they have worked through NGOs, chiefs and other local organizations to create temporary decision making mechanisms that include various stake holders. While the ideal of many practitioners of these approaches has been greater inclusion and justice, the choice of this approach is part of a larger global narrative that pits people against government rather than seeing government as a legitimate body by and for people whose job it is to represent and serve—whose job it could be to facilitate greater participation of society in governance.

In the era of Integrated Rural Development, the 1970s through the 1980s, the state was viewed as a positive progressive force of development and change. Civil society was seen as a backward bastion of primordial loyalties, it was the primitive object of the developmental State's progressive transformation. There was then a funny little state-society flip (see Ferguson 1996) over the past two decades in which the state became (a la Kreuger 1974; Bhagwati 1982; Colander 1984; Buchanan and Tollison 1984; Bates 1981) an overbearing, rent-seeking, corrupt bastion of clientelism and primordial loyalties that was a fetter on development. Evans (1997:65) and Ranger and Vaughan (1993:259) remark that the State is often described with such adjectives as 'diminished,' 'defective,' 'hollow,' and 'vampire.' As Tendler (1997:1) so aptly, and somewhat sarcastically, put it 'In trying to explain this sad state of affairs, economists and political scientists have richly chronicled the bad behavior and used it to good advantage in the building of theory'; that is, rather than trying to explain success, regardless of how rare. These theories, Evans (1997) later argues, derive from and contribute to an ideology of globalization underpinning attacks against the state.

As part of the same ideological flip, civil society and the market became the creative progressive forces that would drive development--if only they could be liberated from the parasitic grips of the 'rent-seeking', 'kleptocratic' state (see Allen 1997:335). Together images of the 'bad' state and the 'good' society help drive today's move toward decentralization, privatization, participation, stakeholder inclusion, NGOism, etc. Unfortunately, this flip in attitudes, in what Tendler calls 'mainstream development thinking', has deeply influenced the ways development practitioners give advice, orienting them toward policies that limit public sector 'damages' by limiting government (Tendler 1997:1-2). In the last decade the left and the right's attacks on the state have converged with the growth of a populist movement that sees everything local and indigenous as good and everything of the state as bad (Western, Wright and Strum 1994; Shiva 1989; Singh and Titi 1995; Escobar 1995; Scott 1976). This ideological state-civil society flip tries to erase the state, as powers are believed to be devolving downward toward NGOs and 'the people' and upward toward the Global arena (Rosenau 1993). Further, channeling of international aid only through central governments or NGOs (as the alternative, anti-governmental route) has also conspired to blot out local government from the picture (Romeo 1996:4).

Evans (1997) has called this bifurcated view of global and local, with no state in between, the 'eclipse of the State.'

What the discourse of eclipse has done is to make responses to a genuine crisis of state capacity unrelentingly negative and defensive. The danger is not that states will end up as marginal institutions but that meaner, more repressive ways of organizing the state's role will be accepted as the only way of avoiding the collapse of public institutions. Preoccupation with eclipse cripples consideration of positive possibilities for working to increase states' capacity so that they can more effectively meet the new demands that confront them. (Evans 1997:64.)

Evans (1997:80) suggests that '...the relation between the state and civil society are more productively thought of in terms of mutual empowerment or synergy.' This is not far from Gramsci's (1971) argument that the State is necessary to protect the space in which civil society can thrive: a space that civil society itself must actively carve out of the State. While state and civil society have been portrayed in tension (e.g. Migdal's (1988) *Strong Societies, Weak States*), there is plenty of

evidence that strong state institutions can go hand in hand with strong associational life within civil society (cf. Putnam 1993; Evans 1997:81-2; Anu Joshi, personal communication, IDS Sussex 1999).

