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Can pro-poor organisational change be driven from above? Lessons from Costa Rica's Triangle of Solidarity

Harry Smith

Centre for Environment & Human Settlements, School the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University

Introduction

This paper analyses organisational aspects of the pro-poor Triangle of Solidarity initiative implemented in Costa Rica during 1998-2002. This government-led programme ostensibly tried to establish a participatory decision-making framework involving central government, local government and local communities in allocating and overseeing the use of public resources for urban and rural development at the local canton level. Implementation started in the officially most deprived cantons, but the programme was suspended before it had reached national coverage, had implemented most of the defined projects in a participatory manner, or had become established as a new mode of governance. Based on empirical research undertaken immediately following the programme's closure, this paper argues that a key factor contributing to its failure was the generalised lack of organisational change within the actors that participated in this initiative. Given its top-down and politicised nature, the response from those engaged by the process was extremely varied – ranging from grudgingly 'going through the motions' to initial enthusiasm followed by disillusionment – but rarely involved taking ownership or displaying full commitment that translated into consolidated changes in institutional practices and arrangements. The experience suggests that the kind of organisational change required to transform existing governance and resource-allocating structures affecting poor urban areas can only be brought about if there is bottom-up pressure that rises to meet such top-down initiatives, or that drives it in the first place.

The paper first briefly provides a reflection on the Habitat Agenda and subsequent exhortations surrounding pro-poor institutional arrangements and on their implications. It then provides a short background to the research on one of such pro-poor initiatives – the Triangle of Solidarity in Costa Rica – and the research methodology. This is followed by an analysis of the Triangle of Solidarity agenda, and a brief description of its outcomes. The paper then provides an analysis of the field data collected in this research, focusing on themes related to the organisations involved, their capacity and performance, and their relationships, leading finally to some conclusions.

The complexity of pro-poor organisational change

As noted in the outline of this workshop, the Habitat Agenda and other normative documents have identified a range of types of pro-poor policies to be adopted on land, housing and services provision. A key factor identified as necessary in their formulation, adoption and implementation is the need to recognise, identify and develop new roles in the various actors involved (state, private sector and civil society) and to foster institutional cooperation and partnership. The Habitat Agenda specifically identified governments as having the primary responsibility for implementing such agenda, through enabling wide-ranging and inclusive partnerships and establishing or improving national mechanisms to coordinate actions at various levels (UN, 1996).

Crucial to the implementation of pro-poor actions is therefore the institutional framework. From the perspective of new institutionalist analysis, this includes institutions as both organisational structures and mental models (Jenkins & Smith, 2001a). As organisational structures, change can involve alterations or transformations in existing organisations, or the creation of new organisations. In both cases a key determinant of the success of organisational change will be capacity, which is multi-dimensional. Referring to the capacity of state organisations, e.g., Grindle (1996) suggests four elements – institutional capacity, political capacity, administrative capacity and technical capacity¹ – which can be seen to be linked to the availability of a conducive legal/regulatory framework, effective power, an appropriate structure and adequate resources. These latter elements would also be key in determining the capacity of other types of organisation, such as within the private sector and civil society.

As important as organisational change (if not more) are changes in mental models, to which invariably organisations are linked. Thus, a major shift in the mental model of the state internationally in the last couple of decades has been from the state as provider to the state as enabler and partner. This new role, advocated in the Habitat Agenda and related documents, entails not only organisational changes, but also linked changes in perceptions and expectations. Such changes in perceptions can be highly contested, as is shown e.g. by the widespread and sometimes violent resistance in many Latin American countries to the privatisation of public utilities.

Organisations and their related mental models result in various types of relationship, which directly affect how actions (including pro-poor activities) are developed and implemented. Again Grindle (1996) identified roles of civil society in development primarily on the basis of their relationship with the state, including: opposition to the state; negotiation and bargaining with the state; substitution for the state; and disengagement from the state. The focus on partnerships highlights the importance of relationships, which can make or break identified actions, and which are far more complex in reality than is suggested in international policy documents, being affected by a range of factors including perceptions (i.e. the mental models themselves), communication, power, political and other agendas, and trust among others (see e.g. Wakely & Riley, 2003).

