



International Association  
for Public Participation

# Painting the Landscape

## **A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Public-Government Decision-Making**

*Executive Summary of Preliminary Findings*

**August 2009**





The **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)** is a membership association founded in the USA in 1990 and now attracting membership and networks on all continents. A total of 27 countries have been represented in the membership which in total in this period has attracted around 10,000 individual, group and corporate members and allies. In 1999 it developed an international certificate in public participation that has had over 6000 participants in the public, private and community sectors.

This executive summary of preliminary findings results from a research collaboration with the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. The **Kettering Foundation** is an operating foundation rooted in the tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is “what does it take to make democracy work as it should?” Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others.

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## Executive Summary

This is a report of the findings laying the foundation to stimulate discussion and reflection amongst government officials, public participation (p2) practitioners, professional associations and civil society leaders. It draws upon some surprising and practically relevant preliminary findings an international survey of public-government decision-making. A number of bold statements are made throughout (highlighted like this), to provoke discussion about the future of the practice.

This report is not a comprehensive summary of the key findings from the international survey. The final report will provide further elaboration and confirmation of these preliminary findings based on the empirical data collected in the research. The report presents its analysis in the following sections:

<b>Public Participation (p2) Terminology</b>	Each country uses p2 terminology differently and a wide range of activities are included under the banner of p2.
<b>Improved Outcomes From p2</b>	There is evidence of improved outcomes as a result of p2, but better evaluation mechanisms are needed.
<b>Government and Civil Society Partnerships</b>	Partnerships between government and civil society are integral to p2. Each side has interests that need to be negotiated in the partnership. This may require courage, humility and a level of trust in the p2 process.
<b>Civil Society and p2</b>	Civil society contributes to p2, and p2 strengthens civil society. Organizing and training people enables better p2, and meaningful p2 processes in turn revitalize civil society and create new connections between previously isolated individuals.
<b>Perceptions of p2</b>	Views about the relationship between the government and the people shape perceptions of p2. A government that believes it manifests the will of the people may see no need for additional p2 processes.
<b>Government Support for p2</b>	Governments have many important roles to play in supporting p2. They can fund p2 processes; introduce p2 legislation; help to build civil society capacity; reform government organizational culture; be willing to consider public input in decision-making processes and provide feedback; and maintain transparency.
<b>Traditional Practices</b>	Recognizing traditional p2 practices can improve engagement with different cultures. The principles of p2 are echoed in many cultures, and a p2 process that emulates traditional practices is more likely to be accessible.
<b>Sharing p2 Practices</b>	Sharing effective practices provides opportunities for cross-fertilization to enhance outcomes.
<b>Conclusion</b>	The conclusion highlights which points are most relevant for different audiences, and points towards future research.

## Background

In 2005 the **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)** and **The Charles F. Kettering Foundation** began work on a joint research project exploring public-government decision-making in seven country/regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Australasia, Canada, Latin America, UK/Western Europe and the United States (see Figure 1 below).<sup>1</sup> Details of the research methodology are provided in the Appendix.

This project presented an opportunity for both organizations to gain a broader understanding of how the public is engaged in decision-making and deliberative practices through processes led by government in countries around the world. Moreover, IAP2 and the Foundation sought through this study to provide a baseline for mapping how cultural context potentially impacts such processes. This provides a foundation for future research on cross-cultural public-government decision-making.

Three key questions guided the research:

1. *What does public participation/deliberation in government decision-making processes mean in different cultural contexts?*
2. *How do different cultures provide space for public participation/deliberation in government decision-making processes?*
3. *What positive and negative outcomes occur as a result of public participation/deliberation in government decision-making processes?*

The data gathered emphasizes the significant personal and professional commitment by officials, practitioners and NGO representatives to core democratic principles. Each interviewee struggled with fulfilling the often momentous expectations that are associated with these duties and sometimes with reconciling them to their own personal and professional ethics.


This study has broad relevance to democracies as a whole, as well as specifically to government officials, public

participation practitioners, professional associations and civil society leaders—across all boundaries, regardless of geography. Some implications are primarily relevant to specific countries or regions.

The following sections summarize the preliminary analysis of the research findings.

## Public Participation (p2) Terminology

**Each country uses p2 terminology differently and a wide range of activities are included under the banner of p2.**

There is no one definition or conception of public participation that can be generalized across all cultures, places or political systems. This has important implications for practitioners operating and communicating across different local contexts. According to a US federal administrator who speaks multiple  languages, the terms “community”, “public” and “stakeholder” are sometimes difficult to translate into other languages, and therefore s/he finds the phrase “civil society engagement” is useful when working internationally.