Dichotomous arguments about state and civil society have their place, but they can also obscure important points. Social movements, often depicted as anti-State, are almost always about *reforming* the state. As such they implicitly acknowledge the State and see it as a legitimate and potential purveyor of *good*, or at least better, policy. Civil servants often act on behalf of local populations rather than in self interest alone (Tendler 1997). Under certain circumstances representatives act on behalf of those who elect them (Mehta 1996). In recent years the notion of trust and social continuity have become popular in discourse on how and why markets and civil society work (Bordieu 1977; Granovetter 1985; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993; Tendler 1997). While there are good reasons not to trust politicians or civil servants, so well documented by Krueger (1974), Bhagwati (1982), Bates (1981), and others, there may also be reasons to trust them and ways to build in accountability so that such trust does not have to be blind or naïve. To empower local government and to build up its legitimacy, local governments must be entrusted with real resources and powers. This article proposes that *entrustment* with powers is a key element in creating productive local governance.¹⁸ The other key element, developed below, is local *accountability*.

The state is clearly not gone. There are strong African calls to reverse the anti-Statist trend by supporting the creation of 'democratic developmental states' (Mkandawire 1995; Mbassi 1995:24; Mutizwa-Mangiza 2000:23). The notion of ILD is to re-focus attention on the state in a positive way (cf. Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985; Evans 1997; Tendler 1997). This time it is the local state, as the integrating mechanism for rural development. That is, as a tool and enabler of civil life. Here the locally accountable, popularly elected leaders of local government play a key role in this integration. It is in the actions of local leaders, as they are embedded in and accountable to their local communities that rural development is integrated. It is in entrusting accountable local authorities with powers over critical local decisions and over valuable local resources that the needs and desires of local communities can be integrated, by a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people' (as Cleon is alleged to have written—quoted in Williams 1993[1976]:19).

The integration through ILD depends on 'participation' (in the sense of inclusion) through empowered locally accountable local government. ILD and 'democratic decentralization' (following Manor 1999) are effectively the same thing: Local actors with powers who are downwardly accountable to the local population (cf. Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Following a similar logic, Parker (1995:18-9) further suggests that decentralization is the solution to problems of complexity and coordination that undermined previous Integrated Rural Development projects. Devolving these functions to local governments simplifies matters by reducing the diversity with which central planning agencies had to contend while drawing in local expertise that can help match the projects to local needs. He argues that one important way in which the recent wave of decentralizations is distinguished from ones before is that democratic institutions are being created at both the central and local levels.

More attention needs to be brought to the role of representative local government in the integration of multiple interests in local decision making. While I believe local government is an appropriate locus for some environmental management and rural development initiatives, I am not as convinced as Parker (1995) that local-level institutions are, as of yet, democratic. Very few appear to be in Africa (Ribot 2001). This is the critical point. Participatory natural resource management or rural development makes demands on rural institutions, changing and strengthening them. The equity, efficiency and

¹⁸Entrustment and trust are important and complementary concepts. To *entrust* in this context means to 'transfer powers to'—as in the central government entrusting Local Government with real resources and real decision making powers. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines *entrust* as: 'to commit or place in one's hand or keeping.' Shipton (1995:172) uses the term 'entrustment' to explore relations of lending and borrowing in Kenya. I expand the term to describe the relation of local public authorities to both central government and the populations they serve. See discussion in section VII.

development implications of depending upon, building and strengthening local institutions depends on the nature of those local institutions. If they are democratic and locally accountable, then NRM interventions can strengthen these attributes. If they are undemocratic, administrative, upwardly accountable or unaccountable, NRM interventions can strengthen these negative attributes as well (see Ribot 1999). The new 'participatory' approaches to natural resource management or rural development cannot ignore the political-administrative context nor the broader goals of rural development in which they are located.

ILD presents opportunities for institutional sustainability and general replicability of community participation. If local governments are reformed to be democratic (i.e. made to be downwardly accountable), and are entrusted with their own budgets based on their own sources of revenue, their endeavors have a chance of enduring beyond the typical project timetable. Deriving initial and ongoing costs from the revenue generating capacities of local government can be critical to the sustainability of new local institutions. Sustainability here is predicated on strengthening ongoing institutions of the local arena, not only by funds or outside assistance, but by entrusting with permanent sources of income and permanent powers of decision. Further, since ILD is based primarily on legislation to enable and support new rural institutions, rather than on direct project intervention, it is replicable across territories (i.e. able to be 'scaled up') through a legislative process.

