16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

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17 ROOMS GLOBAL FLAGSHIP
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17 ROOMS

17 Rooms - Room 16 Report, 2023

From one-off engagement to system change: How to institutionalize participatory and deliberative democracy

Executive summary

Governments around the world are suffering from a crisis of democracy. Elections alone are failing to deliver the government institutions that we need to promote peace, justice, and sustainable development. In recent years, however, there has been a rapid growth of innovations in participatory and deliberative democracy, such as citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting. These efforts have demonstrated the ability to boost public trust, bridge divides, make government more inclusive, and deliver more equitable and effective outcomes. But most of these innovations have been implemented as one-off exercises, which limits their impact. The 17 Rooms initiative convened a global room of experts in 2023 (in Room 16) to identify how to institutionalize innovations in participatory and deliberative democracy. It aimed to help these practices lead to long-term systemic change, as a way to advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and build more effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. The Room prioritized three complementary actions to accomplish this goal: (i) a donor innovation, impact and learning program; (ii) a program to develop and test evidence-based model legislation, policies, regulations, and guidance; and (iii) a network of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to continue supporting collaboration in the field.

About 17 Rooms

The [17 Rooms initiative](#) was launched by The Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation in September 2018, gathering on the eve of the U.N. General Assembly in New York City, as an experiment to stimulate new forms of action for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project aims to promote pragmatic action within each SDG, while also stimulating productive connections across all goals. In practical terms, 17 Rooms convenes participants from disparate specialist communities to meet in their own "Rooms," or working

groups, one for each SDG. Each Room is tasked with a common assignment of identifying cooperative actions they can take over the subsequent 12-18 months. Emerging ideas are then shared across Rooms to spot opportunities for collaboration. The process offers an efficient way of convening natural allies, ideally promoting enough familiarity to enable collaboration and enough diversity to spark new ideas and pathways to action.

Room focus and background

Room 16 focused on efforts to institutionalize high quality participatory and deliberative democracy, as a way to build accountable, inclusive and participatory institutions, which is one of the aims of SDG 16.

Participatory and deliberative democracy (PDD) is a range of practices that engage citizens in reaching agreement and making decisions about important issues. Participatory democracy generally refers to the direct participation of community members in making the decisions that affect their lives. Deliberative democracy refers to reaching broad consensus via informed, fair and reasonable discussion, often among groups of randomly selected individuals, broadly representative of society.

In practice, these overlapping categories take the form of programs such as participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, participatory policymaking, and legislative theater. These methods have spread rapidly in recent decades, to thousands of local, regional, and national governments around the world. Often, however, they are implemented as pilot programs or one time events, without changing mainstream decision-making.

Institutionalization refers to embedding PDD in governments and institutions, so that these practices move from one-off exercises to long-term systemic change. This may involve creating and sustaining formal rules, procedures, structures, values, finance and governance mechanisms. According to research compiled by the OECD, People Powered, and others, this can lead to greater public trust, more effective implementation of decisions, and more cost-effective and efficient engagement; hence, enhancing effective, accountable and transparent institutions, while ensuring responsive, inclusive and participatory decision making, at the core of SDG 16.

Goals

Our room had three main goals:

- Build stronger relationships and collaboration among individuals from international organizations working on PDD.
- Build a greater shared understanding of innovations in PDD around the world, common challenges and opportunities, and strategies for making these innovations more inclusive, equitable, and impactful.
- Identify and prioritize 1-3 actionable next steps to institutionalize high quality PDD around the world, so it is sustained over time and has greater impacts.

Methodology

Room 16 brought together a cross-section of experts from a dozen international organizations and networks supporting PDD around the world. The methodology of the Room encompassed a dynamic and iterative process in which the participants worked together in person, online meetings and asynchronously, to prioritize key needs to institutionalize PDD and build together actionable ideas to solve those needs. These translated into three specific ideas created in the Room to institutionalize high-quality participatory and deliberative democracy, meaning programs that deliver strong positive outcomes for individuals, communities, and government. The Room was especially attentive to the difficulties and differences for implementing this work in diverse contexts in the Global South and North. It agreed to think big and inclusively about ideas that could work in different realities, while recognizing that this remains an ongoing challenge.

The participants initially met in a two-day workshop held in Mexico in May, 2023. Subsequently, they met in three online meetings held in May, June and July, 2023, to revise, prioritize and further develop key actions and next steps for them. In between the meetings, the participants individually reviewed the proposals and answered surveys to further enrich the process.

During the process, the Room made agreements on how to work together in order to have successful working sessions, including coming with humility, an open mind and a collaborative spirit. Likewise, the participants agreed on common values for the Room, such as active inclusion, transformation, partnership and whole-system thinking. The Room also created a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of the PDD field and an assessment of the potential impact and the feasibility of implementing several preliminary ideas, to have a better understanding on what actions to prioritize. This work is summarized in a workshop report [available here](#).

