



Participants and Abstracts

Thematic Sessions

Thematic sessions depart from paper presentation, where participants will receive and provide feedback on their research.

Climate Action

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments can and should play in climate change adaptation and mitigation. ICLD is supporting local governments in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia with projects that focus on increasing citizen influence in waste management, water supply, public transport, and urban planning, and on reducing climate-related vulnerabilities.

Session Leader



Jesse Ribot

Professor, School of International Service at American University, Washington, USA

Before starting at AU August 2018, Jesse spent a decade as a professor of Geography, Anthropology and Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences and Director of the Social Dimensions of Environmental Policy Initiative at the University of Illinois. He has also worked for numerous development agencies, such as World Bank and United Nations. His research focuses on decentralization and democratic local government, natural resource tenure and access, distribution along natural resource commodity chains and household vulnerability in the face of climate and environmental change.

Read more at www.jesseribot.com

See also the short video “Climate Refugees?” on ICLD’s Youtube channel and Jesse’s publications in the ICLD Knowledge Bank.

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Participants



Anne Kairu

Dr. Anne is a Newton International Fellow at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom—her research centres on the governance of voluntary carbon offset projects. Additionally, Anne's research focuses on environmental justice within carbon offset projects, community-based forest management using real-time technology, multi-level governance of coastal ecosystems, and participatory forestry. Her research interests encompass carbon management, net zero strategies and capacity building in climate change actions. Anne also has a keen interest in local indigenous knowledge and the contribution of women to climate action.

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Abstract: From centralization to decentralization: Evolution of forest policies and their implications on mangrove management in Kenya

Extensive research in forestry decentralization has been carried out to date. However, what is missing from these accounts is the constructions of meaning and interpretations of decentralization policies across time and space. Drawing upon the policy arrangement approach's four dimensions—rules, discourse, actors, and power—we analyse the evolution of forest policies in Kenya and their implications on mangrove management. Data was collected using a desk review of policy documents complemented with semi-structured interviews. The findings show that the shift to decentralized forest management has faced opposing discourses – inexhaustibility of mangroves, forest protection through restricted access, commercialization ostensibly to support resource conservation and use of technical arguments. Findings suggest that decentralized forest governance capacity can be improved by changing from a top-down system of creating rules to a negotiated system involving local communities and other stakeholders. This work can provide insights useful in designing mangrove management policies.



Danny Gotto

Danny Gotto, a public health physician and social entrepreneur, has over two decades of experience advancing health equity in Eastern Africa. His roles span public, private, and nonprofit sectors, addressing health challenges like HIV/AIDS, family planning, nutrition, and maternal health. As co-founder of Innovations for Development, Danny focuses on building resilient health systems in Uganda, using Community Based Participatory Research to tackle issues like climate change, non-communicable diseases, and sexual health. He holds an MBChB from Mbarara University, an MPH from Makerere University, an MBA from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, and a DrPH from Walden University.

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Abstract: Enhancing Citizen Participation in Climate Change Policy Making Through Deliberative Democratic Practices: A Case Study of Kasangati Town Council.

In developed democracies, deliberative processes like citizens' assemblies amplify public voices in climate policy. As urban areas in Uganda face escalating climate risks, it's crucial for affected citizens to engage leaders through democratic means, ensuring policies reflect their needs and aspirations amid rapid urbanization and climate challenges. In Uganda, climate change is worsening societal well-being, causing food, water, and energy insecurities, especially in urban areas. Although the Uganda National Climate Change Policy aims for sustainable development, it faces challenges of transference in local governments especially in municipalities and urban local authorities where impact of climate change on vulnerable populations remains critical.

This study explores the approach of citizens assembly to enhance participation in climate policy and promote equitable urban development. Focusing on a case study in Kasangati Municipality, Uganda, data will be gathered through qualitative methods, including focus group discussions, interviews, and observations, capturing perspectives from local leaders and citizens involved in climate policy processes.

The research will evaluate the citizens' assembly's effectiveness in developing inclusive, people-centred climate policies in the local urban context of Uganda, with the aim to identify best practices and strategies that address the needs of vulnerable populations and enhance policy responsiveness and effectiveness.



Gilbert Siame

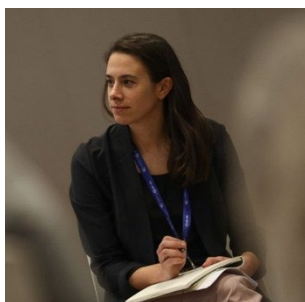
Gilbert Siame holds degrees from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. He is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Zambia where he also co-founded and coordinates the Centre for Urban Research and Planning. Focusing on co-production of urban services and spaces, Dr Siame investigates complexities in state-society relations, urban climate resilience, informal settlement upgrading, and urban service delivery. Siame has led and co-led several international research projects focused on urban governance, political economy of decentralization, co-production of urban services and spaces, climate change adaptation in African cities, urban informality, among others.

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Abstract: Localising Climate Action Through University-City-Community Partnerships in Lusaka, Zambia

This paper seeks to discuss initiatives aimed at increasing capacity at the local level to plan and implement climate action in a global South context. The paper argues that transformative community-level climate adaptation action in African cities is possible if untapped university resources and potential (human resources, research, data, innovation, and capacity for stakeholder mobilisation) are intentionally mobilised and linked to community-level developmental needs and capacity needs in municipal governments. I draw from my experiences and insights in negotiating, co-designing, building capacity and co-managing university-city-community climate change partnership projects in Lusaka. I draw further insights from interviews with the Mayor of Lusaka, relevant Lusaka City Council technical staff, community-level climate change action champions, and community leaders to analyse transformative elements in climate change projects implemented under the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC Model) in Lusaka. The partnership has managed to plan and implement local climate adaptation initiatives in informal settlements of Kanyama, George and Chaisa. The EPIC model projects in Lusaka have succeeded in linking the human capital, research, and innovation capacities of the University of Zambia with Lusaka City Council capacity needs, and with community developmental needs. These projects demonstrate that if climate action at the local community level is well aligned with local community developmental needs, and municipal capacity needs, resources can be unlocked, climate response projects can be more democratised, and implementation bottlenecks can be unlocked.



Katherine Brown

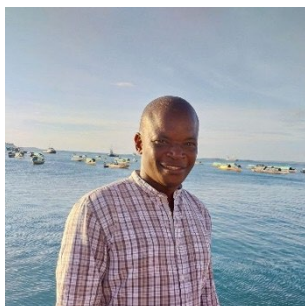
Katherine Browne is a Research Fellow and Lead of the International Climate Risk and Adaptation (ICRA) team at the Stockholm Environment Institute. Her research focuses on climate adaptation, climate finance, and inequality. She holds an MS and PhD from the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan.