ILD is, of course, not a panacea. As one World Bank anonymous reviewer of a working paper from which parts of this article are drawn (Ribot 1999a) aptly stated, arriving at ILD is part of '...an ongoing process; quite literally one with no endpoint.' The reviewer continued: 'The real goal is undoubtedly promoting an institutional and policy context in which ILD is encouraged or even promoted by client governments.' In short, ILD is simply representative Local Government with local accountability and powers.

One of the anonymous reviewers of this current article also aptly pointed out, there is a great risk in depending on democratically elected local authorities who may when making decisions concerning particular resources '...fail to recognize the privileged relationship of some sub-groups (women, gatherers of forest material...) with such resources, especially if these groups are in a numerical minority, or politically weak.' This reviewer added that the minority issues is particularly important since in the idealized version of representative local government presented above, it seems to be assumed that all groups are represented, or that none are weak. Indeed, it does not assume this. But, it does assume that under most current, non-representative, often despotic, local arrangements, their chances of having a voice are even less. Some functions, such as assuring the inclusion of the most marginal populations, will always be matters requiring additional legislation and the intervention of other branches of government and of civil society (see accountability discussion, below). But, the point is well taken that these concerns are not adequately treated by electoral representation and they should never be lost from view.

In decentralizations, ILD can not prescribe which powers belong in the local arena. Not all powers should be devolved to local institutions. Subsidiarity principles would suggest local control over those powers that are of local concern and do not produce externalities for other groups or levels of social aggregation (cf. Babin et al. 1999: 287).¹⁹ Some decisions and resources are of national concern, such as the setting of minimum environmental standards or protecting the rights of minorities. Determining which powers are devolved is a complex political struggle. At present local powers in most places are extremely limited—more limited than ecological concerns necessitate (Ribot 1998). These powers would need to be expanded if ILD is to proceed. While various principles can be evoked in arguing for transfer of powers to local government, the decision of which powers will be at which of the multiple nested levels of authority is ultimately a decision to be fought out politically.

¹⁹For an excellent discussion of subsidiarity principals—principals by which the vertical distribution of power can be problematized—see Babin et al, 1999:287-8.

Accountability

Participation and the accommodation of multiple interests through a local-government-based system of representation would appear from the above discussion to rely entirely on elections for local accountability. But, there is much more to accountability than elections. Moore (1997:3) defines democracy ‘...as a sub-species of a broader concept: the accountability of state to society.’ By broadening his thinking beyond procedural definitions of democracy, Moore provides us with a good starting point for examining the multiple relations of accountability that hold public authorities downwardly accountable to their people. These mechanisms are critical to effective democratic decentralization and for accommodating multiple differentiated interests. Accountability is achieved through the exercise of counter power to balance arbitrary action. (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:478.)

The most commonly cited means of accountability for representative actors are electoral processes.²⁰ While elections may be important (where they exist), however, they are not sufficient to guarantee participation. Many elected officials are not accountable to their constituencies—even when the electoral system is well crafted. Elite capture and other problems constantly emerge (World Bank 2000:109,121; Smoke 2000:17-9; Ribot 2001). In some countries, such as India, Mali, and Uganda, local government is democratically representative in form. Whether it is accountable in practice is yet another question (Ribot 1996; 1999; Crook and Manor--in Parker 1995).²¹ Governments in Africa generally create local institutions that are upwardly accountable to the central state (Oyugi 2000; Ribot 1999; Wunsch and Oluwu 1995; Mawhood 1983). For example, many local governments are constituted only of actors appointed by central government. In countries such as Senegal, Niger, Cameroon and Zimbabwe, where candidates for local elections can only be chosen by political parties, they may be more accountable to the parties than to the local populations that ‘elect’ them (Ribot 2001). Further, even when independent candidates are admitted to local elections, there are many ways that local elite or political parties are able to capture the electoral process, bringing the local accountability of leaders into question. Nonetheless, elected representatives are one important building block in the construction of accountable local government so critical in decentralizations.