Understanding how pro-poor organisational change can be brought about therefore can benefit from an institutionalist perspective which considers changes in the organisations themselves, in the mental models they are linked to, and in the relationships

¹ An analysis of state capacity with reference to housing systems in Costa Rica, applying Grindle's measures of capacity plus a further measure added by the authors – economic capacity – is provided in Jenkins & Smith (2001b).

between organisations. The complexity of the relationships between state, private sector and civil society in any given polity suggests that such change cannot be simply 'implemented' and 'enabled' from above, as is suggested in the Habitat Agenda, but will be the complicated, messy and context-dependent result of factors in each milieu. In this situation, learning and innovation supporting organisational change must necessarily be anchored in the in-depth understanding of such institutional factors within their context and by the actors involved. The research this paper reports on was intended to contribute to such a learning process in the context of the Triangle of Solidarity, a pro-poor government-led initiative in Costa Rica, as is explained below.

Background to the research and method

The new state-civil society relationship model known as the 'Triangle of Solidarity' (ToS), and established by the 1998-2002 government in Costa Rica, aimed to decentralise and deconcentrate decision-making, thus reducing clientelism, strengthening voluntary community-based groups and NGOs, and better targeting the poor – in a country characterized by strong central government, weak local government, and active community based organizations, albeit heavily co-opted through relations of clientelism and patronage (Smith, 2004).

The research aimed to provide an analytical appraisal of the impact the ToS had on the urban poor's prospects in gaining access to housing, infrastructure and services in Costa Rica. It involved:

- A review of the development and implementation of the ToS, undertaken through:
(a) collection of information in the form of grey literature (reports, memos, etc.);
(b) collation of academic research on the strategy through Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) and Universidad Nacional (UNA); (c) supplementing this information with data from implementation of the ToS in two low-income urban case study areas in the Metropolitan Area of San José, and two low-income rural areas as comparators.
- An investigation of the extent to which effective spaces of negotiation had been opened up at case study level, through semi-structured interviews with participants in the ToS initiative from the community, local government and central government, as well as with staff from the Triangle of Solidarity Directorate (TSD).
- An evaluation of the outcomes in terms of housing, infrastructure and services delivery, based on information from the sources already mentioned.
- And analysis of the collected data to draw lessons from this experience.

Most of the above data collection was undertaken during a fieldwork period of 5 weeks in August and September 2002. The fieldwork was funded by the British Academy, and it included in-depth interviews with 19 key informants from community organizations, local government and central government, as well as a workshop with eight community leaders from one of the urban case study areas.

An analysis of the spaces for negotiation² between central government, local government and civil society created by the ToS – i.e. an analysis of relationships between organisations – has already been published in Smith (2004), also providing in-depth empirical material on the case studies of the two low-income urban areas around

² See Smith (2003) for a discussion of this concept.

the capital city of San José. These are: Rincón Grande de Pavas, located eight kilometres west of the centre of San José, with an estimated population of 60,000 in 2002 in an area of approximately 140 hectares; and San Felipe, a district with the canton of Alajuelita, adjoining the southern boundary of San José, with a population of 27,089 inhabitants and covering an area of 5.16 square kilometres. This paper focuses on the broader issues of organisational change, mental models (perceptions) and relationships, addressing in particular the following questions:

- How was the ToS perceived by those who were involved in it, and how did this perception affect decisions taken by the different actors during the process?
- What role did each of the actors play, and how did the ToS affect their behaviour?
- How were existing relationships between the participating actors transformed, whether these were based on patronage, clientelism or other types of relation?
- What material and non-material benefits did the ToS strategy provide where it was implemented?