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Abstract: Investigating Procedural Equity in Decentralized Adaptation Finance in Namibia and the Eastern Caribbean

Calls for procedural equity in international adaptation finance are increasingly prominent. These calls recognize the need for inclusion of climate vulnerable and marginalized groups in decision-making processes at global, national, and sub-national levels, as well as increased transparency and accountability in internationally funded projects and programs. Studies have raised concerns that traditional models of adaptation finance concentrate decision-making authority among elites. Lack of fair representation contributes to poor context-specificity in international interventions, particularly a failure to enable equitable adaptation at local levels. New “decentralized” funding models seek to improve equity and enable locally-led adaptation by devolving greater decision-making authority to actors at local levels. At the same time, national and sub-national political dynamics, capacity constraints, and divisions within communities continue to pose significant obstacles to equitable adaptation. We investigate the procedural equity of the first two pilot projects under the Green Climate Fund’s “Enhanced Direct Access” (EDA) program in Namibia and the Eastern Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Grenada). We present preliminary findings drawn from national workshops, interviews with national and local stakeholders, and document analysis.



Richard Dimba Kiaka

Dr. Richard Kiaka is a research associate at the Centre for Environment Justice and Development, in Kenya. He is lecturer at the School for Field Studies, in Kenya. He teaches on topic of human dimensions in conservation and environmental governance. His research focuses on themes such as inclusive climate resilience, just transitions towards a plastic-free society; grassroots engagement in environmental governance; community-based conservation; and community-based monitoring of pesticides trade and use. Richard is a principal investigator in an ICLD-funded research project titled [Just, plastic free transition and climate change resilience in Mombasa County](#).

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Abstract: Civil society and grassroots engagement for just plastic-free transition and climate change resilience in Mombasa County

My contribution to the 2024 Local Democracy Academic draws from lessons learnt in an ongoing ICLD funded research project on grassroots engagement in government policies and practices to foster just plastic-free transition in Mombasa County in Kenya. Plastic waste is a growing environmental concern in the coastal city of Mombasa in Kenya. Open burning of plastic at dumpsites generates tonnes of greenhouse gases. Floods dump tonnes of plastic waste into the ocean causing biodiversity and economic losses. Mombasa County Government has developed various policies, strategies and legislations to curb plastic pollution and reduce community vulnerability to climate change. Kenya's Constitution requires that public policy decisions and actions must adhere to democratic principles including, transparency, public participation and justice. Using environmental democracy as an analytical framework, we critically examine how plastic governance in Mombasa County creates democratic spaces for civil society and grassroots organizations to engage in plastic pollution and climate change governance. We use participatory action research methods such as democracy labs, participatory videotaping and brand audits to examine the opportunities, gaps and challenges for the County government to deliver a citizen-centred just plastic-free transition. Findings from the research will enable the County Government of Mombasa to know the aspirations of communities working to reduce plastic waste and those affected by its impacts and further inform policy-making processes to foster a just and green plastic-free transition.



Sudarmono Kiramang

Currently he serves as a lecturer (senior lecturer) and researcher in IPDN (vocational school under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Indonesia). His research walks on the local government policy and innovation towards indigenous community; local institutional dynamics and decentralization policies. He also involved in policy evaluation research in the Ministry of Home Affairs (Effectiveness of local government leadership: A Comparative Analysis between Elected and Acting Mayors / Governor). His Ph.D thesis examined the underdevelopment of urbanized fishing community in Makassar City (Indonesia), from the National Univ. of Malaysia. Formerly, he served as civil servant in Makassar City (2007-2018).

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Abstract: Representation of female groups among the urbanized small-scale fishing community in the District of Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta Province, Indonesia

Women's groups play an important role among small-scale fishing communities in the suburbs, especially in subsistence post-harvest activities. Unfortunately, their contributions are not always well documented. Furthermore, not all women's groups are represented in formal institutions. The study aims to analyze the factors that improve female representation in fostering transformation, identify the existing phenomena that perpetuate disparities, and examine the intersection of socioeconomic activity and its impact on environmental sustainability. By employing the qualitative method, this research found a highly structured and massive process to integrate gender mainstreaming into community economic empowerment policies in Kulon Progo. The spirit of equality is also frequently contrasted with Javanese culture, which is known to be paternalistic and uphold patriarchy. The research also revealed a new spirit in the community to give women a greater role. Furthermore, this policy eliminates overfishing and illegal fishing due to the increased efficiency of traditional fishing production.

Democratic Resilience – Civic Engagement

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments play in building democratic resilience in the face of crises, polarization, and autocratization. ICLD is supporting local governments in Ukraine, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Kosovo with projects around peacebuilding, preparedness, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Session leaders



Amalinda Savirani

Professor, Political Science at Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

Amalinda is a Professor of Political Science and Head of Department Politics and Government at Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia. Her PhD research focused on the political behaviour of business actors responding to political shifts and neoliberalism in Pekalongan, Central Java, in Sociology and Anthropology. Her research interests include studies of social movements in the urban sector and labour with political economy.

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Anders Lidström

Professor, Department of Political Science, Umeå University, Sweden

His research focuses on local politics and government, comparative politics and education policy. This includes studies of local democracy and self-government, and political participation in city- regions, both within Sweden and in a comparative perspective. He has also carried out research on education policy, with a particular focus on how this is shaped at the local level.

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Participants



Enaleen Draai

Enaleen Draai is a professor in Public Administration and Management. She lectures modules in Public policy planning and analysis, as well as Research theory and application to post-graduate students. She is also the work-integrated learning program coordinator for undergraduate students in the Diploma of Public Management. Her research niche areas include public service governance, specialising in service quality, reputation management, organisational trust, skills development, policy capacity, and policy implementation. Her research focus in higher education is on institutional renewal and social justice, with a lens on gender equity and equality within academia. She regularly publishes in her research niche areas and contributes to book chapters.