Local governments are usually constituted by some mix of local elected representatives and centrally appointed administrators. These public servants in elected or appointed positions may be held accountable via multiple mechanisms—in addition to elections. These include: legal recourse, separation of powers, polycentricity, balance of powers, third-party monitoring, lobbying, free media, transparency, information provision, public discussions, public reporting, participatory processes, social movements, civic education, discretionary powers for governments, proximity, embeddedness, ideologies, civic dedication, reputation, trust, administrative dependence on local government, taxation, central government oversight, etc. These are mechanisms that that could work to increase downward accountability. They are discussed below.

²⁰ See Echeverri-Gent (1992) for a study of competitive local elections in West Bengal, India that helped make policy more responsive to the poor. For a similar argument from Colombia about the importance of competitive elections at the local level, see Fiszbein (1997a). (cf. Hesseling 1996; Mehta 1996.)

An important aspect of electoral systems is the ability of the electorate to reject incumbents. In Bangladesh, local council leaders dominated local decision making and used to position for self-promotion, but in elections 90 percent of them were not re-elected (Parker 1995:26). The implication is that in open elections local politicians are more likely to try to meet felt local needs. On this count, Crook and Manor (1994--in Parker 1995:26) found that locally controlled resources were re-directed towards more micro-level public works. Citing Crook and Manor, Parker (1995:27) points out that locally elected representatives can also make central government more responsive to local needs:

In Karnataka, decentralization brought more elected representatives into the process of RD [Rural Development]. The quantity and quality of work undertaken by line agencies was closely monitored and problems reported early, and it became harder for bureaucrats to get away with corrupt acts. The result was enhanced institutional effectiveness and improved coordination among civil servants working for different line agencies.

²¹ In Uganda with the local council system ‘...universal adult suffrage has increased the people’s sense of involvement in policy-making process’ (Saito 2000:4).

Legal recourse through courts is an important means of accountability. Independent judiciaries are critical for holding public figures accountable. Often the judiciary is not independent for numerous structural reasons. Local authorities who may very appropriately have the power to adjudicate among local citizens, for example, should not adjudicate inter-jurisdictional cases or cases between themselves and others (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Mamdani 1996; Oloka-Onyango 1994:463). Courts are inaccessible to many citizens in Africa. Regardless of whether courts are well structured, they are often too far to travel or too expensive or complex for average citizens to access. Public interest law associations can help to assure that poor and marginal populations have greater access (Veit and Faraday forthcoming). French system of having a *tribunal administratif* has been cited as one useful accountability mechanism (Rothchild 1994:6). The ombudsman is another recourse structure that has been of use (Rothchild 1994:6).

There is often a failure to **separate powers** of the judiciary, legislative and executive, particularly at the local level. Without separation of powers there is no balance of powers within government and no alternative routes for people to challenge representatives and administrators or to change or even enforce the rules by which all branches of government operate. In the colonial period, the judiciary and executive were fused in the local arena both through the *indigenat* courts of the French and in the system of Indirect rule. This failure to separate powers denies recourse. This is still the case in many places, such as in Uganda's local governments and in most disputes with technical services. (Mamdani 1996; Oloka-Onyango 1994:463.)

Ostrom (1999) argues that **polycentricity** of government and the **balance of powers** are important structural aspects of accountability. A balance of powers in which there are counter powers to the central government can increase accountability by increasing the number of actors with a voice in politics and the ability of non-central actors to scrutinize central institutions. World Bank (2000:112) suggests that there is a need to institutionalize the balance of powers between national and local governments through rules that protect and limit the rights of sub-national governments. Ostrom (1999) supports the notion of 'polycentricity of government', suggesting it introduces such a balance. She argues that multiple loci of power combined with higher levels of government whose role it is to protect people from the excesses of power of elite actors in lower levels are necessary for balancing power.

Third-party monitoring by independently elected comptrollers, NGOs or the associative movements can help construct downward accountability. In some countries, such as the U.S. there are elected town comptrollers. These officials monitor the affairs of local government for the local community. NGOs and other associations can also play a monitoring role. While they should have no powers over community resources or decisions (since NGOs are private bodies and are not necessarily accountable or representative), they can monitor local and national government to assure they are meeting their legal obligations. They can also inform the local population and/or file suit if the government is not living up to its requirements. NGOs and associations can also, of course, lobby on behalf of the portion of civil society that they represent.