The research was intended to feed into the ToS process, aiming to provide inputs that might help evaluate and improve this new state-civil society relationship. However, the ToS did not survive the change in government in 2002, despite the same party remaining in power, and its dismantling was announced in May 2002, two months before the fieldwork commenced. The objectives and implementation of the ToS are looked at next.

Inception and implementation of the Triangle of Solidarity

The agenda

The Triangle of Solidarity strategy was announced in the Social Christian Unity Party's (PUSC) election manifesto in 1997. It had particular support from Astrid Fischel, who later became the First Vice President and Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, and who was in charge of implementing the ToS programme when the new government was elected (Sáenz, 2001). The key concept underpinning the ToS was bringing together the efforts and resources of three actors – central government institutions (including parastatals), local government and community organisations – “with the aim to constitute a forum which could provide logistical support and allow the three actors to reach the agreements needed to promote human development within their communities” (Decreto No. 27842-C, 1999).

According to interviews with people who were linked to the preparation of the strategy, this process drew on several external sources (including the Inter American Development Bank, Bolivia's participation law, Mexico's Solidarity Plan, and community participation in Colombia), as well as on Costa Rican precedents such as work undertaken by the UNCHS-funded Community Self-Management Strengthening Project (PROFAC) (see Smith & Valverde, 2001), the Healthy Cantons programme, the National Directorate for Community Development (DINADECO) and Rural Aqueducts.

One of the supposed advantages of the strategy, as proposed in the party's election manifesto, was that it would not require any legal reforms to be put in place (Sáenz, 2001). This was mainly due to the fact that, in theory, the ToS was not established as a programme that administered or allocated public resources, nor did it implement projects. Rather, “the key role of the Triangle of Solidarity is one of articulating efforts, bringing

together wills” (Sáenz, 2001), i.e. to operate as a facilitator of links between central government, local government and local civil society. However, the strategy was enshrined in legislation through executive decrees in 1998, 1999 and 2000, which defined the principles and objectives of the ToS, as well as its institutional location, its structure, and the procedure to follow for its implementation. In institutional terms, the Triangle of Solidarity was initially established as a Secretariat, and later it became a Directorate – it was first linked to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and later to the Ministry of the President of the Republic, always under the responsibility of Astrid Fischel.

The consensus-building process in each locality was implemented following a set methodology that was gradually adjusted during the duration of this programme on the basis of experience. The key steps in this methodology were (see Figure 1):

