

Quiroz, Catalina and Blanco-Encomienda, Francisco J. (2019) Participation in decision-making processes of community development agents: a study from Peru. *Community Development Journal*, 54 (2). pp. 329-351.

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# **Participation in decision-making processes of community development agents: a study from Peru**

**Catalina Quiroz-Niño\*, Francisco J. Blanco-Encomienda**

*\*Address for correspondence:* Catalina Quiroz-Niño, School of Education, York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX, United Kingdom; email: [c.quiroz@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:c.quiroz@yorks.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

This article argues that although Civil Social Organizations (CSOs) aspire towards a culture of participatory process-driven governance and management, the reality seems far from this aspiration. A culture of participatory processes is understood in this study as working and decisional engagement practices which are part of internal decision-making and action-taking processes from Community Development Agents (CDAs). This brings an ethical dilemma, as these organizations claim to operate upon principles of participation, solidarity, democracy, social justice, human dignity and decent work. Through this study, 506 Peruvian CDAs offered their own analyses about the factors that foster and/or inhibit their participation in specific organizational managerial and professional developmental areas, such as: systemic planning, organization, sustainable management and empowerment. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field of study. Dialogical focus groups were applied, by which CDAs themselves identified and deconstructed the inhibiting and facilitating factors. The study echoes CDAs' aspiration to engage meaningfully with decision-making and action-taking processes as well as creating the participatory mechanisms and processes themselves. In order to do this, CDAs demand an ethical and democratic competence-based training, to empower them to democratize their organizational structures and to counterbalance their daily power relations and dynamics.

## **Introduction**

Community Development Agents' (CDAs) participation has been studied in Peru in recent years from a government perspective and at a macro and inter-institutional levels. This is due to the conception of participation as a model for public policy renewal (Panfichi and Dammert, 2007). This tendency stems from the state's decentralization process begun in Peru in 2002, leading to government requests for CDAs' participation to be linked directly with City Councils' Consensus Roundtables against Poverty, Regional Coordination Councils and Participatory Budgets (McNulty, 2013). For this study, CDAs are people working within rural and urban third sector organizations, at administrative, managerial and board level. Participation is understood as the involvement of CDAs in decisions as part of the ethos and working culture of the organization, regardless of their levels of responsibilities within the organization.

In this context, this article seeks to fill an important gap in the study of CDAs whose competences include creating an organizational culture of participatory dynamics in decision-making and action-taking processes within third sector organizations (Sarrate, García and Pérez, 2013). According to Parnell (2008, 2010) there is scant research linking CDAs' involvement in making decisions in their organizations within the third sector in Latin America. Parnell examines managers' propensity to engage in participative decision-making in two Latin American nations, Mexico and Peru. Regarding Peruvian managers, it was found that those who believed that participative decision-making reduces a manager's power base were less likely than others to see a positive link between participative decision-making and organizational effectiveness.

Furthermore, Forcadell (2005) analyses the link between the use of democratic and participatory methods in management and success. Also, Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky (2007) relate internal process and outcomes, pointing to a change in the internal norms of

participation within organizations. These studies only take into consideration staff from a managerial level, and not operational staff or board members. This differentiates it from the current study.

The article is divided into five stages: the first one shows the organizations that comprise the third sector. The second stage deals with assumptions and norms about participatory organizational cultures. The third one focuses on the contextual information of the country and cities in which the study took place. In the fourth stage, the combined quantitative and qualitative methodology is explained. The fifth stage offers the results, discussions and conclusions of the study.

### **The Third Sector and Community Development Agents (CDAs)**

Civil society is organized and institutionalized within the third sector, which includes the confluence of non-governmental organizations, grassroots social organizations, foundations, cultural, religious, sports and recreational organizations, trade associations; as well as cooperatives, mutuals, fair trade organizations and indigenous communities (McNulty, 2013; Portocarrero and Sanborn, 1998). Pearce (2003) considers a broad spectrum of organizations within the third sector, called the third system, as it embodies specific systemic values and principles which are driven primarily by social and environmental aims.