Blair (2000:24) describes Bolivia's vigilance committees to monitor elected bodies with members 'selected' from traditional local governance systems including peasant unions and neighborhood councils. Native American women in Canada recently blamed tribal chiefs of 'rigging elections, stealing government money, and going on fancy gambling vacations in the States, while their people live in third world poverty' (Brooke 2001:A3). These women have formed the First Nations Accountability Coalition. One member has used hunger strikes to demand accountability. The group has also put together a document recounting numerous instances of corruption and have held 'hearings' on the matter around the country. They also delivered their findings to Canada's Senate.

Confederations, federations and unions of associations and other groups within society can constitute an associative movement. One example is Senegal's FONG (the Federation of NGOs), which is a nationally constituted lobbying group representing a variety of rural associations around Senegal.

Such associative movements can be supported by enabling legislation permitting associations, federations and confederations to form, and through organizing assistance. They can foster accountability by monitoring, informing and lobbying. Political pressures and **lobbying** by associations and associative movements can monitor and apply counter pressure. Lobbying has been supported as an activity to hold governments to account, but this activity can be very difficult and risky in the absence of recourse and other enabling legislation that allows people to organize and pressure their governments. A **free media** can also play such a monitoring role. A free media can shape public action, as Sen (1981) showed its role in averting famines in India. The media can also serve to disseminate important information to local populations on what their rights are and what they can expect from their local government leaders (cf. Tendler 1997:15).

‘Transparency’ is an accountability mechanism frequently called for by international organizations. The members of working groups at the 1993 international conference on ‘Local Self-governance, People’s Participation and Development’ in Kampala ‘...stressed again and again the necessity for greater transparency and accountability at all levels of government to ensure efficiency and honesty. ... Democratic reforms and checks and balances at all levels of government are needed to ensure that good governance can be sustained over time’ (Rothchild 1994:6). **Providing of information** on roles and obligations of government by the media and NGOs, or by government through public reporting requirements is one means of increasing transparency.

Practices of **public discussion** can also increase transparency, as with the elders of many villages across Africa, or like the use of spirit mediums as practiced by the Mhondoro cults (Spierenburg 1995). Practices of required **public meetings** with representatives on all budget and policy decisions. In Uganda, many local people did not feel listened to by their representatives. Nonetheless, people felt it was very important to gather and to exchange views with each other at Local Council meetings. One survey reported that 63 percent of Ugandans claim to participate in the Local Council decision-making process (Saito 2000:8). Public fora have serious limits since marginalized groups, such as women, religious minorities, or immigrants, may not feel comfortable voicing their opinions, so they cannot be the only forum. But they can be positive. Requirement of **public reporting**, such as the weekly posting of budgets in local papers or just on the wall of the local government building, is another mechanism to render government accountable. If budgets, decisions and planned programs and spending are publicly posted, people will have an easier time discerning whether local government is serving their interest. This is a very easy mechanism to legislate.

Participatory processes can also be employed to improve dialogue between government and people. Through facilitated processes of participation in which information is exchanged, people can learn which services government can provide, and expectations can be built. In this manner people can learn to make more demands on their representatives. Orchestrated participation can also increase public participation in decision making in a way that complements or strengthens other representative organs and adds to the public’s ability to make demands on local authorities. The danger is when ‘participatory’ methods are used as an alternative to representative and accountable government—indeed, a way of avoiding government. This use of participation could undermine the legitimacy and accountability of local government.

Social movements are another effective tool for holding governments accountable to their people (Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995). Resistance and threats of resistance can motivate governments to act on behalf of concerned populations. Social movements, resistance, sabotage and other forms of rebellion can be effective ways for local populations to create a domain of local autonomy or to make government responsive (Ribot 2000; cf. Scott 1976). The participants in a 1994 conference on decentralization in Ouagadougou agreed, while representation is necessary, ‘...citizen participation in local affairs is necessarily limited when there are constraints on the freedom of association and the liberty of expression’ (Mbassi 1995:28). such freedoms are critical for enabling

organizing by groups from NGOs, peasant organizations, vigilance committees, to whole social movements.

