









Decentralised community governance

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- Create institutions of direct participation We need to create and strengthen institutions
  of direct participation so that it influences representative institutions to build a relationship
  of trust for the women, poor, and the marginalised.
- Equip groups to understand power relations We need to equip the marginalised communities to use the tools of social accountability to understand power relations in participative institutions.
- **Develop the capacities of women** We need to develop the capabilities of women and demonstrate their leadership on how they run their institutions as a self-reliant organisation.
- Create an understanding of subsidiarity We need to understand subsidiarity in the
  institutional design process so that elements of direct participation and accountability
  become a part of the design of the local governance structures.
- Experiential learning and capacity building of institutions Learning and sharing from
  one's experiences, building the capacities of the community organisation, and being
  enablers and facilitators of the people's organisation are important to support the
  movement of participation



Padma Shri Aloysius Prakash Fernandez, Member Secretary, MYRADA, Karnataka, is popularly known as the father of the SHG movement which emerged around 1985 when the Cooperative Societies that MYRADA was working with broke up. He pioneered the Self-Help Affinity Group (SAG) movement in 1986 and promoted it with the active support of NABARD, which started the SHG-Bank Linkage Program in 1992. He was awarded the Padma Shree in 2000 and received the Caritas Millennium Award in the same year.

**Ms. Carmen Malena**, Consultant, World Bank, is a political economist with special interest in the areas of social accountability, participatory governance, civil society and active citizenship. For close to 30 years, she has worked as a development theorist, practitioner, researcher, writer, educator and facilitator in 30+ countries. she's an Associate of the Coady International Institute (Canada), and collaborates regularly with numerous NGOs, foundations, development agencies and governments.





**Mr. Balasubramanian (Balu) lyer,** Administrator, ICA Domus Trust, India, brings strong management and operational credentials in strategic planning, budgeting, performance assessment, compliance, and audit to the job. His project experience across Asia extends in the areas of co-operatives, business associations, water, food-security, women's empowerment, and economic development. ICA is the apex organization for co-operatives worldwide that advances the co-operative social enterprise model and provides a global voice and forum for co-operatives

**Mr. N Vashi**, Managing Director, VALSAD Dairy, has over 60 years of experience in this sector. VALSAD district cooperative milk producers' union limited has been registered in 1973 under the cooperative society at government of Gujarat and initiated Dairy Development Activities on ANAND Pattern since 1975. Vasudhara grew from strength to strength and had today, organization stands tall for its pioneering concepts in Rural Dairying as well as Clean Milk Production drive, offering remunerative prices to milk producers.





**Mr. C.S. Reddy**, Founder CEO of APMAS, has over 30 years of experience in the development sector, particularly in the microfinance and livelihood sectors focusing on community-based model of microfinance and livelihoods. Mr. Reddy is providing leadership in promoting self-regulation of SHGs & SHG federations, promotion of farmer producer organizations (FPOs) as viable business entities engaged in agriculture value-chains and facilitating Government – NGO collaboration to maximize impact.



**Mr. Liby Johnson** is the Executive Director of Gram Vikas in Odisha State of India. He has led large scale, impactful, poverty eradication efforts in his 25+ years of social development work, with non-profits and government. His multisectoral experience spans water, sanitation, livelihoods, disaster management and community institutions. Liby regularly contributes to policy making in rural drinking water and sanitation and livelihoods sectors, at the National and State levels.

**Mr. Mahendra Singh Kunwar** is the Executive Director, Himalayan Action Research Centre. Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC) is an autonomous voluntary development organization, which aims to help the mountain people by working for their holistic, integrated and sustainable development based on the indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and local resources. HARC has conducted planning, monitoring, micro planning, trainings, different studies and surveys





**Dr. Rajesh Tandon,** Founder President, Participatory Research in Asia, India, is currently a UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education. He serves as chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) network, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide to further community-based research

**Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay** is the Director of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India. For more than 30 years he has been working on citizen participation in urban and rural contexts. He is an internationally acclaimed researcher, trainer, and facilitator of organisation development and participatory planning, monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment. Currently, he is the Co-Coordinator of Asia Democracy Research Networks (ADRN) and serves on the Governing Council of Asia Democracy Network (ADN).