Their organizational structure and culture claim to be based on the principles of democratic participation, solidarity, social justice, reciprocity, respect for traditional knowledge, human and ecological diversity (Felber, 2012; Muñoz and Briones, 2011; Portocarrero and Sanborn, 1998). Their main features are the relational capacity of their members (UNDP, 2001), their diversity (Marshall, 1996) and their heterogeneity (Wagner, 2000). This should make participation their axis of decision-making and action-taking processes around coordinating, managing, facilitating, administrating, empowering and

evaluating tasks from different posts and levels of responsibilities. Thus, third sector organizations follow different ethics and logic from those in the private and public sector (Anheier, 2005; Frumkin, 2002; Perrow, 2001). It is assumed that there is no competing for power and that they are not governed for profit-maximization (Monzón and Chaves, 2012; United Nations, 2014). By law, the distribution of surplus for non-profit organizations within the third sector is invested in furthering the aims of the organization itself, improving services and/or products offered to its members and the community they serve.

These characteristics define a very different mindset of how structures, operations and relationships are carried out from those of public and private commercial organizations. Their *modus operandi*, therefore, is assumed to be in a continual and iterative process towards democratizing and socializing power through participation. Despite this, neither the third sector ethos nor its structural approach has stopped civil society organizations acquiring models and practices of management which compromise their own principles (Melé, 2012).

## **Participatory Organizational Culture**

In this study, organizational culture is understood as a system of meanings shared by CDAs, at different roles and responsibilities of governance, managerial and administrative posts within the organization (Hodge, Anthony and Gales, 2003). The participation within this culture acts as a governing principle and key axis of internal management, facilitation, administration, and empowerment processes towards consolidating a collective organizational identity and an optimal collective performance of CDAs. Theorists of organizational culture (Cunningham and MacGregor, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars, 1994) state that one of the key characteristics of an organization is its participatory approach and outreach.

Participatory organizational culture maintains, and brings people together around, a set of shared values, creating a sense of belonging to the organization and a personal identification with work, going far beyond linking organizational success to pure economic outputs (Collins and Porras, 2002). Senge (2005) emphasizes that organizational cultures which are able to resist the changes and crises they constantly face are those which maximize commitment to, and capacity for, training their staff in the different decision-making and action-taking processes and levels of the organization. From this perspective, a participatory organizational culture can be understood as the space which makes sustainable personal and collective transformation possible, whilst creating a new field of competencies and professional relations (Drucker, 1990). As Burnell (2012, citing Matarasso, 2007) states, active participation of community groups in programme planning, management and implementation is essential, as the evidence given by CDAs in this study also confirms.

The literature supports participatory organizational culture as the framework that enables inclusive governance and management, allowing the right and duty of CDAs to participate. However, this seems to be more an aspiration than a reality, when the internal managerial structure and mindset from the private sector co-opts and compromises the ethos and logic of the third sector. As Kenny, Taylor, Onyx and Mayo (2015) note, business and markets are not designed to build those third sector rationales that are concerned with the social cohesion of communities; neither are they concerned with strengthening the ways in which people care for each other.

This study puts the spotlight on specific decision-making and action-taking processes where a participatory organizational culture and a facilitative leadership could be assessed by all members of the organization. Leadership styles could be perceived as authoritarian, democratic and/or laissez-faire. Power structures and hierarchal working relations are legitimized under each one; and therefore shape the impact on the quality of participation,

motivation and engagement of the CDAs. It is relevant to redefine the conception and perception of leadership as a team process, not linked to a specific person and/or post, but as a collective duty and right of all CDAs (Hubbard, 2005; Jackson and Parry, 2008). Within this conception, leadership is facilitated (Quiroz-Niño, 2010), co-produced, distributed, and socialized (Guthey and Jackson, 2005). A team leadership mindset is key for meaningful engagement in and involvement of CDAs within a participatory organizational culture (Schwarz *et al.*, 2005; Weaver and Farrell, 1997; Wilkinson, 2005).