Clearly there is a great variety of meanings attached to terminology in each country and culture. Therefore it may be useful to provide functional descriptions of a process rather than assuming a shared understanding of terminology when communicating internationally.







The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation serves this purpose (see [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org) for more details):

**inform ⇒ consult ⇒ involve ⇒ collaborate ⇒ empower**

Some interviewees cited examples of public participation activities that seem to fall outside the range of the IAP2 Spectrum (see Table 1 below).

<sup>1</sup> A total of 66 interviews were conducted across 12 countries, in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Mandarin and French. We interviewed people within government with responsibility for participatory processes at the local, state/provincial or regional and federal/national levels who were administrators, elected or appointed officials. We also interviewed public participation practitioners and leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were involved in public participation activities and civic engagement.


**Table 1: Examples of p2 cited by interviewees that fall outside the IAP2 Spectrum**

	Reporting a leaking water pipe, even when the damage does not personally affect you (South Africa).
	Benefiting from government services and programs (South Africa, Mexico).
	Participating in agricultural production activities (Mexico).
	Allowing people to volunteer in government run initiatives such as the Olympics (China).
	A community festival in which diverse ethnic and social groups “participated” (Ivory Coast).
	Paying taxes (Ivory Coast).


### Improved Outcomes From p2


#### Evidence of improved outcomes as a result of p2, but better evaluation mechanisms needed.

There were many anecdotal examples of improved outcomes as a result of p2 in most countries, including:

 **Building a culture of tolerance in Brazil:** A p2 practitioner said that p2 processes have helped to

overcome the lack of dialogue and trust between the government and civil society, and even between different sectors of civil society.

**Exploring common values in the United States:**  A public participation practitioner said, “I have seen this over and over... where you have two polarized groups or starting to head in that direction. And just that simple thing of getting everybody together—forget the positions, but let’s talk about your deeper interest. What are the values that you care about? And that is the one thing that anybody in the public can talk about.”

**Forging partnerships in Scotland:**  An NGO leader described how multiple formal and informal partnerships have been developed amongst local government units, service providers, community organizations and the general public. They “are around learning in its broadest sense, so that is formal learning, both from schools, colleges, and universities, but also informal learning, adult learning, community development, and youth work—young people getting with the partnership.” In some communities the culture of partnerships is ingrained, so that they become an automatic part of people’s work. “Officers within the local authority will almost as a matter of course in the day-to-day working environment have to talk to my colleague in health...