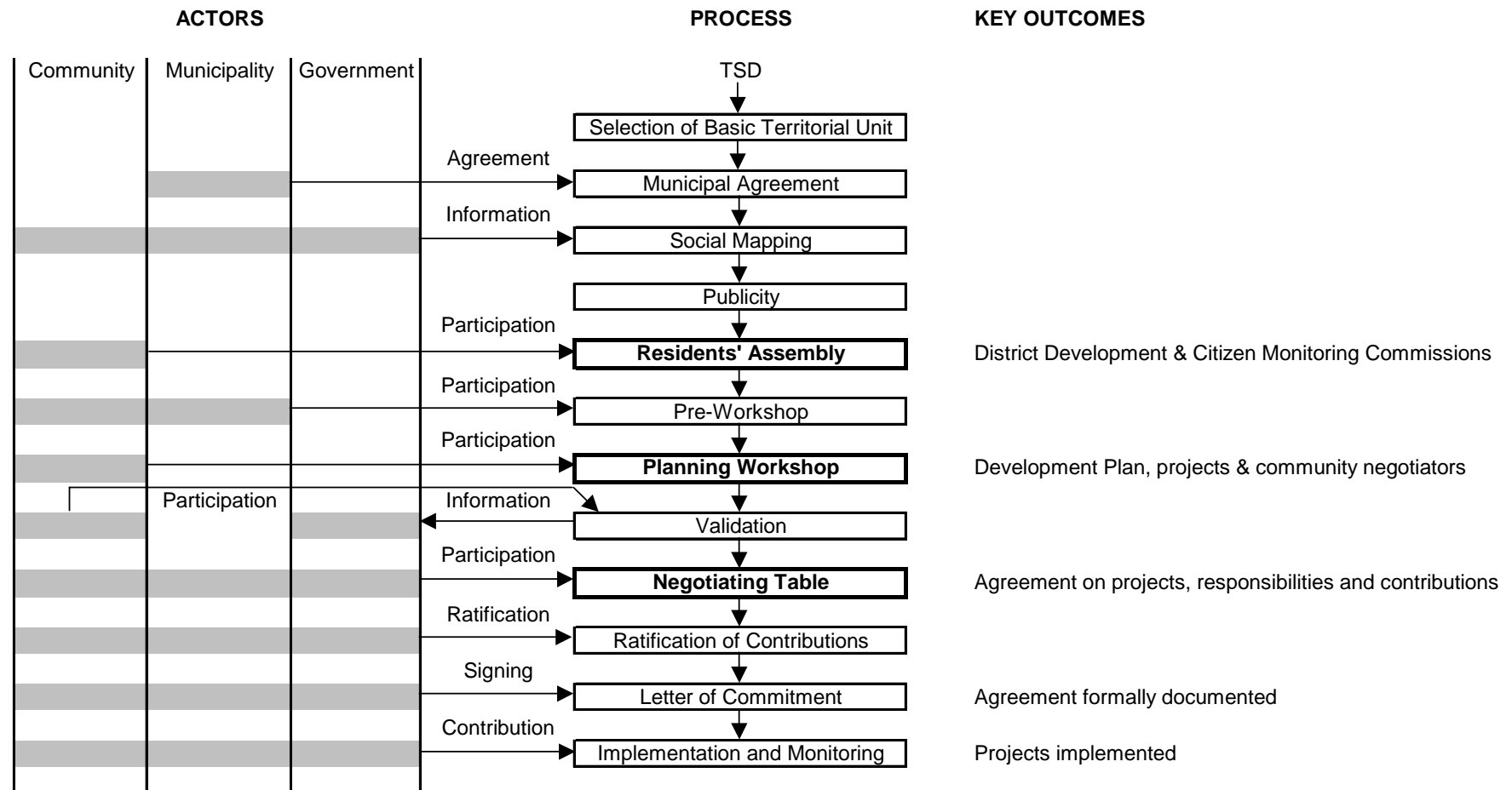
- Residents’ Assemblies (*Asambleas de Vecinos*), usually at the district level, where communities elected representatives to constitute a District Development Commission (*Comisión de Desarrollo Distrital*) and a Citizen Monitoring Commission (*Fiscalía Ciudadana*);
- Planning Workshops (*Talleres de Planificación*), where District Development Commissions discussed the problems in their community and solutions, identified possible projects, prepared a District Development Plan, and nominated local management groups and teams of negotiators;
- Negotiating Tables (*Mesas de Negociación*), where representatives from the three “corners” of the Triangle – community, municipality and central government – analysed the feasibility of the projects that had been prioritised in the Planning Workshop, established the involvement and contribution from each sector, and agreed implementation deadlines;
- Letters of Commitment (*Cartas de Compromiso*), which were formal documents signed by all three parties at a public event, committing in writing the contributions to be made by each party.

Initially the Triangle of Solidarity Directorate (TSD) selected the territory to “intervene” in, a key selection criterion being that the canton should have a low development ranking, though it would only launch its strategy once the respective Municipal Council had officially agreed to participate. The first ToS processes were launched in the summer of 1998, starting with a predominantly rural canton in the eastern seaboard province of Limón, where levels of poverty were high. The early experience in this and other rural cantons throughout the country raised expectations and led to local authorities requesting implementation of the strategy in their constituencies. Later that year TSD launched processes in low-income urban areas, where results were more mixed.