Hence the importance of a team leadership approach from CDAs, especially in decision-making processes and systems related to planning, organization and accountability. Goldsmith and Clutterbuck (1998) offer key factors linked to decision-making and action-taking processes within a sustainable participatory governance and management:

- *Leadership*: a clear inclusive and process-driven management of different perspectives and values of organizations' members towards one common articulated vision and mission.
- *Autonomy*: the need to count on a degree of independence, dependent on levels of responsibility according to the nature of the tasks.
- *Control*: the need to decide which operational aspects of the organization require consensus and which do not.
- *Power*: a determining factor in regulating people's level of participation. Sources of power outline a certain type and quality of interaction within organizations' members. Power is linked to responsibility in a given post, a person's professional experience, and access to, and withholding of, information and resources. How power is applied and perceived must also be considered since this is how power will become a limiting, permissive or a facilitating factor towards participation (McClelland, 2008; Lukes 2005).



Within this perspective, participatory governance and management are seen as the kind of power Hayward (1998) proposes, focusing on ‘whether the social boundaries defining key practices and institutions produce entrenched differences in the field of what is possible’ (p. 20). Thus, power is linked in this study to unquestioned managerial dogmas, rules and norms which legitimate a way of operating and which open or close possibilities for becoming empowered to transform the social realm in which CDAs work. Bourdieu (2005) also adopts a view that power is socialized; creating embedded social norms and conventions whereby it becomes part of an accepted order within society. In the case of the study, it refers to a specific economic leadership and managerial model in a dogmatic way without questioning assumptions. The concept of agency is still valid for Hayward (1998), as in order to challenge power it requires taking action to shift the boundaries of what is considered possible. At this point, a key factor such as empowerment comes to life under the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen which denotes what people really “can do and can be”. This leads to the set of valuable functionings that CDAs could have to change, negotiate and compromise within the dynamics and exercise of power within their working culture context (Sen, 2003).

Taking into account Hayward, Bourdieu and Sen’s notions of power and capabilities, we argue that their level of power and empowerment could be enacted through:

- Articulating in a systemic way a sense of belonging and commitment without compromising the values and ethos inferred by civil society organizations.
- Collectively identifying resources needed and deciding on their proper use.
- Designing, through participatory budgeting, a comprehensive management plan, assessing economic and financial assets needed.

- Deciding and designing the kind of training needed in order to fulfil responsibilities in a satisfactory way.

These same premises have been systematized by experience and literature review to outline a potential framework to assess the quality of participation in decision-making and action-taking processes within organizations in the third sector:

- Systemic planning: processes that develop the capacity and legitimize the right and duty of CDAs to set the mission, vision, general policies, and objectives within their own organization (Moreau and Mertens, 2013; Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2016).
- Organization and sustainable management: processes that allow CDAs to create spaces for participation to collectively fulfil the aforementioned mission, vision, policies and objectives so as not to undermine the impact and transformation intended within the projects being undertaken by the organizations (Defourney, Hulgard and Pestoff, 2014; Skelcher and Smith, 2015).
- Empowerment: processes that enable CDAs' capacity to decide on the training they require to optimize job effectiveness and thus performance (Abbott, Wallace and Sapsford, 2016; Anheier, 2005; Sen, 2003).

The exercise of the different decision-making and action-taking processes detailed could enable CDAs to have a decisive role in questioning and counteracting any power and constraints limiting their abilities, capabilities and knowledge to build on a participatory organizational culture.

It is claimed that the presence of women in the third is an increasing trend. The sector is highly female-dominated, but not necessarily in post of higher managerial responsibility

(ILO, 2016). Regarding women's economic autonomy eight out of every ten women work in low-productivity sectors and their access to technology is still low (Bárcena, 2017).

## **Context of the Study**

This study involved Community Development Agents (CDAs) from third sector organizations in two Peruvian cities: Lima (urban) and Cuzco (urban and rural). Both cities are affected by a non-equitable distribution of wealth, social exclusion, social injustice and regional fragmentation.

Peru ranks 84th out of 188 positions within the Human Development Index, according to UNDP (2015). The Peruvian Finance Ministry stated that in 2015 poverty remained especially high, 33.8 percent, in the resource-rich Andes, in which Cuzco is located. In the coastal regions, home to the capital Lima, the poverty rate was 14.3 percent. Poverty in Peru is deepest among indigenous people living in remote rural areas such as the ones reached by the study in rural Cuzco (Cespedes, 2015). This chronic and systemic community impoverishment has been one of the reasons for the emergence and intervention of organizations within the third sector and, as a result, the presence and influence of CDAs as facilitators and catalysts to overcome this adverse reality within a micro social level.