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Abstract: Reimagining Local Government for the Future: The Restoration of Trust for Social Cohesion

In its service delivery mandate, local government is instrumental in fostering public value, leading to social cohesion. Trust is the defining principle in this relationship for inclusive social equity and economic impact. Initiatives and strategies developed amidst complex issues that define this sphere have been implemented by the South African local government to restore organisational trust for public value creation, leading to social cohesion. A qualitative methodological approach and content analysis focus on political and organisational trust at the local sphere of government. Two key questions guide the discussion: How can organisational trust be restored to enable public value leading to social cohesion? Can civic leadership and engagement be the catalyst for renewing citizen trust in local government? The conclusion is that political will and administrative capacity are crucial to restoring organisational trust for social cohesion.



Gregory Davids

I am the Deputy Dean of Teaching and Learning of the Faculty-Economic and Management Sciences, University Western Cape , Cape Town, South Africa. My research interest is governance and in particular local governance and the role of citizens to change their lived reality. In this regard I provided various support and executed various studies to assist local government. Provide input at SALGA to mayors and municipal managers in the Northern Cape Province. I have more than twenty years of experience within the higher education sector and served as a board member of the different state own entities.

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Abstract: The complexity of transformative local democracy to co-create solutions for an inclusive society

The role of local government to transform and create inclusionary lived environment, building trust across a divided society and unite a divided society is an ongoing and contemporary discourse. South Africa socio-economic history of racial and economic inequality is still evident within a democratic society. Thirty years after democracy the apartheid fault lines are still evident. On the one hand an economic prosperous and modern society and on the other hand asituation of absolute poverty an underdevelopment. Glaring inequality in service delivery is a contributing factor to the lack of trust in the ability of the state to address societal concerns. The past thirty years of South Africa's democracy various strategies driven by the state to transform the socio-economic inequality has bear little positive outcome. Transformative local democracy in part is to advance the interest of the various stakeholders and create a lived environment of inclusivity and equality. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that Cocreation of solution to complex societal issues in a diverse society contributes to value creation.

The paper departs from the principle that participatory deliberative democracy is key to advancing co-creation of solution to societal problems. The paper is a study of four case studies to unpack the notion of co-creation of solutions.

Although distinct in using a South African context the lessons learnt could be used in other countries faced with similar realities. The preliminary findings indicates that co-creation and inclusive local governance holds the answer to increasing public trust and credibility in decision outcomes. In closure the paper contributes to the discourse on inclusive governance and the co-creation of solutions to build an inclusive society.



Michael Touchton

Dr. Touchton is Associate Professor of Political Science, Research Director, and Faculty Lead for Global Health at the Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas. His research focuses on governance and public health, comparative health systems analysis, and population health. He has a broad background in comparative public policy, with specific training and expertise in quantitative modeling for impact evaluations, experimental design and administration, survey research, and analysis of governance arrangements for public health service delivery and health outcomes. He is PI or co-PI on over \$1.5 million in World Bank and NSF funded grants, including a large-scale RCT on village level health decision-making and health outcomes in Kenya; Dr. Touchton's impact evaluations of a variety of participatory governance arrangements for community health outcomes in Latin America.

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Abstract: Procedures for Power: Designing Direct Democracy for Marginalized Groups in Kenya

Citizen participation in decision-making has been widely promoted as a method for improving sustainable development outcomes. Participatory budgeting is one of the most popular ways to engage the public in policy making. These programs have spread rapidly across the Global South but have rarely been evaluated. Participatory budgeting has been lauded as a program that empowers the poor and marginalized groups but also criticized for being prone to elite capture. Actual outcomes related to inequality likely depend both on the broader political context within which participation occurs, as well as the specific procedures that are used to encourage and structure participation. Within the context of participatory budgeting in rural Kenya (which represents a 'hard test' of hypotheses surrounding the benefits of participation), we randomly assign three different commonly used group decision making procedures. In this paper, we compare these treatments across villages in terms of the selection of development projects as well as individual satisfaction with decision-making and heterogeneous treatment effects across gender and leadership status. These preliminary analyses represent our first step toward assessing the extent to which these differing participatory designs succeed at empowering marginalized groups in a rural, low-income context.



Viktor Mitevski

Viktor Mitevski is a PhD candidate and Fulbright Scholar with extensive expertise in fiscal transparency and public finance reforms. As Special Adviser to North Macedonia's Minister of Finance, he led the Economic Reform Program and enhanced the Ministry's transparency and accountability, making it the most transparent institution in the country within two years. Mitevski co-founded the Association for Research and Analysis ZMAI, producing over 30 influential research and policy papers. His work spans public sector reforms, EU accession processes, and quantitative policy research, driving significant positive change for Macedonia and the Balkans.

Photo credit: Violeta Ogdenovska

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Abstract: Navigating Digital Democracy: The Influence of AI and Big Data on Local CitizenEngagement

In the contemporary era characterized by the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analysis, the role of citizen participation in local governance has become increasingly critical. This paper explores how these technological tools can be harnessed to enhance democratic engagement and empower citizens at the local level. It argues that while AI and big data offer unprecedented opportunities for improving public services, decision-making, and policy development, they also pose significant challenges to democratic practices, including issues of privacy, equity, and transparency.

This study draws on case studies from five diverse local governments—Entebbe (Uganda), Valandovo (North Macedonia), Helsingborg (Sweden), Medellín (Colombia), and Jakarta (Indonesia)—each representing different levels of digitalization and AI adoption. By examining these varied contexts, the paper illustrates how citizen participation can be integrated with Aland big data to foster more responsive, inclusive, and transparent local governance. The selected local governments provide a broad spectrum of experiences, from emerging economies to advanced smart cities, offering valuable insights into both the potential and challenges of digital democracy.

The paper identifies gaps in current research and practice, particularly in understanding the longterm implications of these technologies on democratic participation and the potential risks they pose to privacy and civil liberties. It proposes a research agenda focused on developing guidelines and frameworks for ethical AI use in local governance, ensuring that these technologies serve to augment rather than undermine citizen participation.

Democratic Resilience – Conflict

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments play in building democratic resilience in the face of crises, polarization, and autocratization. ICLD is supporting local governments in Ukraine, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Kosovo with projects around peacebuilding, preparedness, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Session Leaders



Tomila Lankina

Professor, International Relations at London School of Economics, UK

Tomila's research focuses on comparative democracy and authoritarianism, mass protests and historical patterns of human capital and democratic reproduction in Russia and other states. She is currently working on a book on the long-term patterns of reproduction of social structures in Russia and why this matter for democracy, development, and social inequalities.