# CONVERSATION (SAMVAD) 山 工 L

As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years, it recommits to continue institutional strengthening and capacity development support to civil society and non-profits with a special focus on new-generation civil society and non-profit groups. Between August and December 2021, PRIA will be convening <a href="mailto:PRIA@40 Conversations">PRIA@40 Conversations</a> with partners, associates, supporters, experts, investors and colleagues, drawn from civil society, government, business, media and academia, to share ideas and experiences that can help 're-imagine' PRIA, its interventions and the world in the coming period.

In this context, PRIA co-convened a conversation (samvad) on <u>Participation</u>, <u>Representation</u> & <u>Accountability: Strengthening the Movement</u> in partnership with <u>APMAS (Hyderabad)</u> and <u>International Cooperative Alliance Domus Trust (India)</u> on 17th November, 2021. The conversation was held virtually and was attended by 63 participants. The session was moderated by **Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay** (Director, PRIA).

The conversation began with a short presentation by **Mr. S. Ram Aravind** (Program Officer, PRIA) on PRIA's journey of the past four decades – a journey about sustaining an independent forward-looking and energetic civil society organisation in an otherwise rapidly disruptive and uncertain world. PRIA believes in supporting individuals, organisations, grassroots initiatives to learn, change, grow and sustain themselves. PRIA's support has been in the form of sharing information and ideas, generating new knowledge building linkages and relationships, providing intermediation expertise, and at times emotional support.

Mr. Aravind also spoke on PRIA's work on the theme of <a href="Decentralised Community Governance">Decentralised Community Governance</a>. PRIA's work on popular participation, collective mobilisation and strong organisation of the poor has gradually been integrated in many development programmes – nationally and globally. There was a need to collectivise as a union to challenge discrimination, oppression and exclusion from access to basic rights and resources. Community participation was enabled through community-based organisations to enable greater access to development resources. While the early impetus to cooperatives as a form of the economic organisation began to lose credibility as the ownership of operators declined due to external control. Collective mechanisms of organising began to lose their sense of representative accountability to their constituencies. The downward accountability of the elected councillors to their constituencies did not materialise adequately. It was observed that leadership within CBOs, as well as local government, was not always accountable to their constituents. <a href="Read more...">Read more...</a>

In this context, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** introduced the focus questions for the discussion, which are as follows:

- What lessons can be drawn from past practices and innovations in fostering direct participation and governance of development programmes for and of the vulnerable and marginalised households?
- What strategies can be built-in large-scale programmes (both public and private) to enable participation and representation, to remain mutually accountable and vibrant for the long-term health of such enterprises?

Next Dr. Bandyopadhyay invited **Padma Shri Aloysius Prakash Fernandez** (Member Secretary, MYRADA, Karnataka) and **Ms. Carmen Malena** (Consultant, World Bank) to set the stage for the conversation (samvad).

'Participation and PRIA have been synonymous', said Mr. Fernandez. There are different interpretations of participation and participative institutions. It was in 1992 that the local government bodies were recognised constitutionally. The Government of India incorporated two institutions – the Panchayati Raj Institution of Governance and the co-operative structure for development. Reflecting on his experience of working with the co-operatives, specifically the Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), he said that the higher officials in the PACS were people belonging to rich and upper-caste families. As a result, there were inbuilt mechanisms that further strengthened this power relationship within structured society. Alternatively, a credit management group was formed in which 10-15 people came together and they had put the money in a group account and used it as savings. This group was constituted by the poor people; as a result, there was homogeneity in economic status. They were also bound by some relations of affinity, trust and mutual support. This was the strength of traditional society and the basis of effective participation. These groups later came to be known as the Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

If an institution comprises the rich and the poor, the upper caste and the lower caste, men and hardly any women, then it is structured traditional society. The structure of the society dominates the co-operative system, especially when credit is concerned. The major roadblock is the caste and power dynamics due to which the people crafted their institution where they were the stakeholders and were linked by the trust. If we want to work with the women, poor and marginalised, we have to have institutions of direct participation that are economically homogeneous. We need to strengthen direct participative institutions to influence representative institutions like panchayats & create a level playing field.