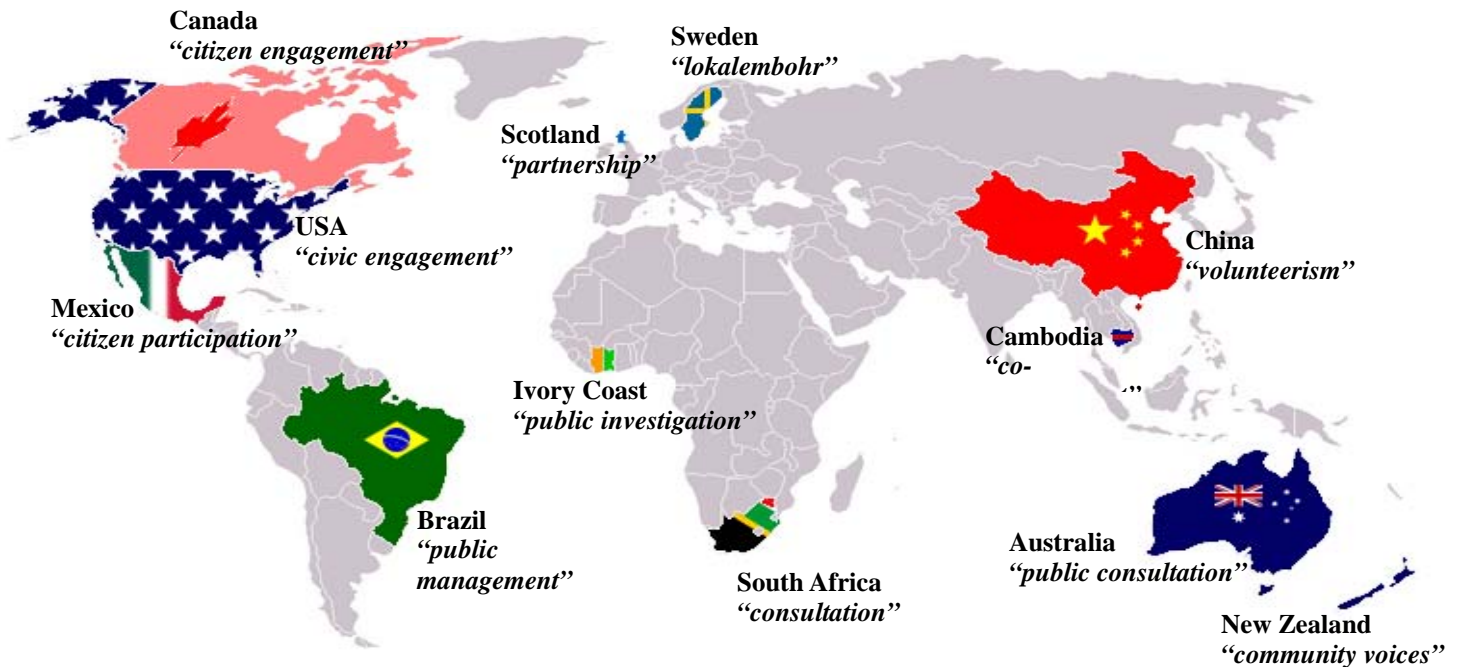





Figure 1 Countries included in this research and typical public participation terminology




that’s how we deliver the best quality of services... That’s when community planning becomes mainstream.” Each formal partnership is funded by the Scottish Government and has an allocated administrative support officer and a lead officer.


 **Improving project design and cost-effectiveness:** “I can think of numerous road projects where there are quite serious adjustments made to the construction of the road as a result of public feedback. I can think of quite important adjustments made to school projects, to hospital projects, to make them work better in the context of the local community,” said an Australian state elected official. Furthermore, “they believed it really did save them money and it certainly allowed them to deliver on time and they got a benefit out of that.”


 **Creating connections between people and ministries or government in Canada:** A provincial administrator said “members, politicians – politicians’ staff – can connect individuals to government, people who make decisions, people who are looking at certain problems.”


 **Achieving more sustainable decisions:** As a result of public participation, a Scottish local administrator said “you get decisions made that actually are locally applicable and therefore things are more likely to survive and be sustainable. But you also get people understanding why decisions are made and therefore more people are likely to use it the benefits.”


 **Changes in government plans:** A Brazilian local administrator said that government plans changed as a result of the Municipal Budget Committee meetings that included 50% civil society representatives. For example, civil society indicated that a hospital expansion program was more important than park revitalization, so the government completed the hospital expansion first.

**Obtaining buy-in from the public:** Many government officials spoke about the value of p2 in terms of increasing the public's acceptance and support for a decision. This is obviously important from a political perspective, but sometimes it is also needed to enable smooth project implementation. A US local administrator cynically noted “I do not think there is anything more altruistic than that.”

However, little concrete evidence was provided across project interviews to substantiate the outcomes of p2 processes. Surprisingly, most governments do not appear to have undertaken cost/benefit analyses of the various forms of public participation. An exception was a  road construction project cited by an Australian state administrator, in which it was estimated that the public consultation strategy delivered a five to one return on investment. “In other words, they saved \$5.00 for every \$1.00 that was invested in the consultation process.”

A US local administrator said quantitative measures  and qualitative feedback forms are useful, but this is “something that often just totally falls by the wayside in terms of measuring the effectiveness.” S/he said the reason is that asking participants to complete an evaluation form can be burdensome, especially when they have been working in “a very data-rich environment.”

Some interviewees pointed to the need for improved  quantitative and especially qualitative tools. A Brazilian federal administrator was critical of the ingrained culture of *eventology*, that is measuring the extent of p2 by the number of events and participants. Perhaps there is a trade-off between the number of events and participants, and the actual quality of the p2 process. It seems more important to focus on who is participating and how well engaged they are, rather than merely counting numbers.

One example of a detailed process and impact  evaluation conducted by a p2 practitioner was cited in Brazil. This demonstrates that p2 practitioners can provide important professional advice without fear of compromising their professional integrity in order to please their clients or other stakeholders. The p2 practitioner was contracted by the local government to evaluate the Participative Budget (PB) process in a particular city. The evaluation required a review of all documentation produced by the process and interviews with all the actors that “participated directly or indirectly in the budget.”

