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Bringing government to the peopleTM: women, local governance and community participation in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper considers the ongoing political transformations in South Africa in the context of debates about good governance and participatory democracy. It first appraises the current transformations of local government in South Africa, focusing specifically on relationships between gender equality and citizenship on the one hand, and local government policy, legislation, and community participation on the other, and then explores meanings of participation and how they inform approaches towards local socio-economic development. The findings of primary research conducted with civil society organisations and black women in communities in the Cape Town metropolitan area are explored through three interrelated themes. First, the model of structured participation that is central to South AfricaTMs democratic transformation is assessed from the perspective of black women. Second, cultures of alienation, both within local governance

structures and amongst black women and the extent to which recent restructuring is combating or contributing to these are explored. Third, how participation policies are dealing with conflict within and between target groups are analysed, whether stakeholder group politics obliterate important differences in interests and whether alternative structures might be more effective in terms of women's participation and empowerment. Finally, the findings are interpreted in relation to theoretical concepts of good governance and participatory democracy, and the potential and problems of realising South Africa's transformation process toward developmental local government are assessed.



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Keywords

South Africa; Local government; Black women; Community participation; Development; Integrated planning; Cape Town

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