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Sten Hagberg

Professor, Cultural Anthropology and director of the Forum for African Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden

Sten is a Professor of Cultural Anthropology and director of the Forum for African Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. His PhD research focused on dispute settlement between farmers and herders in Burkina. He has conducted anthropological research in Burkina Faso since 1988 and in Mali since 2008 covering themes including dispute settlement, local politics, environment, development, democracy and social movements. His research nowadays focuses on political culture, municipal democracy, local development, the mass media, security and popular struggle.

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Participants



Salma Aquida

Salma Aquida is a doctoral candidate in comparative politics and media studies at Goethe University Frankfurt, where her research focuses on political communication and protest politics from a comparative perspective, with a special focus on the study of Islamists and the far right. Alongside her PhD, she is currently serving as a visiting fellow at Cornell University and the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. She also recently completed a fellowship at the Center of Muslim Politics and World Society Studies (COMPOSE) at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII), and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Additionally, she is a tenured lecturer at the School of Communication and Social Sciences, Telkom University, Indonesia.

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Abstract: Participatory Propaganda, Digital Technology, and the Rise of Far-right Islamist Protest Mobilization in Southeast Asia

This study explores the connection between participatory propaganda and protest mobilization in the Global South, focusing on the 2016 Jakarta election in Indonesia and the subsequent Action to Defend Islam demonstrations. Despite historical marginalization, the far-right Islamist movement achieved unprecedented mobilization, which some attribute to social media and others to a rising anti-pluralist sentiment. The research identifies six digital tactics employed by far-right actors to mobilize support and uses qualitative methods, including literature reviews, interviews, and social media analysis. The study reveals a hybrid form of activism, merging online and offline efforts, and explores the role of both new and traditional media in this process. Expanding the scope to Malaysia, the research examines the transnational nature of these movements and their implications for the rise of far-right politics in the region. The findings highlight how digital media has facilitated the spread and production of propaganda, with significant implications for democracy in Southeast Asia.



Gareth Wall

Gareth has over a decade of experience in international local government. He worked for the Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2011-19 where he led on knowledge exchange across the membership of national associations of - and ministries responsible for - local government, and networking academics working on local public administration. For the past five years, he has worked in UK local government, and has recently started a consultancy with UN Women, around SDG 5.5.1b on local elected women's representatives. He recently completed his PhD on deliberative democracy and human development at the local level, at the University of Birmingham and has published on the role of local government in post conflict environments.

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Abstract: Decentralisation as a post-conflict state-building strategy: lessons for Kosovo, Ukraine and Palestine

When mandated through peace processes and supported through devolution, the empowerment of post-conflict diverse communities has the potential to deescalate community tensions and promote cohesion following the cessation of armed conflict (Jackson and Scott 2007, Brinkerhoff and Johnson 2009, Jackson and Wall 2020, Wolff et al 2020). Drawing on lessons from recent conflicts including Sierra Leone, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Colombia, and Northern Ireland, this paper will outline advocacy strategies for national and international networks of local authorities around the role of local government in securing and promoting peace in Northern Kosovo, Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, and Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine. Using Jean-Paul Faguet (et al 2015)'s work on decentralisation as deeper and more supple democracy, this paper will show how a nuanced understanding of the local social dynamics coupled with decentralised local government and inclusive and meaningful truth and reconciliation processes can avoid which termed incongruent federalism (cf Lijphart 1999), risking a fall back in conflict and heightened risk of separatism.



Mashood Omotosho

Mashood Omotosho is a Professor of International Relations at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He was a visiting fellow at the Department of Political Science, University of Florida, USA. He has gained external recognition by winning academic fellowship at the highly regarded Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Senegal. He also participated in the American Black History in Tacachale Centre, Gainesville, FL USA. He has won a research grant from Institute of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. He is a Country Expert with V-Dem, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. A Convener of a workshop on “Women’s Rights in Islam sponsored by the Institute of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK. He has attended many local and International conferences.

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Abstract: Strengthening the People’s Capabilities Towards Local Democracy in Zazzau Emirate in Northern Nigeria

This paper x-rayed how the Local Government in the Zazzau emirate induced the local citizen participation and offers a model for designing collaborative decision-making processes towards entrenching democratic tenets at the grassroots. A review of the valuation of the local tier of government in the delivering practical choices for enhancing local elections, representative democracy through electoral rules and building of local democracy anew. Within the contemporary democratic local governments, there is a dramatic stimulation and emphasis on local democracy around the world. This transformed interest has arisen for many different reasons, for instance, the new social pressures emanating from the influences of globalization, urbanization, and increasing human migration. Since inception of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, the Local Government administrators in the Zazzau emirate, have mapped out strategies to ensure maximum participation and involvement of the people at the grassroots in local democracy and development. However, can the local administrators at the Local Government Council influence the local people’s participation and involvement in promoting democratic proficiencies at the local level? How can the Local Government serve as an essential tool for ensuring effective democracy and development at the grassroots level? To what extent has the ruling aristocracy at the Zazzau emirate affect the democratic tenets at the grassroots? How has the representative deployed under the Zazzau oligarchy enhance local democracy? Inter alia, these are some of the nagging questions that this study interrogated.



Nenad Grsic

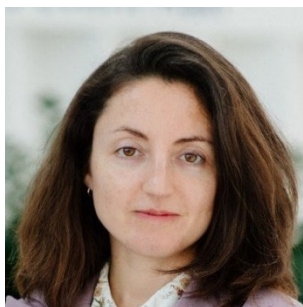
Nenad Grsic is an experienced project manager at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Office in Belgrade. He has a demonstrated history of leading initiatives related to parliamentary development, good governance, decentralization, and democracy-building. He holds a JD in comparative constitution-building from the University of Belgrade. He has completed several specialized training programs and conducted research in conflict analysis, constitution-making, and decentralized governance. His primary research and professional interests include ethnic federalism, multilevel governance, and devolution as tools for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding.

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Abstract: The Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities in Kosovo:
Between Innovative Local Governance and Territorial Autonomy

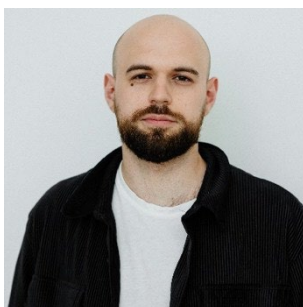
Since the end of the 1999 war, Serb-dominated areas in Kosovo had been refusing to accept Pristina's authority, heavily relying on Belgrade-controlled parallel institutions. The idea of setting up the Association/Community has arisen as a compromise solution to rearrange remaining Serbian institutions by integrating them into Kosovo's administrative system. Nevertheless, a dispute over the nature of the proposed entity has further ignited the mistrust between the two communities. Constructive ambiguity of the signed agreements took a destructive turn, with the Serbian side insisting on genuine self-governance and autonomy, while Pristina refusing to acknowledge nothing more than a limited inter-municipal cooperation. Divergent views on the scope and nature of the powers of the proposed Association are making a compelling framework for examining a dilemma on political decentralization as an efficient tool for mitigating an ethnic conflict. At the heart of this discourse are local governments and their essential role in service delivery.