The p2 practitioner concluded that the PB process “has had an impact... indirectly, there have been large changes to planning... [because] the decisions taken at the meetings have been taken to the agenda of the Secretariats,” and the public servants are forced to

respond to each of the recommendations, either implementing them or explaining why they are not feasible.

In addition, the PB process has fostered wider public debate about budget decisions, which in turn increased the level of participation in subsequent PB processes. Nevertheless, the PB process has limited power, because it only relates to decision-making about 3% of the City Hall budget. The p2 practitioner also said there was insufficient room in the PB process for diverse viewpoints to be expressed openly and debated frankly.



### P2 prevents fraud in the Ivory Coast

Public participation is used to prevent fraud in land transactions. Before the government can issue a “granting letter” for a piece of land, it must first carry out a public investigation in the local neighborhood to make sure that nobody else had a claim to that land. In particular, the traditional ruler of that area is consulted, as well as adjacent landowners and the relevant government departments.

## Government and Civil Society Partnerships


**Partnerships between government and civil society are integral to p2.**



According to a US NGO leader, genuine public participation requires partnership between civil society and government. “Public participation is not simply I had a voice and I told you what to do to fix the problem and went away. It is far more collaborative and inclusive and we all have some kind of a role or responsibility in implementing those solutions.”




In the words of an NGO leader from South Africa, public participation should be a “two-way street”, not simply a “grievance session.”

This means recognizing that both the government and civil society have needs and interests, and must forge partnerships that are mutually beneficial. “Is public participation there to serve the needs of government where government goes out and gets what it needs to 

do its work from the public, or is it really community-based... people in the community talking to each other, identifying their needs and then working with government in a partnership?” (US p2 practitioner).


However, engaging with civil society as an equal partner requires public officials to have courage, humility and a level of trust in the p2 process. “It is a big challenge for getting public agencies to sit down at a table as just another player... [in] the community’s game. Many of them see it the other way. [A] big obstacle is getting people who have the power to make or break the agreement to actually sit down and participate in the process,” according to a US p2 practitioner.

A Swedish local elected official expressed a high  degree of humility about the role of government officials: “The local political or people like me working for the government, we do not know anything. We do not know the needs and what people need.” A Swedish NGO leader confirmed that when the community is “not satisfied with what the government has done, we also ask them [government officials] out and have a meeting on-site.”

## Civil Society and p2

**Civil society contributes to p2, and p2 strengthens civil society.**

For people to engage in public participation beyond just voting, they usually need to be organized together rather than acting individually. This means becoming involved in some aspect of civil society, which includes non-profit, non-governmental organizations, networks and community associations.

Civil society is an important prerequisite for  democratic governance. In Brazil, historical factors have left civil society organizations in a secondary and subordinate position relative to the government. Therefore civil society tends “to wait for the State to take action, not making any moves themselves,” according to a Brazilian NGO leader. As such, there is a tendency for government to take over responsibility for all aspects of p2, even “seduction” of citizens to participate (local administrator).

By contrast, when governments respect civil society and allow it to flourish, citizens become inspired and motivated to become involved in p2. Civil society





encourages people to participate, as noted by a South African p2 practitioner who helps people “to get organized” because a large proportion of the population lacks the resources and knowledge to challenge government policies.

Conversely, p2 processes can in turn revitalize and strengthen civil society. For example, a Brazilian p2 practitioner noted that involvement in p2 processes can actually increase people’s understanding of, and sympathy for, others’ needs. In the Municipal Budget Committee process, civil society representatives from each region of the city have to witness the conditions in other regions, before they deliberate on recommendations for funding across the city. “So this also creates a relationship of solidarity between them... so my region is difficult, but yours is worse. I also want your region to be OK.”

In addition, individuals who are not associated with some form of civil society are less able to engage with government decision-making. P2 processes can widen the scope for engaging such isolated individuals, thereby also building civil society capacity into the future. For example, random selection of participants in citizens’ juries and community panels has been used in Australia and New Zealand, especially by local governments. An Australian state elected official spoke about addressing “the inequality between those who seek to get involved... and those who, perhaps, have a more private existence.”

Several interviewees talked about their work building the capacity of civil society to engage effectively in p2:

 A South African NGO leader said “We try to educate the people to do public involvement efficiently and effectively from the community’s perspective.”


A US NGO leader provides organizing training and moderator training, providing local community organizers “with a tested model that they could then use... and adapt to their own needs and purposes.” 


A US p2 practitioner provides a community asset-mapping service to help communities look at “what are the kind of organizations we have... [and] develop a strategy of how do we engage all these groups. [We] get


them to start to know each other and develop those relationships.”


