



## Internal CEESP NRGF Background Brief #15

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### Democratic Governance or Deliberative Democracy – covering issues of voice, power and agency

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Democracy: Beyond voting rights, democracy is a normative process that helps define interactions within societies; it governs not only the relationship between the state and citizens, but also that between citizens and among their associations.

*Deliberative Democracy:* In contrast to decision-making in the aggregative or interest-based model of democracy<sup>1</sup>; in deliberative democracy, participants arrive at a decision not based on what preferences have greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reasons (Young, 2002). Most proponents of deliberative democracy emphasize that in deliberative model of democracy, participants not only express and register preferences, but are able to *transform* their preferences and the beliefs that inform these preferences through deliberation. Political theorists advocating strong democracy suggest that the process of transformation of preferences helps in transforming citizens from self-interest-driven to other-regarding citizens or public (Barber, 1984) –which becomes critical in natural resource governance in the process of formation of new values.

Deliberative democracy increases the likelihood of more just outcomes. The theoretical justification of this is that in inclusive democratic practice, people aim to persuade one another of the justice and wisdom of their claims, and are open to having their own opinions and understanding of their interests change in the process.

*Communicative Democracy:* Feminist political theorist, Iris Young, uses the terms communicative democracy to expand the ideas of deliberative democracy, beyond the limitations of rationalist argument-based deliberations (dispassionate, orderly or articulate), to incorporate various other means of communication through which different marginalized

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<sup>1</sup> In aggregative or interest-based conceptions of democracy, decisions are taken based on aggregating the preference of and where individual preferences are taken as given and democratic politics is seen as a competition between private interests and preferences.

sections, including women, might choose to engage with to make their voices heard (more embodied, rhetoric and emotion-laden).

In most functioning democracy, a combination of interest-based aggregative democracy, and deliberative democratic decision-making mechanisms exist. Instead of thinking of representation and participation as either/or, it is important to consider of them as complementary – and in the context of natural resource governance, focus on expanding spaces for deliberation and communicative democracy, within representative democracy. To break the reinforcing circle between social and economic inequality and political inequality, it is important to widen democratic inclusion.

Without getting bogged down on the choice of terms (deliberative/ discursive/ communicative/ strong democracy), for our purpose, it will suffice to focus on some of the conditions for deepening democracy (Young, 2002):

1. Inclusion: A democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes.
2. Political equality: As a normative ideal, democracy means political equality. Not only should all those affected be nominally included in decision-making, but they should be included on equal terms. The ideal model of deliberative democracy, promotes free and equal opportunity to speak. This condition cannot be met without a third condition of equality, namely freedom from domination. It is not only important just to speak, but it is equally important that these voices get heard.
3. Reasonableness: A reasonable respectful process of discussion.
4. Public Formation: Formation of a public in which people hold one another accountable and which consists of a plurality of different individual and collective experiences.

#### *Applications to Natural Resources Governance*

*Radical Ecological Democracy:* Many activists groups are calling for Radical Ecological Democracy, a framework of human well-being and governance in which all people and communities have the right and full opportunity to participate in decision-making driven by concerns for ecological sustainability and human equity.

[\(http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com/red-principles/\)](http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com/red-principles/)

*Difference as a Resource:* In deliberative democracy, difference is not seen as a problem to be erased in the process of consensus building or interest aggregation; but a useful resource for problem solving. This is especially critical in natural resource governance. Attention to modes of communication, venues for civic organizing and ways of attending to social difference, are important conditions of political inclusion – and need to be paid attention to in the NRG.

Various studies on democratic decentralization in natural resources show that there is very little actual democratization taking place, even with a limited definition of democracy, and these studies emphasize that most decentralization reforms in natural resource governance rely on institutions that are upwardly accountable rather than downwardly accountable.

Some of the things to include/ be attentive to in the NRGF will include:

1. Venues for democratic engagement at different scales (capacity-building and transformation of power relations can be enabled by spaces for deliberations and citizen action at different spatial scales; often women find it easier to 'act' and gain skills in spaces at meso-scales than at the local scales where power relations are more strongly entrenched – for a practical example see Singh, 2011).
2. Criteria and indicators for assessing democratic inclusion (to what extent are all those affected by decisions relating to natural resource use, conservation and benefit-distribution, included in decision-making; what special concessions are made for alternate modes of communication, etc.).
3. Criteria and indicators for political equality;
4. C& I for public formation (venues for civic organizing) etc.

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