# "participation and the institutions that promote participation imply a level of plurality, diversity and local governance"

**Ms. Carmen Malena** (Consultant, World Bank) shared lessons based on her experience of supporting participatory governance initiatives in different parts of the world from the grassroots and up to the national and international level. She emphasised on the importance of the 'P' word i.e., *power*. Anyone interested in working on participation, representation and accountability is essentially concerned with how to make sure that people with more power are listening and responding to people with less power. However, the key question is the same at the international, national, or local level i.e., who holds the power and who doesn't? What are the sources of that power or the lack of it? What are we doing and what can we do to manage those power relations to level the playing field, especially for the more vulnerable and marginalised groups?

One needs to develop institutional and individual capacities to analyse power relations. This analysis must inform policies and practices that can seek to promote justice and effectiveness, despite the inevitable power inequities. This requires collective brainstorm and the creation of a visual map of key stakeholders as well as the power relations between them. Some brilliant tools and resources that are available to us, as practitioners, such as the *Power Cube* developed by Prof. John Gaventa and others at IDS, to help us do a more in-depth analysis of power relations and/ or to identify and analyse the various intersecting factors that are also influencing the power relations of the various members and stakeholders.

Looking at these themes of participation, representation and accountability through a power lens, the critical importance of the accountability element becomes clear. Participation is a very general term that says little about the level of involvement or influence of participants. But accountability, on the other hand, clearly defines the nature of the relationship, the terms of engagement, the rights and responsibilities between different parties, etc. When we introduce the concept of downward accountability, we acknowledge that those who hold

power as duty bearers and those with less power are not just members or beneficiaries but are rights holders. In this sense, affirming and operationalising accountability of duty bearers to rights holders become a highly empowering act in itself. Accountability and empowerment are two sides of the same coin. Achieving that downward accountability requires both – the supply side and demand side efforts. We need to educate and mobilise rights holders to be able to claim their rights and also be aware of the responsiveness and accountability of those duty bearers.

We have an incredibly rich global tool kit for participatory governance and social accountability practices. She re-affirmed **Mr. Fernandez's** comment that most of the innovation and learning of participatory governance has really originated from the global south and subsequently been adopted and adapted by developed countries. For example, participatory budgeting was initiated in Brazil before it was adopted around the world. Community scorecards which are now used in dozens of countries were originally applied in Malawi. India has been a global leader in participatory governance and social accountability practices pioneering other foundational practices like social audits and citizen report cards that are now used around the world.

"accountability of duty bearers in participative institutions is very important; equip members to understand the power dynamics and how to deal with it"

Moving on to the next segment of the conversation (samvad), **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** requested the panellists to deliberate on the focus questions of the discussion.

**Mr. Balasubramanian lyer** (Administrator, ICA Domus Trust, India) reiterated **Mr. Fernandez's** comment – *co-operatives are not bad.* It is not essentially the structure of cooperatives but the heterogeneous society in which it exists that becomes a challenge. Thus, it is, important to educate the members of the co-operatives, the board and the policymakers because they need to collectively manage the co-operatives, through democratic arrangements, in which the individuals have the right to information and representation. 2012 was declared as the International Year of Co-operatives by the United Nations and the ICA Domus Trust came out with a blueprint for co-operatives, where members are kept at the centre to make it an inclusive structure.

In the presence of external control by the government, the co-operatives do not function to the extent that they should be functioning. Also, for the co-operatives to function effectively, the composition and behaviour of the board becomes critical. Thus, our strategy should acknowledge the fact that the board needs to be strengthened and educated about inclusionary practices. It is important that the board actively engages with each of its members. Our focus should be on educating and training the board and the staff about the rights and responsibilities. Thus, imparting education becomes crucial.