## Perceptions of p2

**Perceptions of public participation are intimately connected with views about the relationship between the government and the people.**

For example, a US state administrator saw the  electoral process as a clear manifestation of p2, based on historical precedents: “We are a country that fought a revolution to be self-governed and to have deliberative bodies that we would elect that are representing our views.”

There is often a divergence between the views of government officials and the general public on what constitutes p2. Many US legislators believe that  public deliberation occurs exclusively in the halls of government, according to a US state elected official: “The public gives us their opinions but the legislators deliberate among themselves.” Most members of the public accept this line of thinking, but others cherish “the hope that the legislators would deliberate with them... and include them in the deliberation, and they are almost always disappointed.”

When government officials see little distinction between the will of the government and the will of the people, there is a risk that implementing specific p2 processes may be seen as superfluous. In China, an NGO leader  noted the official mantra that “the communist party’s stand is to represent the widest range of the working people. So its suggestion or view should be supported by the public.” Yet the NGO leader believes some government projects are designed just to make government officials look impressive, and would be immediately opposed by the public, if they were asked.

By contrast, when the general public sees little distinction between themselves and their government, it may be an indicator of healthy democracy. A Swedish p2  practitioner explained that people feel like the municipal government is a part of them. “We’re...


working together to have a good relationship with the municipality... and the municipality is all of us. It's not we are down here and they are up there.”

## Government Support for p2



**Governments have many important roles to play in supporting p2 processes.**

Our data demonstrates how government organizations support public participation and deliberation in different countries, and suggests ways of improving this support:

### *Fund p2 processes*

 A Scottish p2 practitioner pointed out that most community organizations need some funding to continue – or at least a venue where they can meet for free. S/he argued there needs to be a system for allocating small amounts of funding to all community organizations, retaining accountability without the time-consuming process of submitting new funding applications every year.

Funding bodies should not constrain p2 practitioners from expressing their professional opinion and maintaining professional integrity when working with communities. A New Zealand p2 practitioner noted the difficulty of

 “trying to play the role of serving the funder, as well as serving the community.” An American p2 practitioner  emphasized that maintaining accountability to the funder means “you are accountable to give them a good process, accountable to advise them well about how to ensure that they have integrity. And when they are headed in the wrong direction, or you think they are, you need to be able to speak up and say that.”

### *Introduce p2 legislation*


Sometimes funding is guaranteed by legislation for organizations to participate in specific processes. Public participation legislation seeks to ensure that decision-making will consider the views of all people affected by a decision, regardless of their wealth and power.


However, instituting government legislation is far from being a panacea that ensures well-functioning p2


mechanisms. It is merely the first step in demonstrating government commitment to p2. Indeed, conducting p2 simply to comply with statutory requirements often results in lower quality processes, according to a Canadian local elected official. “The public participation was minimized or the potential effect of the public participation was carefully crafted to be eliminated. [It] really did not have any kind of intention of having an outcome that would reflect that public participation. It was just more of going through the motion.”

### *Help to build civil society capacity*


Governments can also be instrumental in building the capacity of civil society organizations to contribute to decision-making. For example:

A US state elected official provides “consulting and  educational and coaching services to citizen's organizations... to brief them about how the [legislative] process works on paper and how it actually works in reality. I support them in devising... strategies for increasing their effectiveness.”


A New Zealand government administrator spoke  about advocating for the interests of indigenous and marginalized populations, ensuring that their views would be accurately represented and considered in government decision-making.

 In Scottish community planning forums, the local government is a mediator, facilitating communication and negotiation between the community members and the other government agencies. The local government also provides community members with skills, support and expertise to negotiate effectively and influence service providers.


However, most interviewees placed more emphasis on accomplishing organizational goals and less emphasis on active steps their organizations can take to develop the public's capacity to participate.


Moreover, government officials are themselves often constrained by a lack of funding. A US federal  administrator expressed a desire to share their knowledge and methodological tools with civil society


organizations, if only funding was available.



In countries where there is a history and culture of authoritarian government, the role of the government in training civil society is disputed. A Brazilian NGO leader  argued that civil society has to build its own capacity without relying on the government, and if anything “society has the duty to educate the State in this regard, and not the opposite. The State must not educate society.”

### *Reform government organizational culture*

Effective p2 requires building the capacity not only of civil society to contribute ideas, but also of the  government to receive them, according to a Scottish p2 practitioner. “Capacity-building should really extend to bureaucrats and elected politicians as well [because] the real challenge is the organizational culture of bureaucracies to make them responsive to citizen participation.”