Civic education is important for building accountability of government. It is about people *knowing their rights* and *knowing the powers and obligations of their representatives*. In Uganda, many local people do not know how the elected local councils work. Many are suspicious that ‘the local leaders are eating our money.’ Explaining democratic local government to people can engage them with governing processes. One Ugandan woman to whom decentralization was explained for the first time said ‘in the past I was unwilling to pay my tax, because I was not clear how the money was used. Now I am willing to pay it since I now know how it is used’ (Saito 2000:10). **Education** writ large is also important for forming a critical citizenry. General education, which includes literacy, numeracy, analytical skills, history and other information dissemination, is another way to empower people to make demands on their representatives.

Discretionary powers in the hands of local leaders can have positive effects on accountability and on the engagement of civic organizations. Co-financing in which communities are required to provide a portion of the funds for a given program has been proposed as a way to give communities ‘ownership’ in local programs. But, ‘experience so far is that this is both patronizing and empirically difficult to substantiate’ (Onyach-Olaa and Porter 2000:25). Onyach-Olaa and Porter (2000:25) observed that where the funds transferred were truly discretionary and seen as a supplement to local funds, however, that Local Councils ‘...have no difficulty in principle contributing a major share of their revenue...’ and where there is no required contribution Local Councils ‘...have begun to utilise the funds in very inventive ways’ with higher efficiency and ‘multiplier’ effects.²² ‘...If truly discretionary resources are made available, experience so far suggests that room begins to be created for better ‘downward accountability’, to local constituents who expect and demand that Councilors will stretch the resources as far as possible.’ Joshi’s (personal communication, IDS, Sussex 1999) observation that in India civil society organizations begin to form around and lobby strong local governments supports the argument that having discretionary powers within the local arena is one way to make local government accountable. Without powers, there is actually no reason for anyone to even try to hold local government to account.

Proximity of leaders to their community and their **embeddedness** in local social relations can also make some difference. Community Based Natural Resource Management is lauded for increasing accountability by dint of community being close and involved in formulation and implementation of natural resource management (Hue 2000:4). The way authorities are embedded in social relations within their communities may help to make them more accountable to the local population. Authorities within the communities they govern must live with the consequences of their decisions on people they know and who know them. This fact may influence their decision making. Clearly, different **ideologies** or belief systems of leaders and their communities can also have an influence on accountability relations, although these may be less amenable to policy intervention. For example, the Fon (Ghanaian Chief) feels that the community is in his hands and that this is a responsibility he has inherited. **Civic dedication** can play an important role too. Tandler (1997:15) shows that public sector workers can be highly dedicated to their jobs. This was in the context where civil servants were given greater autonomy than usual and performed quite well at their jobs. ‘On the one hand, workers wanted to perform better in order to live up to the new trust placed in them by their clients and citizens in general. The trust was a result of the more customized arrangements of their work and the public messages of respect from the state. On the other hand, the communities where these public servants worked watched over them more closely. The state’s publicity campaigns and similar messages had armed citizens with new information about their rights to better government and about how public services were supposed to work.’

²² This observation may challenge Moore’s (1997) claims, discussed below.

Reputations that societies hold people to and people want to maintain can also shape their public and private behavior (Bordieu 1977). **Trust** is another element that, if developed, is believed to improve the accountability of local governments. Putnam (1993) argued that environments with numerous civil society organizations, social networks that link people to government, society and business, and relations based on shared values and trust enjoy greater levels of mutual accountability among state, market and civil society. This in turn is argued to lead to more efficient government and a more synergetic relation between state and civil society. (Bebbington and Kopp 1998:13; Evans 1997.)

Administrative dependence on local elected authorities can increase administrative accountability to local populations. Blair (2000) points out that administrative bodies should be accountable to elected authorities and elected authorities should be accountable to the people. Entrusting local government to manage service and development activities within the public domain involves making public-resource users and public-service providers accountable to local government. This can be accomplished by enabling local government to contract out service provision, to provide it in-house when appropriate, and to have control over the advisors and experts they hire or who offer them services from NGOs or the central state. Creating mechanisms so that local government can contract with line ministries or private service providers and experts (that is pay them) may effect the accountability of these service providers.