### "for co-operatives to work, keep the members at the centre"

**Mr. N. Vashi** (Managing Director, VALSAD Dairy) shared his experience of working with VALSAD dairy since 1976. The district had no milk and 90% of the population was tribal with meagre resources. From his experience back then, he said, that Indian farmers were willing to produce anything if they were given a market for their product. Thus, he provided the farmers with a market by setting up a milk processing plant of 30,000 users' capacity. The milk was then brokered and marketed in and around the towns. Farmers and their families, including children, were educated about animal husbandry practices. Gradually they started organising co-operatives and eventually, milk co-operatives became a success.

Currently, they are collecting around 8.5 Lakh litres of milk, manufacturing ice creams, ghee, curd, buttermilk, and so on. All these products are being prepared and marketed by the cooperatives. He concluded, 'The challenge is that, nowadays, the politician, the board of directors, the chairman are all interested in politics and not in the organisation'.

# "educating farmers about their duties, responsibilities and rights is crucial for successful co- operatives"

**Mr. Mahendra Singh Kunwar** (Executive Director, Himalayan Action Research Centre) said that Uttarakhand, the region where he comes from, is in difficult geographical terrain and the population is scanty. There is no volume in isolation; therefore, it is important to work with the collectives. Today, almost all government programmes use the co-operative approach. As a result, number of co-operatives has risen. However, owing to its scanty population, one individual is part of numerous co-operatives which leads to a lot of confusion. The number of the co-operatives going up is good, but their quality and effectiveness have not been at par. There is a lack of knowledge about the roles, responsibilities and accountability of the multiple stakeholders.

One of the reasons for the poor quality and ineffectiveness of co-operatives is that even though the planning at the top level is good, however, the tools of training and knowledge management at the implementation level is very poor. Thus, we need to ensure that the implementation is as good as the planning for the co-operative to be effective.

### "we need to maintain, capacitate and strengthen the existing co- operatives to ensure their effectiveness"

Drawing from his experience of working with the SHG movement in India, Mr. C. S. Reddy (Founder CEO, APMAS) said that one of the unique features of this movement has been that women have been at the centre stage. They demonstrated their leadership and paved the way forward for building self-reliant institutions. Endorsing Mr. Vashi's comment, he said that the SHG movement doesn't start with the federation or a superstructure, but it starts with 10-20 women coming together. It is a bottom-up structure. The most important thing for institutional development is capacity building. These bottom-up institutions, through the leadership of women as community resource persons and trainers, became a global approach for developing people's institutions. MYRADA is the pioneer of these institutions. A unique feature of the SHGs is that they are informal, small, nimble, localised and combine with the federation of SHGs at the village level or the cluster level. We need to maximise on the informal groups that are coming together into a formal entity. Co-operative participatory democratic institutions cannot be built only by the NGOs or civil society organisations, governments have a role to play. There will be a huge amount of vested interest interference and the women have learned to negotiate with these vested interest groups and manoeuvre through these dynamics.

Creating an enabling ecosystem is central to mainstreaming and upscaling participatory democratic institutions of women or of communities at large. These democratic institutions of women or communities must be recognised and given a seat at the table so that they can influence the policies that are made at the national and international levels. While civil society today is termed as anti-national, there is also a recognition that participatory institutions like the SHGs, federations of SHGs, farmers collectives, etc., are here to stay as participatory institutions that strengthen local democracy. They have the negotiating capability and the power to influence local decision-making.

## "in the SHG movement in India, women's membership & leadership have been at the centre stage"

Reflecting on his journey **Mr. Liby Johnson** (Executive Director, Gram Vikas) spoke about the different initiatives that his organisation undertook over the years. He said that Gram Vikas has been promoting village level institutions and committees that are inclusive of everybody in the village – the male and female heads of the household come together to form a gentle body from which an executive committee is elected to manage their water and sanitation work. Everybody in the village has to participate – physically, materially, and also in terms of decision making. In their early two decades of work, a substantial amount of community work was done in Adivasi areas where village-level heterogeneity was very limited.