Oleksandra Keudel

Oleksandra Keudel is an Associate Professor at the Kyiv School of Economics. She studies democratic transformation and societal resilience in hybrid regimes, specializing in Ukraine's sub-national politics. She combines academic research with policy consulting on open government and public integrity for international organizations, such as the EU, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and IIEP-UNESCO. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin and has been a visiting researcher at George Washington University, NYU, and Södertörn University.

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Andrii Darkovich

Andrii Darkovich is a researcher at the Center for Sociological Research, Decentralization, and Regional Development at the Kyiv School of Economics Institute. His work focuses on state-society relations in Ukraine, including local democracy, cooperation between local self-governments and various actors, community resilience, and local elections. Andrii holds a Master's degree in Public Policy and Governance from the Kyiv School of Economics. He is also a researcher in the ICLD project in Ukraine "Local Democracy and Resilience in Ukraine: Learning from Communities' Crisis Response in War".

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Abstract: Local Democracy and Resilience in Ukraine: Learning from Communities' Crisis Response in War

Amidst the devastating impact of the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine has retained its sovereignty. Enabled by decentralization reforms from 2015-2020, local self-governance bodies have played a crucial role in Ukraine's resilience, offering essential services and backing defense efforts. This phenomenon is puzzling in light of conflicting evidence about crisis management in decentralized states. This paper aims to comprehend the relationship between local self-governance and democratic resilience, spotlighting participation, equity, transparency, and accountability as factors influencing conflict resilience on the local level. While employing a mixed-methods approach, the study involves quantitative analysis of original local authority surveys and qualitative analysis of online interviews and focus group insights. By building upon prior surveys conducted in the pre-war time in 2021 and in the first year of the full-scale invasion in 2022, this paper uniquely tracks the evolution of local democracy's role in resilience.

Gender Equality

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments play in promoting gender equality. ICLD will soon provide support to local governments in Colombia and Guatemala with projects that focus on maternal health, urban planning, and inclusion of indigenous women in local decision-making.

Session leaders



Winnie Mitullah

Director and Associate Research Professor of Development Studies at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), and the Director of Gender Affairs, University of Nairobi

Winnie is the current Director and Associate Research Professor of Development Studies at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), and the Director of Gender Affairs, University of Nairobi. She holds a PhD in Political Science and Public Administration from the University of York, UK. Her PhD thesis was on Urban Housing, with a major focus on policies relating to low-income housing. Winnie is also a well-cited scholar with a long list of relevant publications related to local governance, democracy and urban marginalised groups. She is also the chair of the University of Nairobi UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks.

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Ana Maria Vargas

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Ana Maria is a scholar in the field of international development, passionate about social justice and understanding social change. She has a PhD in sociology of law from Lund University and the University of Milan. Her research focuses on the relationship between the law and everyday citizens, mostly in informal settlements and the informal economy, with a particular interest in what everyday forms of resistance tell us about local governance, state legitimacy and the role of the law. She is passionate about connecting research and practice to create impact, and joins the Academy as the previous Research Director of the Knowledge Centre at ICLD

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Participants



Romina Rodela

Romina Rodela, Ph.D., is a Senior Researcher conducting interdisciplinary research at Södertörn University (Sweden). She has a special interest for the study of urban governance and in her work she focuses on questions around equity, justice, and novel participatory approaches in local contexts. Currently, she is researching the engagement and participation of underrepresented groups in urban planning and governance. She is the research coordinator of the Urban Hub at the Eco Justice Research Platform at Södertörn University.

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Abstract: The prospect of a care-informed spatial planning in the Swedish context

This paper seeks to reflect on the way an ethics of care analytical focus could support spatial planning and what type of novel opportunities this framework could offer in re-shaped relationships between communities and those who make decisions. Additionally, we will delve into the concept of power as it relates to the types of relationships fostered through participatory planning, highlighting how an ethics of care framework can enhance our understanding of these dynamics.

By grounding our analysis in the ethics of care, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relational and ethical dimensions of participatory planning. It seeks to highlight the potential of this approach to not only improve planning outcomes but also to foster more equitable and compassionate relationships between all stakeholders involved in the creation and management of our shared urban spaces.



Marsela Dauti

Marsela Dauti is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Tirana. Dr. Dauti's research examines how democratization processes unfold at the community level, focusing on issues of political and social inclusion, democratic accountability, and government responsiveness. Before joining the University of Tirana, Dr. Dauti was a Marie Curie Fellow at the Department of Government at Uppsala University and an Associate Professor at the University of New York in Tirana. Dr. Dauti holds a PhD and an MSW from the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis.

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Abstract: Reversible gains: Democratic decline and the struggle for gender equality in local politics

Globally, women have entered local politics in large numbers. The implementation of gender equality reforms, such as electoral gender quotas, has changed the face of local politics. In this paper, I focus on women's political representation in the local councils of Albania following the implementation of 50/50 electoral gender quotas. Albania is one of the European countries with the highest proportion of women in local councils, and it is internationally recognized for championing women's participation in politics. I draw on three waves of data collected in local councils to examine women's demands for improved quality of government over a seven-year timespan. The study revealed that the gains observed in the early years of quota implementation have disappeared over time. Indeed, men have strengthened their position vis-à-vis women. Interviews with local councilors provide insights into the underlying mechanisms of change.



Clara Rocío Rodríguez Pico

Colombian researcher and professor at the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations (IEPRI) of the National University of Colombia, with background in Political Science and previous experiences working with NGOs and international cooperation. Published a series of academic and dissemination articles and books, related with her main topic of interest: representative and participatory democracy and its interrelationships. Presentation of papers in congresses and specialized gatherings. Eager to participate in international initiatives on topics such as political institutions and reforms; subnational policy; polarization; gender representation; reconciliation and peace building; direct democracy mechanisms; and citizen participation.