 A Canadian locally elected official articulated the underlying fear that public participation arouses in some government officials. “So when we are talking about public participation, does that mean that we really do want to hear what people have to say, or are we are afraid to hear that because it could move us from what we have already decided we were going to do, or it could create a real problem where the public has expectations that may not be equally met.”

An organizational culture of continuous service improvement recognizes the value of public participation as an early warning mechanism to minimize the risk of policy failure. A US p2 practitioner suggested  providing incentives for public officials to take p2 seriously, such as including p2 in their job description and reviewing their performance on this regularly.

A South African state administrator observed how  useful it is for public officials to have a personal connection to the region they are serving. “Until you speak the people’s language, understand exactly things from their own perspective, not from your own comfortable side of the situation, it is then that you would have a true perspective of what they want and what you should be doing.” Such a perspective can be developed when government officials engage with communities 

through p2 processes, changing “the way in which decision-makers view their communities,” according to a Scottish local administrator.







### **Highly formalized p2 in Mexico**

Government initiated p2 processes are often highly structured, formal and only open to individuals selected by the government, such as academics and civil society leaders. For example, the advisory council associated with a federal agency “represents a carefully planned sample of civil society. Once council members meet, they receive training on parliamentary procedures. At meetings, each member has a sign bearing their name that they raise when they wish to speak. Each member is allowed to speak for a maximum of three minutes.” Such a regimented process is understandable given the council has about 450 members.

According to a Mexican p2 practitioner, “there is no culture of public participation in Mexico, or in any branch of the Mexican government, or in political parties.” A highly structured, formal p2 process with very good attendance rates may not necessarily equate to a high quality p2 process.


### *Government willingness to consider public input in decision-making processes and provide feedback*


Governments risk losing the general public’s interest in participating if they repeatedly fail to show how their decision-making processes have been influenced by public participation. *Consultation fatigue* was mentioned by interviewees in most countries. Even if the government  did not utilize the public’s input, they should explain why and apologize, according to a Scottish local administrator. According to a US local administrator,  the failure to give feedback is simply due to lack of resources: “It is not a malicious thing, it is a time and energy thing.”


Failure to give feedback after a p2 process may actually  damage the functioning of democracy by depleting trust. A Scottish p2 practitioner said “Trust is built when  people see that it is worthwhile to participate.” By contrast, a p2 practitioner in South Africa argued that trust

between stakeholders and the government can increase simply “by putting people together and helping them to talk to each other and to understand each other.”

### *Government transparency is fundamental*

 In some countries access to information is often very limited. According to a Brazilian p2 practitioner, the government’s provision of participatory mechanisms and spaces is somewhat negated by its lack of transparency and the limited amount of reliable information it provides.


In several countries, significant sections of the general public do not know when the government is making a decision that may harm them. Although government  officials in South Africa talked about the importance of transparency, an NGO leader complained that industry and the government “do not tell you about the negative impacts [of a decision]. They only tell you about the positive things.” Therefore this NGO conducted an “education drive” to “empower” people so they would “know when a decision is actually going to affect them.”

 The Ivory Coast government is establishing local *listening centers* which provide opportunities for people to access timely information. There are also plans to install microphones so community members can make announcements using a public address system and potentially also on community radio.


## Traditional Practices


### **Recognizing traditional p2 practices can help improve engagement with different cultures.**


The principles of p2 are echoed in many cultures, with their own traditional practices for meeting and communicating together. For example:

A Mexican NGO leader described the deep cultural  roots of public participation processes in their indigenous communities: “We indigenous peoples have... our own forms of decision-making and public participation. Since ancient times, the... collective vision of communal participation in the indigenous world... entailed... exchange at forums, meetings, conferences and assemblies.” Decisions “are typically made by consensus”

with the “wise men, elders, men and women... sit[ting] together in the form of a circle.”

In the Ivory Coast, people generally feel “honored”  when they are granted some power to influence decisions that affect them. The cultural understanding of public participation is that issues will be discussed at length, with the aim of reaching consensus. In public discussions, women tend to initially remain silent, and the facilitator needs to encourage their participation. However, women are more frequently becoming community leaders. They have a central role in community life, and are the most keenly aware of impacts from government decisions, according to a federal administrator.