Key actions

The main purpose of the Room was to identify and prioritize 1-3 actionable next steps to institutionalize high quality PDD around the world, so that they are sustained over time and have greater impacts. During the first in-person meeting of Room 16, the participants created a range of 20 preliminary ideas, including several actions to build capacity in State institutions, devote more resources to institutionalizing PDD and developing research, case studies and tools to support institutionalization. Subsequently, as the process developed, the participants prioritized and further developed these ideas, until three clear and concrete proposals were refined and decided as the final products of the Room. The criteria for prioritizing ideas included their ability to advance SDG 16, the feasibility of being actionable steps toward institutionalizing high-quality PDD, the potential for collaboration among multiple organizations, the prospect of benefiting various global regions, and the possibility of implementation within 1-2 years. The detailed proposals can be consulted here.

The first idea is a **Support Program for Institutionalizing PDD**, with the aim of helping diverse actors in turning PDD experiences into permanent and sustainable systems with actionable tools and support based on best available evidence. More often than not, the actors that lead innovative PDD programs struggle to turn them into longer-term institutional change because they lack actionable tools and support. As a result, the proposal seeks to build actionable evidence-based model legislation, policies, and regulations and implementation guidance for the institutionalization of PDD, so diverse actors are more capable of advocating for and planning institutionalization of PDD with the use of the guiding tools. The proposal is divided into two phases. The first phase aims to develop model legislation, policies, and regulations and implementation guidance based on expert knowledge, research and actors' needs. The second phase includes an action learning program to apply and test guidance with a cohort of government and civil society champions who are committed to embedding PDD in institutions. The first two years of the project require a budget of approximately $500,000 to $1 million.

The second idea is to create a **Coordinating Network for Participatory and Deliberative Democracy.** The proposal aims to address the fragmented coordination among international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) supporting PDD, resulting in duplication of work and missed opportunities to advance or accelerate institutionalization. While several international

organizations (such as Democracy R&D, International Observatory of Participatory Democracy, Open Government Partnership, and People Powered) link together local and national actors, there is no global space to connect and align these international organizations. Hence, this project seeks to create a standing global network of support and coordination specifically for the INGOs that are implementing, supporting and institutionalizing PDD processes. The initial activities include mapping actors and needs, conducting surveys, creating a network plan, holding meetings, and devising preliminary projects. The long-term activities focus on maintaining a roster of experts, sustaining regular meetings, and promoting knowledge sharing within the network. The project requires an initial budget of $350,000 for the first year and collaboration with a host organization.

The final idea is to create a **Donor Innovation, Impact and Learning Program.** One of the main problems the Room identified that prevents the institutionalization of PDD, is a low and inconsistent financial support from the donor community. The proposal aims to support learning among the donor community regarding democratic innovations, their effects, and ways to foster institutionalization. This proposal seeks to secure more substantial, long-term, and strategic financial backing for the institutionalization of PDD. Some of the activities in this idea include collecting clear evidence that PDD is happening, it works, and that it is viable in diverse contexts, identifying ways for PDD to help address key issues that are already prioritized in the donor community, developing and implementing a strategic donor engagement and learning plan, and sharing experiences of democratic innovations and their impacts, to support learning in the donor community. Overall, as desired outcomes, the proposal aims for the donor community to have a better understanding of PDD practices, how PDD can support different lines of work, ensure impact and move beyond innovation to institutionalization and, as a result, is more willing to invest in the institutionalization of PDD. This project requires a budget of $100,000 - 200,000 for the first year.

Possible next steps

The Room also identified possible next steps to advance the ideas. At the Room level, after the submission of this report to 17 Rooms, the ideas will be presented at the Global OGP Summit in Tallinn in September, 2023, to continue advancing the communication and awareness of the issue in the global community of open government. This aligns with a current action that OGP is prioritizing, to mainstream participation across key government practices, processes and

institutions. The Room will also hold a briefing webinar to present the results of the process and continue raising awareness and securing support to advance this issue, which will be complemented with local workshops on the topic. Likewise, the participants agreed that a main step to advance the ideas is to secure resources and broader collaborations to implement the proposals. In this vein, the participants made specific commitments to identify potential funders and collaborators, continue developing the proposals, and communicate the work of the Room.

Room members

- Diana Dajer (co-lead), Fundación Corona
- Josh Lerner (co-lead), People Powered
- Greta Ríos (Room associate), People Powered
- Aaron Azleton, National Democratic Institute
- Adrià Duarte, International Observatory on Participatory Democracy and United Cities and Local Governments
- Aluna Serrano, Extituto de Política Abierta
- Anna Downs, International Republican Institute
- Anthony Zacharzewski, Democratic Society
- Caroline Vernaillen, Democracy International
- Enrique Bravo-Escobar, National Endowment for Democracy
- Ieva Cesnulaityte, DemocracyNext
- James Muraguri, Institute of Public Finance
- Rachel Locke, University of San Diego
- Rose Longhurst, Open Society Foundations
- Sarah Mendelson, Carnegie Mellon University
- Tim Hughes, Open Government Partnership