The official figures describe an impressive effort nationwide in terms of the number of processes that were launched. By September 2001, the ToS strategy had been implemented in 45 cantons and 176 districts across the country,³ nominally reaching a total population of 1,551,717 (40.57% of the country’s population). A total of 32,561 people in the communities had participated (some 46% of these being women), and around 928 people had been trained through 89 training courses for Community Promoters. A total of 2,023 people had been named as Citizen Monitors, and 2,833 as representatives on the District Development Commissions (MIDEPLAN, 2001).

³ A total of 176 Residents’ Assemblies and Strategic Planning Workshops had been held, as well as 48 Negotiating Tables, and 47 Letters of Commitment had been signed.

Figure 1. Triangle of Solidarity methodology



The description of the stated objectives and methods of the Triangle of Solidarity in the decrees and other literature provides a basis for an initial conceptual analysis, which is then applied to the analysis of the empirical results of the research.

Firstly, a stated principle of the ToS was participatory democracy (www.triangulo.go.cr/default2.htm). However, the initiative was essentially a centralised and top-down strategy from its conceptualisation to its implementation. For instance the TSD (at least initially) selected the territory where the Government of the Republic would offer to intervene, although such intervention only took place if the Municipal Council accepted. In addition, the TSD developed the method that was “applied” (see above), and convened each of the steps in the method.

Secondly, the stated objectives of the ToS included enabling civil society, local government and central government institutions to coordinate their efforts to benefit the community, as well as to maintain an open dialogue between these three actors. In this sense, civil society representatives were being given an opportunity to take the lead in identifying needs and priorities through Strategic Planning Workshops and Integral Development Plans. However, little indication was given of how these community priorities were to be coordinated with those already established through the guidelines and programmes set out within central government organisations, as well as about how the two could be better integrated in the future. The research therefore attempted to investigate the impact that the ToS strategy had on the programmes and action plans of central government organisations, in particular those of the Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements (MIVAH), the National Institute for Planning and Housing (INVU), and the Institute for Mixed Social Aid (IMAS), as well as organisations linked to the provision of infrastructure and services – i.e. the organisational change in operational terms brought about within these organisations in response to the ToS initiative.

Thirdly, one of the declared objectives of the Triangle of Solidarity was to “Foster decentralisation and the strengthening of local government” (Decreto No. 27842-C, 1999). However, the strategy did not modify the weak legal status of local government, nor did it give municipalities more resources, which were scant. Moreover, the creation of the District Development Commissions were seen by some as undermining the legally established figure of the District Council (Contraloría de la República, 2002),⁴ although very few of the latter had been constituted.

Fourthly, the Triangle of Solidarity strategy created new spaces for negotiation wherein new opportunities for civil society to enter dialogue with the state, both at local and central levels, appeared to be opened up. The space of negotiation that was openly recognised as such was the “Negotiating table”, but it should be noted that besides this space, the implementation of the ToS theoretically opened up other linked opportunities for negotiation such as the Planning Workshops and the monitoring activities of Citizen Attorneys. The scope and success of these spaces for negotiation are addressed in Smith (2004).

Finally, and with regard to the previous point, the ToS was implemented in a socio-political context of patronage and clientelism, which were meant to be weakened or eliminated through this strategy. The way in which clientelistic relationships were affected by the ToS was explored in the fieldwork.

The above factors were examined in the case studies and interviews, the findings from which are analysed below, but first a brief account of the material outcomes from the ToS programme is given.

⁴ Existing law allowed the creation of district councils comprising five residents, appointed by the municipal council.

The material outcomes

MIDEPLAN (2001) gave data for September 2001 that presented an impressive record for the first three years of implementation of the ToS (see above). As a result of its launch in 45 cantons and 176 districts across the country, a total of 2,754 projects had been agreed, of which 1,071 were related to education, 946 to infrastructure, 455 to health, 161 to income generation or productive ideas, and 121 to housing.