A p2 process that emulates traditional practices is more likely to be accessible for people who may have been less comfortable providing input to governmental agencies through more conventional methods. A New Zealand p2 practitioner works in collaboration with indigenous  organizations to make sure the process incorporates cultural practices and communication preferences. “It’s good to see someone from your own community be part of running or facilitating [the process].” Partnering with local churches to implement p2 processes is also very useful with some minority communities. “You have a church minister there who blesses the meeting.”


However, some Pacific Island and immigrant populations are not affiliated with a particular community group or church, and therefore tend to be less represented in p2  processes. The New Zealand government sought to improve engagement with the Pacific Islander community by employing an officer from that community to act in a liaison role.


Innovative use of communication technology can also improve the effectiveness of p2 processes with indigenous communities. An Australian state elected official encouraged feedback in a culturally appropriate and responsive manner by using “three-dimensional plots” to talk with Aboriginal groups “about the areas that they were interested in... and they regarded that as being a very effective way of consulting with them because two-dimensional maps with dots and lines tend to be produced in western countries do not necessarily mean a lot to some indigenous people.”

## Sharing p2 Practices

### Sharing effective practices provides opportunities for cross-fertilization to enhance outcomes.

Although countries and interviewees were not chosen based on their reputation for consistently adopting effective practices, some examples of effective practices did emerge in our data. This presents an opportunity for learning between countries, particularly when pursuing trans-national goals such as responding to climate change.

 A South African local administrator described an annual p2 process with three phases of citizen participation: raising issues; monitoring and providing input to the city’s budget plan; and receiving feedback about the final budget and reasons why the government included certain things and not others.

 An NGO leader in Brazil highlighted a strategy for maintaining vitality in a civil society network. “The network must not be based on meetings, as if it is based on meetings then it is sure to diminish. The network has to be based on connection, contacts and action. Sometimes celebrations, parties or other type of activity, if you reduce it to meetings, then you will reduce the contingent to those meeting professionals.”

A US NGO leader is working with a former news director to cultivate citizen journalism and increase the dissemination of little heard stories from communities. They are developing podcasting infrastructure so that content “can be widely distributed for folks to hear stories of what other communities are doing that they could replicate in their communities.”

Walkabouts, or *imbizos*, are public meetings in South Africa where government officials at the local or national level visit local communities to discuss specific issues that need to be addressed. These meetings occur regularly at the national level and are attended by government ministers or even the President or Vice-President. Imbizos also occur at the local level, with the executive mayor of the locality visiting the communities that have made a petition.

 Australia, at the state level, sponsors community

### Democracy that works in Sweden

A Swedish NGO leader gave the example of a village where “the democracy process works” because virtually every resident belongs to one of the many committees that make recommendations on various issues. These small committees cater to people with a broad range of interests, including home-owners, the elderly, IT enthusiasts, business proprietors, and football enthusiasts.

The NGO leader chairs an umbrella committee that brings together the chairs of all the other committees. When the umbrella committee decides “we want to do something and bring that into the government, you can say that almost 100 percent of the people in the village stand behind it.”

For example, the “whole village” backed a recommendation by the IT committee to bring broadband to the village. They negotiated with the infrastructure providers, and people from the village organized themselves into groups to dig trenches for the cables. This “brought a lot of people together that do not socialize, normally.”

This structure is not necessarily very common in Sweden. The NGO leader believes it was possible in this village because of the small population. “It is more easy to feel what people want, what they think.”

cabinet meetings that encourage community residents to engage with decision-makers on a wide variety of topics. According to one state elected official, these meetings are publicized through an “open invitation” broadly distributed to citizens within a specific geographic area. At these meetings, “people can book a delegation, an interview with a specific minister” explained a second state elected official. “You can have 300 or 400 people involved, and some of them will never have had any contact with government in this way before.”

 In Sweden, a local elected official organized breakfast



meetings every week in a different village. They attracted a higher than expected turnout, and the locally elected official answered their questions on any issue. When there was insufficient time, s/he took the questions away and sent an email response to all the participants soon after.

A Canadian provincial administrator described an open-ended investigative process called the Questions Project. In the first stage, government officials went out to visit service providers “to get their sense of what was working and what wasn't working.” One of the key points that emerged from this was the worsening gap in youth services due to funding cutbacks. Therefore in the second stage they “decided that we would go out and talk to youth. So we have our youth coordinators doing that, so that they were youth themselves talking to youth.” The outcomes of the process included not only significant learnings for the government, but also greater connections formed amongst community organizations and young people.