## **Methodology**

The empirical work was structured around two distinct but complementary phases. The first was quantitative with a survey-based approach, applying statistical tests. The second phase was qualitative, in which dialogical focus groups were organized. This dialogical approach enabled CDAs to get involved in the analysis and interpretation of data. In addition they developed a common understanding of the root causes that inhibit active participation and

identified factors which facilitate such participation in decision-making and action-taking processes within their own organizational culture.

### *The Quantitative Phase*

Random sampling was used to identify the CDAs, using official directories of registered not-for-profit organizations from Lima and Cuzco. To extend the sample and to access hard-to-reach CDAs, the snowball sampling technique was used (Noy, 2008). CDAs participated if they had been linked with the organization for the previous 18 months.

The sample consisted of 506 participants (47.6 percent male, 52.4 percent female). Directors, general managers and coordinators comprised 57% of the sample; operational staff, including administrators, under which qualified and non-qualified professionals (interns and volunteers) were considered, comprised 77.3% and board members, 11.4% of the sample. In terms of the geographical working area, the majority operated in urban areas (73.7 percent) and just over a quarter in rural ones (26.3 percent). The main fields of work fell within economic development (36.8 percent), participation and community development (26.3 percent). The average time the participants were in post was 4 years. The high representation of qualified and non-qualified operational staff (77.3 percent) should also be noted. Table 1 presents an overview of the characteristics of the CDAs who participated in the study.

### **INSERT TABLE 1**

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire which consisted of seven different decision-making and action-taking processes and frequencies of participation based on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = always). These 7 processes were clustered in the following three dimensions:

- Systemic planning: CDAs were asked: how often do you participate in the following areas: a) setting the organization's mission and policies; b) defining project objectives; c) selecting organizations to work with.
- Organization and sustainable management: CDAs were asked how often do you participate in the following areas: a) establishing processes for implementing projects; b) selecting communities and target groups to work with; c) setting the budget for roles and tasks within the post.
- Empowerment: CDAs were asked how often do you participate in the following area: a) selecting the required training for the post.

### *The Survey Instrument*

The psychometric properties of the instrument and its items, in this case the 7 decision-making and action-taking processes, were analysed to determine content validity and internal reliability. Note that these 7 processes were adapted, systematized and validated from experiences specifically within third sector organizations and through literature review from management research publications.

Content validity was assessed based on the opinion of ten CDAs, five with a recognised academic profile and five professional experts in community development in the third sector. Their selection criteria were: a) between 2 to 6 years of engagement within the third sector, as an academic and as member of staff; and b) working in the following posts of responsibility: managerial, operational, and administrative. They evaluated the appropriateness, clarity and relevance of the survey items. The Aiken's V coefficient, which combines the ease of calculation and the evaluation of the results statistically (Penfield and Giocobbi, 2004), was then applied obtaining a coefficient of 1.0 (CI<sub>95%</sub>: 0.8-1.0) in all the decision-making and

action-taking process items assessed. This value also indicates high consensus among academics and CDAs on the nature of items assessed for this study (Merino and Livia, 2009).

Internal consistency reliability was ascertained by calculating Cronbach's coefficient for the questionnaire. In addition, a reliability analysis was carried out on each of the items by assessing the Cronbach's coefficient that the instrument possessed when an item was deleted from it. From these sets of data, decisions were made about whether to keep each of the items. The Cronbach Alpha inter-consistency coefficient of the questionnaire used in the study was found to be 0.862. The obtained reliability coefficient is quite high (Latorre-Medina, Blanco-Encomienda and Bel-Blanca, 2014).

### *The Qualitative Phase*

A phenomenological and dialogical approach was used, showing how individuals, in their interactions with the world around them, interpret the conceptual resources they use to construct meaning from their circumstances. The focus is on rich description of some aspects of experience, described through language and from their situation (Davidsen, 2013; Vann and Cole, 2004). There was an interest in knowing, therefore, what factors foster or inhibit the participation of CDAs within specific decision-making and action-taking processes within their post.