However, the analysis undertaken by the National Audit Office provided a very different reading of the outcomes. Contraloría de la República (2002) drew on several reports according to which the results on the ground were very low, ranging from MacDonald & Joseph's (2001) estimation that by the end of March 2001 (nearly 3 years into the ToS programme) only 12% of the agreed projects had been completed, to the First Vice President of the Republic's report that only 27.8% of the agreed projects had been completed and 19% were being implemented.

Therefore, although the number of events and agreed projects, and the levels of participation, seemed to indicate a high level of success, the delivery of projects on the ground seemed to tell a different story. Contraloría de la República (2002) suggested as possible causes: dispersion among several actors of responsibility for providing resources, and lack of legal enforceability of the letters of commitment; failure in practice of any participant to take overall responsibility for the implementation of projects; lack of centralised, systematic and up-to-date monitoring of project implementation; excessive number of projects being agreed in relation to the resources available; and lack of effective coordination between the various actors involved in the process, partly because some had the legal wherewithal to undertake the agreed activities and others did not, and at the end of the day each actor was responsible only for their own contribution.

In summary, according to these evaluations the low level of project completion was related mostly to issues of organisational capacity and the relationships between such organisations. In addition, the analysis of the fieldwork findings shows that the prevailing mental models, and the lack of change in these, also contributed to the poor results.

Analysis of fieldwork findings

This analysis addresses in turn each of the research questions set out above.

From high expectations to the feeling of deceit: the evolution of perceptions of the Triangle of Solidarity

The ToS initiative was formulated and implemented from central government. Its management was linked to the figure of the First Vice President, and normally the process in each district or canton was initiated by the State. However, although in the early stages the ToS had to demonstrate its feasibility through the first experiences of its implementation, it soon raised expectations across the country as a new form of governance. In fact, this research found no interviewees whose views were contrary to the idea of achieving development through action agreed between community, local government and central government.

This level of acceptance was evident especially among community participants, who in general saw the initiative as a possible way of solving their communities' problems, though there was also some degree of mistrust. At municipal level reactions varied, ranging from embracing this mechanism as a way of channelling resources from the State towards the canton (which coincided with the aspirations of many communities) to the criticism that the ToS did not contribute to strengthening local government but rather preserved a strong role for the central state in local development. Central government organisations and parastatals had a less positive perception of the Triangle of Solidarity, some because they did not consider that the approach was innovative, as it reflected the *modus operandi* they had already

developed historically (this was evident especially at IMAS), and others because the ToS tried to establish a new way of working for which they were not prepared – or willing, as some critics would state.

In low income urban settlements the initial high expectations gradually withered away, with the ToS eventually being perceived as a “pretence”. This shift took place not only in how community leaders perceived the ToS initiative, but also in how they were perceived by their own community constituents and by the officials they negotiated with in government organisations. In this sense, in some cases, both urban and rural, communities ended up seeing community leaders and representatives that took part in the ToS process as an integral part of a central government-led initiative, with its shortcomings, rather than as representative members of the community.

The research showed, however, that the perceptions the various actors had of the ToS approach, as well as of other actors in the process, did not have the same starting point, nor did they evolve in the same way in the different communities where the initiative was implemented. Thus, according to the community leaders in the two urban case studies, in Rincón Grande de Pavas the process led to their loss of legitimacy vis-à-vis the community, linked to a growing negative perception of the ToS within this settlement, while in San Felipe de Alajuelita there was a process of increasing understanding between the different leaders and community groups faced with a common negotiating party: central government.

A perception that is shared almost unanimously among community leaders, representatives from other central government organisations and parastatals, and TSD staff, is that the government organisations with housing responsibilities responded poorly within the ToS process. This response, as is demonstrated by the outcomes presented in this research, was late and insufficient. Participants in the research suggested reasons for this performance ranging from the lack of efficiency and capacity within these organisations, to the lack of commitment to the ToS approach.