This kind of arrangement may require central government to commit to providing local government with a budget for such purposes—a budget drawn from the resources central government would ordinarily have spent directly supporting line ministries. This strategy could create competition among service providers and incentives for providing better services. It also involves making private and other non-governmental organizations accountable to local government through local government approval for the use and management of commonly held public resources. For outside projects involving ad hoc or permanent planning and coordination committees, local government authorities would have the final decision making power over their activities to assure that these activities were under representative community control. The law can make local administration (even deconcentrated services) subordinate to elected local government. In this manner, local elected government can have decision-making powers, veto powers or other forms of control over the decisions of central government ministries in matters determined to be within local jurisdiction.

Taxation arrangements have been argued to seriously affect the relations of accountability between people and their governments. Moore (1997) has forcefully argued that governments that depend on taxes derived from the earned income of their populations are more likely to have populations that make demands on government and hold their governments accountable. He has also argued the converse, that governments dependent on outside assistance are not likely to be accountable to their populations. (Also see Yates 1996; Guyer 1992.) In much of Africa local governments have had difficult times collecting taxes. Local tax rates and collection have declined places such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Nigeria (Therkildsen 1993:84-5). In southern Nigeria where rates fell from eight percent of income in 1968 to under two percent for poorer farmers by 1988, Guyer explains that ‘With such low contributions..., financial management becomes a poor basis for people’s demands for accountability; with no graduation of taxation there is no official theory of inequality and no way for the poorer majority to demand higher contributions from their wealthy brethren; with no property tax there is no basis for ... growing outside business in the area to support its development... The material basis for a [Western style] form of democratic struggle for accountability and control is more or less defunct. (Guyer 1992:57)’ (cited in Therkildsen 1993:85).

Central government can play roles in assuring accountability of local government and must also be accountable for some services to local government. Central government **oversight** of local government can play a role in local government’s downward accountability. Oversight of the local state by central government, making sure they carry out their duties, is another means of assuring local government is accountable to local populations (cf. Tendler 1997:15). Uphoff and Esman (1974:xx) state ‘sanctions to

control the acts of leaders of local organizations should be balanced both from above and from below to get the best performance' (emphasis in original). Parker (1995:35) also argues for central monitoring and sanctions to '...penalize institutions that do not carry out their functions appropriately.' Tendler (1997), however, cautions against this sanction-based approach, pointing out that greater degrees of local autonomy can improve government performance of community services. (Cf. Evans 1997.) A system of internal performance audits can also assure accountability (Rothchild 1994:6).

Downward accountability is not the only accountability relation of concern. In addition to the above means of downward accountability, attention must also be paid to making other levels of government accountable to local government. Onyach-Olaa and Porter (2000:1,9) argue that local government accountability is also contingent on central government and donor agencies accountably playing their roles of delivering timely and accurate policy guidance, monitoring, mentoring, compliance verification and so forth. They make the same arguments for donors in their efforts to support local government. When local government needs the assistance of donors or of district, regional or central government, either for coordination of larger-scale actions or for expertise and equipment, mechanisms must be in place to help assure that these services will be adequately delivered in a timely manner. 'Local Government accountability, of much concern to the centre and donor agencies, is contingent on accountability of these agencies' (Onyach-Olaa and Porter 2000:3).

Conversely, the World Bank (2000:121) and Crook and Manor (in Parker 1995:27) argue that locally elected representatives—under electoral rules that encourage participation and representation—can make central government more responsive to local needs. Relations of accountability between administrative and representative branches of local government are also important in holding local authorities accountable to local populations (Personal Communication, Doug Porter 1999; cf. Porter and Onyach-Olaa 2000). These vertical and horizontal ties within government can shape the relation of accountability between local government actors and their constituencies (Blair 2000). Similarly, the relations between customary authorities and their administrative superiors in government can positively or negatively shape their relations of accountability (in many countries chiefs or headmen are assistants to the *sous-préfet* or district officer) (see Ribot 1999).