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Abstract: Political (under)representation of women in Colombian municipal councils. Are gender agenda and public policies possible without women in political decision-making

This paper analyzes the trends and patterns of women's representation in Colombian municipal councils in the subnational elections held in 2015 and 2019. To do so, the country's 1,101 municipalities were classified into nine categories of constituency sizes that move in the range between 7 seats as a minimum and 45 as a maximum. The study examines how the gender quota and other rules and designs of the Colombian electoral system affect women's interest in being elected, depending on the varying magnitudes of these constituencies. The results are related both to women political competition and to the outcomes reached by them. It is considered that descriptive gender representation, analyzed in this research, is essential as a prerequisite to ensure the adoption of a gender agenda and the formulation and implementation of public policies that include women's interests, which is understood as substantive gender representation.



Deodatus Patrick Shayo

Deodatus Patrick Shayo (PhD) is a senior lecturer and researcher in the Department of Economics and Social Studies, Ardhi University, Tanzania. He is a Coordinator for Inclusive Societal Outreach, African Centre for Sustainable Cities Studies, and Vice-Chair, International Political Science Association (IPSA), RC10 – Electronic Democracy. He holds a BA with Education and MA in Political Science and Public Administration both from the University of Dar es Salaam, and PhD in Political Science from Muenster University, Germany. His areas of research interests include: community-based crowdsourcing, inclusive digital governance, local democracy, digital politics and related aspects of sustainable digital communities.

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Abstract: Voices Against Violence: Documenting Local Community Voices Against “Mikopo Umiza” in the Selected Wards in Bagamoyo District Council in Tanzania

“Mikopo Umiza” in Swahili means “predatory loans” poses so many problems of gender-based violence at the local level. The loan entail high interest rates and unfair short term repayment terms which become a burden to the borrowers. This paper intends to: identify community groups mostly affected, analyze contributing factors to the prevalence of “mikopo umiza”, and examine socio-economic effects of “mikopo umiza”. The paper deploys qualitative approach using focus group discussions to collect data in Dunda, Magomeni and Nianjema wards in Bagamoyo. Data were collected March 2023 from men and women, young girls and boys. Findings show women and children are mostly affected, and traditional dance and hardship influenced the prevalence of “mikopo umiza”. Socio-economic effects of “mikopo umiza” namely family separation, divorce, sexual harassment, prostitution, confiscation of properties and men run away from home were reported. Collaborative efforts in monitoring and awareness creation about predatory loans are required.

Human Rights Cities

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments play in safeguarding and advancing human rights within their communities. ICLD is supporting local governments in Botswana, Zambia, and South Africa with projects focusing on gender equality, disability rights, and youth inclusion.

Session leader



Valeria Guarneros

Reader in Public Policy and Politics | Deputy Director, Centre for Urban Research on Austerity Department of Politics, People and Place, De Montfort University, UK

Valeria has a PhD in Public Policy (De Montfort University, UK). Currently, she is a visiting scholar at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield. Between 2014-2022 she was Reader in Public Policy and Politics, De Montfort University. Her research focus has been on local governance, citizen participation, collaboration, partnership working. She has been able to study these topics within the English and Welsh contexts and in Mexico and Latin America. She has done studies on the impact that structural economic changes and institutional socio-political reforms have on local governance. Also, democratic principles such as inclusion and accountability have been also an area of interest, particularly how these concepts and meanings affect the organisational structures of local government as well as the practices and behaviour of local government bureaucrats.

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Participants



Ester Barinaga

Ester Barinaga is Professor of Social Entrepreneurship at Lund University, School of Economics and Management. Her research focuses on concepts, strategies, methods and practices social entrepreneurs use to advance social change. The methods she uses are interventionist, actively taking part in the entrepreneurial processes she also studies. In the past, she founded Förrorten i Centrum, a social venture that used the collective production of mural art to work bottom-up with vulnerable communities. She leads the DANIDA-funded project “Grassroots Financial Innovations for Inclusive Economic Growth” in which a group of researchers from the Copenhagen Business School, Lund University, Gothenburg University (Sweden) and JOOUST University (Kenya) are working with local urban and rural communities to set up community currencies in Western Kenya. Her research has been published among others in *Urban Studies*, *Organization Studies*, *Geoforum*, *Human Relations*, *Urban Geography*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, and *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*. Her latest book – *Remaking money for a sustainable future: Money Commons* – was published in 2024 with Bristol University Press.

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Abstract: Digital municipal currencies as a policy instrument for counter-politics: The case of the State of Rio de Janeiro

Emerging from the citizen movements of the early 2010s, New Municipalism merges the administrative capacity of municipal government with the popular organisational capacities of activists and social movements to build more equal, democratic and ecological local economies. In these contexts, Digital Municipal Currencies (DMCs) emerge as potent instruments of counter-hegemonic struggle, enabling cities to implement welfare policies and local economic revitalisation. However, a trans-local paradox inheres to New Municipalism: how to remain local yet advance broader systemic transformation? This study compares six DMCs in Rio de Janeiro, addressing the paradox by introducing the notion of “standardised malleability.” It describes how cities adopt a uniform monetary infrastructure while adapting policies to local contexts, thus balancing local adaptation with trans-local scalability. Findings reveal DMCs as promising instruments for urban governance, enabling progressive policies amid financial constraints. However, their long-term viability depends on stable funding sources, prompting discussions on evolving DMC designs to enhance sustainability and wider adoption.



Fundiswa Khaile

Dr. Fundiswa Khaile is a senior lecturer at the School of Government, University of the Western Cape. She has published and presented her research locally and internationally, focusing on local government, social cohesion, and municipal accountability. In 2020, she was awarded a grant by the National Research Fund (Thuthuka). Dr. Khaile is an active member of the International Research Society for Public Management (IRSPM), the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM), and the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM). She also serves on various faculty committees, including Teaching and Learning, Assessment Committee, and the Think Tank on Teaching & Learning.