Once these cooperatives started moving to Adivasi areas heterogeneous villages, multiple castes came into the picture bringing about 100% percent participation in decision making as well as in material development. They started working on an uncontested domain where contestation among people within the village was very limited. For instance, the need for drinking water is the same for everybody irrespective of their social or economic status. Unlike something like water for irrigation, where natural divisions within the village would automatically come to the forefront in the beginning. Thus, we used drinking water as an entry point for the development process of getting people to work together and practice working together towards a common good. This initial process of coming together and working into a direct democracy where everybody sits together and takes decisions has paved the way for new things to happen and had improved citizens' ability to engage with local governments substantially.

The biggest challenge today is that the institutional system designers are not giving adequate weightage to the subsidiarity of different people. Thus, we must reflect on how to create this understanding of subsidiarity in the institutional design process so that elements of direct participation and downward accountability become part of the design of the local governance structures.

## "create an understanding of subsidiarity as part of the design and structure of local governance institutions"

### Meet the panellists...



L to R: Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay, Mr. Mahendra Singh Kunwar, Mr. Narendra Vashi, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Mr. C.S. Reddy, Ms. Carmen Malena, Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Shri Aloysius Prakash Fernandez and Mr. Liby Johnson

# CONVERSATION (SAMVAD)

Moving on to the segment of deep-dive conversation, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** requested the panellists to deliberate on some of the strategies to enable participation and representation to strengthen the institutions.

'There must be collaboration amongst civil society organisations', said Mr. Reddy. We need to prioritise partnerships with organisations like PRIA, MYRADA and other such entities because we are stronger when we are together. Partnerships, collaborations and networking are extremely significant. It is also critically important to work with the state government, provincial government and national government in a constructive manner. In collaboration, we need to design a standard operating procedure that is participatory, responsible and accountable. This is central to the entire process of strengthening institutions. It is significant, people's institutions take responsibility for policy advocacy by forming their own federations at the state and the national level to represent the interest of the poor and the marginalised. It is critical to deepen democracy in the SHGs, federations of the SHGs, emerging farmer collectives, etc., through capacity building, capability development, mentoring and incubation. Superficial capacity building is not going to make a difference. Therefore, it must be continuous, context specific and based on the evolution of the institutions.

Reiterating **Mr. Johnson's** comment about building mechanisms for downward accountability into organisational structures, **Ms. Malena** said that it is significant to do so. It is important to develop service charters or social contracts that clearly define the rights and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. It is also important to institutionalise the practice of publicly reporting on our performance as organisations and it would apply equally to government and local governance institutions, cooperatives and others. We need to ensure that we are reporting to our rights holders and our constituencies on an ongoing basis. As this would take us a step closer to being more accountable.

Re-iterating **Mr. lyer's** and **Mr. Reddy's** comment on the composition and selection of board members and the importance of focussing on women, respectively, she said that we need to ensure that women have the space within the decision-making bodies of the institutions. It is, therefore, important that we ensure diversity and representation in our boards' members. We also need to encourage fluidity between the duty bearers and rights holders, even at the organisational level. For instance, regular renewal of board members would be desirable so that people can move between the positions of decision-making and authority. This could help in keeping relationships fresh and vibrant throughout the life of an organisation.

'We must reach out to and engage with the youth of the country in the process of strengthening the institutions', said **Mr. lyer.** They will bring on board new and creative ideas that will make a big difference going forward.

**Mr. Kunwar** said that we need to build a cadre of trainers who can enable the co-operatives to use their knowledge and play their role effectively. Organisations like PRIA, MYRADA and Gram Vikas can make this significant contribution by building the much-needed cadre of trainers.

Re- emphasising **Mr. Reddy's** comment on the need to collaborate with the government institutions, **Mr. Fernandez** said that this collaboration is critical if we aspire to scale on anything. India is such a diverse place, no one situation or solution fits everybody. Our strategies and approaches have to be context specific. In agreement with **Ms. Malena's** comment on power, he quoted **Dr. Robert Chamber**, 'we must hand over the stick of power'. He added that unfortunately the stick is never handed over. It has to be taken away and that

# CONVERSATION (SAMVAD)

is where power will be broken down. Capacity building is the need of the hour. But one needs to be mindful of the fact that capacity building of institutions is different from capacity building of individuals.

Later **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** invited **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder- President, PRIA) to share some key takeaways form the discussion.