This discussion of accountability is in need of systematization and development. It should nevertheless be evident that there are many means by which accountability can be achieved. All of these means can help make elected or non-elected leaders more locally accountable. Some can be used as policy tools, others are less amenable to manipulation. But, many could be developed and applied.

Conclusion

This article outlines the arguments indicating that to achieve the social and ecological benefits of broad citizen participation requires: local authorities who are downwardly accountable to the local populations *and* who hold significant powers over nature. Further, it posits that local government could be an institutionally sustainable seat for such authorities and powers. Where powers are devolved, however, they are usually placed with upwardly accountable agents (in different forms of deconcentration) or with private groups who are not systematically accountable to local populations (in various forms of effective privatization). Where representatives do exist, they are rarely empowered with significant powers over nature. In short, I argue that the 'political' or 'democratic' decentralization experiment has not yet happened. On the same token, the 'participatory' natural resource management experiment has also not taken place—if it is popular participation that we are interested in. Therefore, we have yet to test the theories of participation that predict more equitable and efficient natural resource management and use. Discourses on decentralization and participation are common, but the institutional arrangements that constitute them are hard to find.

I suggest that local democracy through local government should be brought back into debates on local participation. With representatives and powers, local government could be an institutionally sustainable form of local participation that is generalizable across territories through legislation.

Indeed, it seems that representation to increase participation is an obvious role of government. It is a known mechanism for accommodating multiple interests—both in conflict and cooperation. To make it work local government must be downwardly accountable and entrusted with real public powers. ‘Stake-holder’ participation by committee or meeting is not the popular participation that integrates across all local interests. Not all interest groups are equally powerful or equally entitled to rights within a given local jurisdiction. The objective that most analysts agree upon is to accommodate multiple interests in a just and equitable manner. Representative forms of governance are designed to level the playing field so that the citizens of a given locality are the first actors with rights over local public resources—not just interest groups. The boundaries of the local, which resources are public and which are local, are political decisions. But when decisions are to be made over resources that are local and public within a given jurisdiction, the rights of local citizens are the most relevant consideration.

Local representative governments—when downwardly accountable—can represent the citizens of their jurisdiction. This raises questions concerning the match between the jurisdiction and ecological scales. It also introduces questions about the match between jurisdictions and the territorial concern of interest groups—user groups, conservationists, etc. Resources that cannot be managed at the most-local scale or overlap boundaries, might be modulated upward, following the principles of subsidiarity, to a larger scale of government or to a special district. Alternatively, multiple local jurisdictions can federate around a larger ecozone. In both cases, there is no reason that local governments could not retain certain rights of decision in these areas and continue to represent the interests of their citizens and local groups within larger-scale debates. When outside interests operating at larger scales make claims on local resources, representatives can mediate between these outside interests and those of local citizens. Such scale issues are nested, inter-linked and often complicated by the match or mismatch between ecological, social and political boundaries. They are not insurmountable.

The Institutions and Governance Program of the World Resources Institute is now conducting research to explore the relation between democratic decentralization and associated social and ecological outcomes in Africa, with cases in Mali, Cameroon, Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The program examines 1) whether in the name of decentralization (and in some cases in the name of community participation) local actors are actually receiving powers over nature and are downwardly accountable to the local population, and 2) whether downwardly accountable representative bodies with powers over nature can be shown to cause more sustainable environmental management and use and greater social justice.²³ In short, we are looking for cases where the experiment—with all the requisite institutional arrangements—is being done, and whether this experiment produces the outcomes that decentralized and participatory approaches promise.

Good governance involves good government. As Joshi (Anu Joshi, personal communication, IDS Sussex 1999) has brilliantly argued, even civil society depends on strong government (cf. Gramsci 1971). Interest groups—with their multiple interests—will crystallize around empowered and downwardly accountable local government. When they have a chance of being heard and making a difference, civil society institutions will emerge and voice their concerns. It is time to stop viewing government and society as polar opposites and to begin to bring government back in as a dynamic and necessary element for representing and galvanizing society.

²³WRI’s Institutions and Governance Program’s ‘Decentralization, Accountability and the Environment program.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their valuable constructive comments. I would also like to thank Boris Utria at the World Bank for his generous support of the initial research on which many of the arguments in this paper are based.