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Abstract: Exploring the Relationship Between Socio-spatial Injustice and Social Cohesion in South African Cities

The reality of the untransformed socio-spatial division and dynamics of South Africa continues to produce disturbing social injustice in communities. Spatial injustice in South Africa is an undeniable reality. There is an observable unanimity among authors that the persistent spatial legacy of apartheid remains visible and untransformed. Quite notably, the failed spatial transformation has exacerbated pervasive inequality, which divides rather than unites communities in us and them". Various authors have highlighted that municipalities have failed to overcome historical exclusions and divisions as reinforced by the apartheid spatial divide and its related urban geography. Equally, the literature indicates that the persistent apartheid spatial divide and its related urban geography have resulted in pervasive spatial fragmentation; exacerbated social polarisation, weak social relations, conflict, mistrust, and marginalisation. Therefore, the constitutionally envisioned ideals of society reflecting collective identity, recognition, and belonging have remained disappointingly elusive. The transformation, as envisaged by the Municipal Demarcation Act No. 27 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a), managed to amalgamate previous racially-based municipalities. However, the demarcation process has not adequately addressed the problem of spatial segregation. It has therefore remained unclear how socio-spatial injustice in South African cities impacts the possibilities for fostering social cohesion. This paper will explore this relationship to develop an understanding of the issues impacting the development of cohesive South African society. The researcher utilised a desktop approach to illustrate the extent of the problem to understand some of the key challenges and provided recommendations. The study found that areas characterized by high levels of socio-spatial injustice often experience lower levels of social trust and civic engagement. This finding is supported by a study by Laurence (2017), who found that individuals living in more deprived neighborhoods reported lower levels of social cohesion and were less likely to participate in community activities.



Khulekani Moyo

Khulekani Moyo is a senior lecturer at Wits Law School, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and a former Head of Research at the South African Human Rights Commission. Khulekani teaches international human rights and advanced international law at the postgraduate level and administrative law at the undergraduate level. He holds a doctoral degree in Public Law (Stellenbosch); LLM (Oslo, Norway); LLB (Hons)(UZ). Khulekani also holds two diplomas in the International Protection of Human Rights and the Justiciability of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from Åbo Akademi University in Finland.

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Abstract: Study on Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: The case of Mogale City Local Municipality

In South Africa, the local government structure underwent a major metamorphosis since the adoption of the 1996 Constitution (Constitution) that brought about far-reaching changes and heralded what is generally referred to as developmental local government. The effect of the 1996 constitutional dispensation was to herald fundamental normative and institutional reforms that transformed the structures of local government in South Africa. Professor Oliver Fuo has noted that '[u]nlike in the past, local government now has a developmental mandate that transcends service delivery.' The 1998 White Paper on Local Government conceives of developmental local government as a 'system of local government committed to working with the community to create sustainable human settlements which provide for a decent quality of life and meet the social, economic and material needs of communities in a holistic way'. Scholars Annette Christmas and Jaap de Visser have pointed out that of all the spheres of government in South Africa, 'local government arguably has the most immediate developmental mandate to realise the ideal physical environment for the communities it serves.' South African municipalities, as a result, have been constitutionally mandated to perform a multiplicity of functions, including, among others, management and delivery of basics goods and services such as water, electricity, housing and sanitation.

The Constitution provides for three distinctive, interdependent and interrelated spheres of government in South Africa. These are a national government, nine provincial governments, and a local government. This constitutional architecture enjoins the multi-sphere governance structure to work in coherent system of government, referred to as co-operative government. Importantly, this decentralised governance model assigns specific powers and functions to each sphere of government, which are enjoined to work together 'to secure the well-being of the people of the Republic'.

Section 152 of the Constitution provides for the objects of local government. These include, among others, a) to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; b) to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; c) to promote social

and economic development; d) to promote a safe and healthy environment; and e) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. Section 152 of the Constitution is further augmented by section 195 of the Constitution, which provides for the Batho Phele or 'people first' principles. The governance philosophy of Batho Phele is the impetus of all government action, and local government in particular has arguably the most immediate developmental mandate. Key among the Batho Phele principles is that public administration must be development-orientated, promote sustainable use of resources and that services must be provided 'impartially, fairly equitably and without bias'. Of particular significance is that section 195 enjoins community involvement and participation in local governance and policy making.



Yency Contreras Ortiz

Associate Professor of the Institute of Urban Studies at the National University of Colombia (UNAL). Associate Researcher Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Political scientist, Doctor in Urban and Environmental Studies and specialization and master's degree in Regional Development Planning and Administration. Coordinator of the Urban Government Observatory and of the Institute of Urban Studies – UNAL. Under Secretary of Planning and Policy at District Hábitat Secretariat in Bogotá (2012-2014). Interdisciplinary work in analysis, preparation and evaluation of development and territorial planning plans and programs.

Investigation. Local governments, planning and territorial ordering, decentralization, urban policies and management, specifically in land management, housing and habitat issues. Consulting and research work in public policy analysis, urban planning, planning instruments, land management and financing of urban development in Colombia and Latin America.

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Abstract: The right to adequate housing in Latin America: the role of local governments through public policies

The right to adequate housing was recognized as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966. Despite this, in Latin American cities a significant number of families live in informal settlements or inadequate housing with limited access to basic services; in addition, although there is a wide supply of new social housing produced by the market, the housing deficit is not being reduced.

Within the framework of the democratization and decentralization process of the late eighties of the twentieth century, the opening of political competition was promoted, and at the same time, competencies and resources for the provision of public services and the improvement of living conditions of their inhabitants were assigned to local governments.

Today, several decades later, local governments have important experiences and challenges in terms of social housing policies within the framework of the SDGs (Goal 11). However, although formally there are regulations that requiring the State to guarantee this right, there are still limitations for lower-income households.

Child and Youth Inclusion

This thematic group focuses on the role that local governments play in including children and youth in decision-making that affects their futures. ICLD is supporting local governments in southern and eastern Africa with projects on youth and children participation, education, and sustainability.

Session leader



Quinton Mayne

Director of Research, Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA

Quinton's research interests include comparative political behavior, democratic representation, subnational and urban politics, and social policy. He earned his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University.

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Jua Cilliers

Jua Cilliers is the Head of the School of Built Environment, and Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. She is the President of the Commonwealth Association of Planners and has over two decades experience as Professional Urban Planner, with professional registrations from both the South African Council for Planners and the Planning Institute of Australia. With experience as chief investigator across Africa, Europe and Australia, Jua is unwaveringly committed to driving real change, shaping the future of our cities, and empowering the leaders who will inherit them.

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Participants



Lynne Cairns

Lynne Cairns is a Social Worker and PhD Researcher in the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) at Durham University, UK. Lynne has been a Social Worker in Scotland for 24 years with children, young people and their families who have experienced abuse, adversity and/or harm. Lynne's PhD explores everyday life with teenage boys who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour to learn about social, spatial and contextual dynamics of safety and risk. Lynne is particularly interested in participatory, place based and preventative understandings of abuse and harm and how systems and structures can help or hinder safety and wellbeing. Lynne is also a member of (ICLD) international, interdisciplinary working group around child focussed cities.