The lack of innovation in the roles of the key actors

The perception that each actor had of the approach and of other actors affected their role within the process. At the community level, the new actors were the District Development Commissions and the Citizen Monitoring Commissions. Another new actor was the group of negotiators representing each district at the Negotiating Table, though this group was not explicitly recognised as a new figure. Generally communities seemed to accept the ways in which these new actors representing them were constituted,⁵ with some disagreement with who was actually elected and their representativity. In addition, also generally speaking, these new actors seem to have been composed of leaders who were already well established in their communities. In this sense, the ToS initiative with its Residents' Assemblies, which were presented as opportunities for a democratic and participatory process, did not introduce any major changes in already existing community representation. The political and personal dynamics between community leaders continued within the ToS process, though these followed different paths.

The District Development Commission, as a new community actor, did allow the establishment of a common purpose for the community at the district level within the process, although this sometimes entailed certain representatives abandoning the process when the projects they defended for their respective communities were not included among those that were prioritised. In parallel with the actions of this new actor as a representative for the community, individual leaders and groups of these continued to act independently, using their traditional contacts.

⁵ It must be noted that the research did not investigate this aspect in depth through interviewing community members other than leaders.

In the case studies focused on in this research the other new community actor, the Citizen Monitoring Commission, did not work. Although community representatives were nominated to constitute these commissions, they found that they faced a role for which they were not trained, and for which they received very little support. As a result of this, the monitoring and auditing role was taken up by the TSD.

The other two key actors – local and central government – fulfilled the roles they have traditionally had in Costa Rica. Local government echoed the demands of their constituencies, and tried to use the ToS mechanism to attract State funds for the projects that communities put forward, as well as for the municipalities' own priorities. When it came to contributing resources, local governments were subject to the constraints they have traditionally endured, caused by the lack of their own sources of funding. In this sense, the ToS did not foster a stronger role for local government in local development.

Central government organisations and parastatals found themselves acting (or not) in response to community demands, and contributing the bulk of resources needed for project implementation. Although they did not have a significant role in the identification of projects, which was the communities' prerogative, they did have the key role in resourcing and monitoring project implementation. In this regard, the role of central government organisations and parastatals continued to be that of supplier rather than its supposed role as facilitator.

Changes in the relationships between actors

The views on how the relationships between the key actors changed were diverse, depending on whether it was the view of a community representative, a local government official, or someone in central government, and even within each category of actor different experiences were reported. It was therefore difficult to draw general conclusions on this issue, but some general observations can be made.

In the case studies, it was apparent that the relationship between community organisations and local government became closer, with municipalities gaining a better understanding of community issues, and with community leaders increasing their knowledge of how local government operates.

The relations between communities and central government organisations and parastatals can be considered at two levels: the "official" level and that of clientelistic links. At the "official" level, there was no significant improvement in the relations between these two actors, in some cases because the organisations involved already had a long established experience in working in collaboration with communities (according to IMAS, for example), and in other because they grew further apart (for instance, in the case of the organisations involved in housing).

The research provided evidence that the less formal, clientelistic, relations had also deteriorated during the ToS experience, particularly in relation to housing, for those community leaders that joined the ToS initiative. One possible explanation was that "patrons" in central government organisations and parastatals perceived of the ToS as a threat to their influence and control over their "clients" in the communities, and thus penalised those community representatives who participated in it.

Finally, as noted above, there were changes in the relationships between community leaders and their respective constituencies, as well as between leaders from different community organisations. These were related to the success (or lack of success) of project implementation within each community, and to community leaders becoming identified with the ToS process. Thus, in the case of Rincón Grande de Pavas, the perception that community leaders had become fully part of the process in accepting and handling (in theory) the allocation of resources from central government, contributed to their loss of credibility when

the projects did not come to fruition. In San Felipe de Alajuelita, on the contrary, community leaders kept their distance with the process, and were able to mobilise the community against central government organisations when projects were not making progress.