In his closing remark, **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder President, PRIA) said, 'Experiential learning – learning from one's experience, and valuing the knowledge that one gains from experience was a methodology which was used to promote participatory training and learning'. Knowledge of experts is built on the experience and sharing this experience is not just individual learning, but social and collective learning. To make a collective or a small group effective, the theories and principles of a small group working, and small group facilitation is very critical. The community organisations also require organisational development and strengthening but they are under organised systems that need different types of intervention. The strategies for a bureaucracy or a state government have to be different from the strategies for community organisations. Implementation of these strategies of participatory institutions began much before the formal institutions of governance like panchayat and municipalities.

Our collective work in building these participatory institutions helped us to find a way to link participatory institutions of the people to the elected representative bodies which had a statutory character. Today, that linkage is much better in rural areas than the urban areas. The urban poor and the informal are the most vulnerable and they feel most exploited because their collective associations haven't been built in the same way as it is in rural and tribal areas.

We need to create a joint program of building capacity of animators, mobilisers, facilitators, the organiser who have the same competency set – helping people get together, listening to them, helping them talk to each other, helping them organise themselves and linking them to other institutions within the local area. Those skills are universal but not easily available.

When large-scale government programmes are launched, one ends up creating paper structures that are actually without soul, energy or vibration. India is a graveyard of millions of participatory institutions. Sensitisation of professionals to enable them to work with people's organisations, not as their bosses, but as their enablers and facilitators is very important. We not only need scaling up of products, but we also need scaling up of principles and methodology that are context-specific and not a mega model that is imposed from the top. We will be successful only when the approach is bottom-up which is built on existing relationships of trust and social capital.

"principles of participatory institutions can only work with investment in education and capacity building"

The conversation (samvad) ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay

### 5.00 pm to 5.10 pm

Welcome and Overview

Moderator - Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA, India

5.10 pm to 5.40 pm

Opening Comments - Setting the Stage

- Padma Shri Aloysius Prakash Fernandez, MYRADA, Karnataka
- Ms. Carmen Malena, World Bank

5.40 pm to 6.20 pm

Lessons drawn from best practices and innovations in fostering direct participation and governance (first round)

- Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, ICA Domus Trust, India
- Mr. N. Vashi, VALSAD Dairy
- Mr. CS Reddy, APMAS
- Mr. Mahendra Singh Kunwar, Himalayan Action Research Centre
- Mr. Liby Johnson, Gram Vikas

6.20 pm to 6.30 pm

Open Discussion/ QnA

6.30 pm to 6.50 pm

Deep Dive conversation (second round)

Strategies to enable participation and representation to remain mutually accountable and vibrant for the long-term health of such enterprises.

6:50 pm to 6.58 pm

Key Takeaways

Dr Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India

6:58 pm to 7.00 pm

Vote of Thanks and Closure

Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA, India

DATE	TITLE	THEME
12 August 2021	Youth Participation and Active Citizenship	Citizen Participation
20 August 2021	Planning for Urban Informalities	Sustainable Urban Future
31 August 2021	Accelerating Capacities in Civil Society and Non-Profits	Empowering Civil Society
2 September 2021	Nurturing Civil Society Partnerships in Uncertain Times	Empowering Civil Society
15 September 2021	Redesigning Civil Society Ecosystem: From Local to Global	Empowering Civil Society
28 September 2021	Unlearning Patriarchy: Expanding Impacts of Gender Training	Making the Gender Leap
30 September 2021	Investing in Civil Society Innovations	Empowering Civil Society
01 October 2021	Community-led Adaptations: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance
06 October 2021	Inspiring Leadership of Mayors and Councillors for Inclusive Urbanisation	Sustainable Urban Future
12 October 2021	Trajectories of Participation: From Development to Governance	Citizen Participation
20 October 2021	Scaling up Citizen Engagement for Inclusive Urban Governance	Sustainable Urban Future
01 November 2021	Gender Transformational Organisational Renewal: Towards Gender Equality	Making the Gender Leap
17 November 2021	Participation, Representation & Accountability: Strengthening the Movement	Decentralised Community Governance