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Abstract: Participation, Protection and Porcupines: towards the inclusion of lesser heard young voices

The philosopher Schopenhauer described the porcupine's dilemma of yearning for closeness but then proximity would spark their sharp quills forcing them apart. The porcupine's dilemma offers a metaphor illuminating the interplay between participation and protection rights of youth who are marginalized, problematized and considered 'hard to reach'. The dynamic interplay between seemingly indivisible rights to protection and participation bring them into contact, at times conflict, with one another. Participation rights are regarded as the means through other rights are made 'real' - yet protection rights can become barriers to the participation of youth around sensitive issues such as violence and abuse. I argue that participation of lesser heard perspectives can uphold the rights of youth and develop new insights through lived experience. More simply, participation as a means of protection. Drawing on my PhD engaging adolescent boys who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB), rarely 'heard' in research, I will explore ways in which I balanced participation and protection through rights-respecting and child sensitive design and methods. This included safe and sensitive research protocols and development of a 'research toolbox' to support marginalized boys to share what they wanted, the way they wanted to. I will then reflect upon a key findings around social and spatial dynamics of safety and contextual risk in 'public spaces'. This will illustrate how participation became a means of enhancing protection rights by creating new insights into local, place-based violence prevention efforts and contextually sensitive approaches to complex issues around youth violence, abuse and harm.



Rejoice Katsidzira

Rejoice Shamiso Katsidzira is a Zimbabwean lawyer currently pursuing doctoral studies at the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, in South Africa. Her study is on Law and Policy Interventions towards Ending Child Sexual Exploitation Against Boys in South Africa. Rejoice is an emerging researcher with interests in Governance, Environmental and Child Law. She has recently published work and co-authored an article on "The Role of Cities in Ending Violence Against Children in South Africa".

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Abstract: Under the Cultural-rug: The Invisibility of boys within Child Sexual Exploitation contexts in South Africa

This paper investigates the role of gender and culture in perpetuating or addressing child sexual exploitation against boys in South Africa. The investigation is from a legal perspective as the paper analyses how South African laws and policies protect and eliminate child sexual exploitation against boys in the face indigenous cultural and gender norms. This is drawn from misguided, gendered misinformation that deems boys only as the offenders and not victims or survivors. Notably, the study unpacks that boys are usually invisibilized in child sexual exploitation matters because of religious and socio-cultural setups which magnify the voices and experiences of girls over boys. The paper does not make a comparison between girls and boys, as rights violation impacts children the same; yet this paper elevates the issue of protecting boys in the context of exploitation behind the backdrop of gendered cultural norms. To fulfil the aims of this study, firstly the paper provides a background of child sexual exploitation in South Africa and the definition of the concept thereof. Secondly, the study unpacks how gender and cultural practices are interlinked to the perpetuation of child sexual exploitation. Finally the paper unravels how child sexual exploitation fits into the South African legal system with references to legislation such as the Constitution, the Children's Act and Child Justice act amongst others. The research paper adopts a desktop study using literature review of primary and secondary sources including international, regional and domestic law, as well as scholarly journal articles, books and court cases.



Uttam Uprety

Uttam Uprety, PhD, is a seasoned development professional. His expertise lies in monitoring, evaluation, learning, and knowledge management, with extensive experience working with USAID/Nepal and various donor-funded governance projects. In addition, he is a visiting faculty with Kathmandu University School of Education, where he teaches Participatory Approach in Development for Master's degree students and Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation for MPhil students. Dr. Uprety has been instrumental in enhancing the organizational and individual capacities of civil society organizations, government entities, and donor partners. He has also been advocating for civic space, human rights, and participatory approaches to development.

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Abstract: Challenges of Children and Youth Participation in Democratic Governance: Experiences from Madhesh Pradesh of Nepal

This study explores the challenges and opportunities for children and youth participation in democratic governance in Madhesh Province, Nepal. Through Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the research highlights the multifaceted nature of youth participation, influenced by personal, social, and cultural contexts. Findings indicate that while participation is seen as a developmental and leadership opportunity, it faces significant barriers, including socio-economic disparities, political instability, and cultural constraints. The traditional family hierarchy and societal expectations further limit active engagement. Despite efforts to create conducive legal frameworks by local governments and civil society organizations, genuine and effective participation remains limited. To enhance youth involvement, the study suggests addressing socio-economic disparities, institutionalizing youth representation in decision-making processes, and raising awareness about the importance of participation. Creating supportive environments and integrating economic empowerment, policy support, and community sensitization are essential for fostering a culture of active and meaningful participation among children and youth in Madhesh Province. This research emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to promote inclusive and impactful youth participation in democratic governance.



Channel Zhou

Channel Zhou is a senior educator and researcher at Boston City Campus Head Office in Stellenbosch, South Africa. His research interests are in the areas of ICT4D covering civic tech, digital citizen engagement, and social accountability monitoring. He holds a Master of Science degree in Computing and is a PhD Information Systems candidate at Rhodes University in South Africa. Email: channel.zhou@gmail.com / ChannelZ@boston.co.za WhatsApp: +27 81 331 8323

Abstract: Navigating Power Shifts: Unpacking Stakeholder Influence in Local Government Digital Transformation - A Case of Pemba Town Council.

The use of digital initiatives in service delivery is no longer a new phenomenon in Africa. The role of digital tools in promoting participation and inclusion cannot be understated. In Zambia, digital tools have been used by the government, the private sector, and non-governmental organisations to enhance service delivery and reach, support advocacy, foster social accountability monitoring, and promote social inclusion and collective decision-making. The high percentages of the young population, coupled with their technology savviness, are challenging local governments to embrace digital tools to promote digital local democracy, where digital tools are used to bridge the gaps that traditional communication channels and service delivery methods have failed to close. Pemba Town Council is one of the local governments in Zambia, making strides to embrace digital solutions to enhance and modernise service delivery and promote youth inclusion and participation. However, the rolling out of digital initiatives comes with its own dynamics – particularly the emergence of power tensions and shifts, which potentially influence the adoption, implementation, management, and maturity of such initiatives. Applying the Powercube framework, this paper explores the power dynamics that emerge due to the digitalisation drive. The influence exerted by different actors within the local government ecosystem is of particular interest, as how they interact and influence change and how they are affected by the power dynamics.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)



Adrià Duarte

Coordinator of the Technical Secretariat of International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD)

Adrià Duarte is the coordinator of the IOPD Technical Secretariat. His work is focused on the local democracy improvement and consolidation through citizen participation innovations.