The poor delivery of material benefits through the Triangle of Solidarity in low income urban areas

Through the ToS, a large amount of projects were completed throughout the poorer communities in Costa Rica during 1998-2003. However, although this initiative constituted a considerable effort overall, and although many communities were provided with infrastructures and services bringing significant improvements at the level of the individual settlement, the overall number of completed projects fell well short of the set targets.

In geographic terms, this poor level of delivery is particularly significant in the cases of urban areas where the Triangle of Solidarity was implemented, and in terms of sectors housing shows a low level of completed projects. In low income urban settlements, the range of problems is very complex, with large concentrations of poverty and housing need, the need for expensive infrastructure, and housing situations that can be problematic in many respects: forms of access to land and land titling, informal housing markets, great housing densities without adequate services, settlements on vulnerable land exposed to hazards, varying levels of commitment and response from local and central government, etc. The processes put in place by the ToS were unable to respond to this complexity and, as a result, in these urban areas the level of target achievement were extremely low.

Conclusions

The ToS experience provides us with an example in which organisational change was put in motion through the creation of a completely new, central government-based organisation – the TSD – that ostensibly promoted a new mental model of relationships between central government, local government and civil society organisations.

This new organisation carried along with it organisational changes only at the level of the community, by creating new representative structures which were not driven from below but reactive. Often, though not always, these new community representative bodies were composed however of the traditional leaders from existing organisations. In contrast, local governments did not alter their decision-making and operational structures in any way, and in central government organisations and parastatals the only changes amounted to allocating particular members of staff to liaising with the ToS processes, with no major consequences for the existing structures and operations (including budgeting).

In addition, although the ToS initially raised some expectations, there was little change in the mental models that were evident in the perceptions the actors had of each other and of the ToS strategy. A particularly important factor in this was the availability of resources, with the actor that ostensibly had access to the largest pool of resources – central government – invariably being seen as 'provider'.

Although there were some changes in relationships between the actors, these were mostly probably short-term, and often not the type of change intended by the ToS strategy. Examples of unintended and unforeseen changes included the reduction of clientelistic relationships not being matched by a strengthening of the new collaborative ToS-based links, and the loss of credibility of some community leaders among their constituencies.

Particularly in the detail of the case studies, the research revealed how the ToS processes were imposed in a target-driven and hurried way in contexts that had long and different histories of community representation and relationships between communities, local government and central government, with complex and historically-rooted relationships of trust and mistrust, political and organisational rivalry, clientelism, patronage, etc. The ToS

strategy can thus be seen as a politically-driven abstract Habitat Agenda-compliant model that failed to take account of the complexity of the contexts both at community level in the areas of “intervention” and at the level of individual central and local government organisations. More crucially, it tried to operate from above, in relation to both communities and other state organisations, without a parallel push from below, which is necessary to ensure committed and continued civil society involvement, and to bring about deeper and more permanent changes in state attitudes and forms of organisation.

In the past Costa Rican civil society's involvement in lobbying for, and getting directly involved in, development of housing, infrastructure and services – often linked to party political processes – has played a major role in bringing about changes in policy, as well as an impact on the ground. A key example of this was the radical change in housing policy introduced by the 1986-90 Arias government in response to strong grassroots lobbying during the 1980s (Smith & Valverde, 2001). The essential need for bottom-up movements within civil society, which interface with top-down state actions through forms of negotiation, is evidenced by cases from other geographic and socio-political contexts, as analysed in Jenkins (2001). However, in the case of the ToS existing community initiatives were ignored, and there was an attempt to channel the relationship between state and civil society through a pre-defined “method” that, despite its positive aspects such as openly recognising negotiation, was driven by central government agendas, with little scope for engaging with existing community-based processes and for generating local ownership.

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