### Participative Budget process in Brazil

Brazil has a Participative Budgeting process. Theme meetings are advertised not only with banners and “Kombis” (buses) but also through several times. The attendance is high, “sometimes had one thousand or four thousand people there” or a red card to vote on proposals. Surprises emerge at these meetings. The process spends a month engaging with the community leaders beforehand to reach an agreement on each proposal.

Brazil also has Municipal Budget Committees, which have 50% government representatives and 50% civil society representatives elected from each region in the city. According to a local administrator, “the construction of the agenda is done jointly.” The government submits “demands”, as do the civil society representatives from each region. An electronic voting system is used to select the final list of demands for each region and for the city.



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## Conclusion

This report has highlighted some preliminary findings from interviews conducted in 12 countries, with a view to stimulating discussion and reflection amongst **government officials, p2 practitioners, professional associations and civil society leaders**. The matrix below shows possible implications for future practice that are most relevant to each of these audiences.

IAP2 and the Kettering Foundation have identified several potential research options for continued exploration in this vein, either by using the existing data that has been collected or by supplementing this data. Recommendations include a more in-depth focus on who is involved in public participation or deliberative processes; how such processes are implemented and for what purpose; more definition and exploration of outcomes or for what purpose participation or deliberation is engaged; and enhanced consideration of differences and similarities across cultures, regions and countries as it relates to participatory or deliberative processes.

	Government officials	P2 practitioners	Professional associations	Civil society leaders
<b>Possible implications for future practice:</b>				
Adapt terminology when communicating internationally and provide functional descriptions of p2 processes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to understand what activities are covered under the banner of p2.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collect quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of p2 processes.	✓	✓	✓	
Conduct cost/benefit analyses to assess the financial benefits of p2.	✓		✓	
Harness the mutually reinforcing relationship between civil society and p2 processes, ensuring that isolated individuals are included	✓	✓		✓
Build the capacity of civil society to influence government decision-making, rather than simply achieving organisational goals	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implement p2 processes in partnership with civil society by engaging with courage, humility and trust	✓			
Implement p2 processes in partnership with governments by taking responsibility for contributing to solutions		✓		✓
Reflect on the extent to which the government's interests are representative of the general public's interests.	✓			
Fund p2 processes and respect the professional duty of p2 practitioners to criticise ineffective or unethical processes	✓	✓	✓	
Introduce p2 legislation while realising this is no panacea and can only be the first step	✓			
Provide appropriate incentives and training for government officials, and take other measures to reform organisational culture to seek continuous service improvement by valuing public input	✓			
Include public input as a factor in government decision-making, and tell the public how their input has been used	✓			
Maintain high levels of government transparency, communicating both positive and negative potential impacts to all stakeholders	✓			
Recognise p2 principles in non-Western cultures, and emulate traditional practices to increase accessibility	✓	✓		✓
Commit to sharing effective practices and learning from others' experiences, both nationally and internationally	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Appendix - About This Study

Working from literature review findings, field work between 2006 and 2008 included conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 66 individuals in five categories – federal, state/provincial and municipal government representatives (including elected officials and administrators), public participation practitioners and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives.

Data were collected by an 18-member team of interviewers, most of whom worked closely with a country/region coordinator (except in those instances where the interviewer also served as a regional coordinator, as was the case in the regions of Asia, Latin America - Brazil and Australasia). An interview protocol and standardized training for interviewers and country/region coordinators ensured internal and external validity.

Countries were selected for this study based on those within which project interviewees had existing relationships and familiarity with participatory or deliberative processes/practices. Effort was made to include as broad a cross-section of countries as was possible under the limitations of the project budget. One country initially chosen – Thailand – experienced a military coup that caused the project subcommittee to withdraw it from the project sample in 2007.

Interviewees were selected based on their operational knowledge or leadership positions or as observers of democratic/participative systems or practices. Interviewees verified the eligibility of candidates prior to submission for review and approval by the project coordinator based on the established criteria. Efforts were made to ensure ethnic and gender diversity to the degree possible as part of the candidate selection process to encourage a range of voices, perspectives and experiences was included in the study sample.

Limitations to this research project include:

- the age of the data at the time of writing (interviews were collected between 2006 and 2008)
- dates in the past that were referred to by interviewees
- difficulty gaining interviewee commitment to participate for some candidates (legal, logistical)
- ability for some interviewees for whom English is a second language to fully comprehend questions included in the semi-structured interview instrument
- the size of the sample, which is small and not intended to be representative but rather a descriptive study.