Five dialogical focus groups were conducted. Each dialogical focus group was attended by 15 CDAs. The 5 dialogical focus groups were held on working premises. The selection of participants in the dialogical focus groups was based on answers given in the survey: on the one hand, those who responded that they 'always' participated in decision-making and action-taking processes and, on the other hand, those who responded that they 'never' participated in these processes. Each dialogical focus group lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. Its objective was to gain a common understanding of the internal and external factors enabling or

limiting the level of participation marked in the questionnaire; and to develop a consensus about the vital changes in assumptions, behaviours and norms needed to facilitate the decision-making and action-taking processes within their own organizational culture. Thus, the dialogical approach meant that participants expressed their sense of empowerment to recognize different ways in which participation could be exercised in a more engaging and committed way (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2013).

Given the qualitative approach, the necessary principles for guaranteeing the quality of information obtained in each dialogical focus group were applied (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009): care and attention towards the sensitivity of CDAs and an idiographic approach throughout the visits in their own working places. The validation of information went through a four step process: testing assumptions and inferences; sharing relevant information; using specific examples; and combining advocacy and inquiry within the discussion (Schwarz *et al.*, 2005). The results were summarized and are shown in Table 7.

### *Data Analysis*

The data from the survey were examined statistically using SPSS software. A descriptive analysis was undertaken for an overview of the results. A contingency analysis was then carried out to establish which identified variables from the sample presented a significant association between the frequency of participation of CDAs in specific decision-making and action-taking processes within their organizations.

The dialogical methodological approach applied a group facilitation method aimed at gaining information about the factors perceived by the CDAs as limiting or facilitating the democratization of decision-making and action-taking processes. Therefore, it has been possible to find out what makes CDAs participate or not in decision-making and action-taking processes, as they experience it.

## Results

Table 2 provides a picture of results obtained from the first phase of the study. The content refers to the descriptive data about the frequency of participation in the different decision-making and action-taking processes in which CDAs take part within third sector organizations studied.

### INSERT TABLE 2

An initial examination of the data (mean and standard deviations) obtained for each of the items in the questionnaire reveals a certain homogeneity in assessments by CDAs, varying the average scores achieved by each of the items between 2.22 and 2.52. Looking at the standard deviations, we also find that there is not much difference between the results: the dispersion falls between 0.649 and 0.807.

A high level of participation is observed in various items validated in the survey. The highest value corresponds to item '*define project objectives*' (62 percent), followed by item '*establish processes for implementing projects*' (59.7 percent). However, a low level of participation is revealed in some items, especially in item '*set the budget for roles and tasks within the post*' (23.9 percent), item '*select organizations to network with*' (16.2 percent) and item '*set the organization's mission and policies*' (15.2 percent). And for 'sometimes' as the frequency of participation, the values range from 27.7 percent (*define project objectives*) to 38.5 percent (*select organizations to network with*).

Besides a descriptive analysis, a contingency analysis was carried out so as to determine the identification variables which maintained a significant association with respect to the items about participation processes, depending on the gender, geographical working area, type of responsibility and field of work of CDAs.



Table 3 shows the items of the questionnaire that maintain a significant association with respect to the independent variable '*gender*'.

### **INSERT TABLE 3**

From the internal analysis of the association between the variable and the item listed in Table 3, it can be seen that only the establishment of the budget for their own tasks within their own posts is significantly associated with the gender of the respondents. While more than half of men (52.7 percent) participate in the decision-making about the budget for the tasks within their own post, a significant percentage of women never participate in deciding the budget for their post-related tasks.

For the same item we find significant differences regarding the '*geographical working area*' (see Table 4). Thus, the majority of CDAs who work in urban areas (58.4 percent) never or only sometimes participate setting the budget for roles and tasks in the post, while 57.9 percent of those who work in rural areas always involve themselves in this task.

### **INSERT TABLE 4**

Moreover, the significance of the relationship between the descriptive variable '*post of responsibility*' and each of the items outlined in the questionnaire is shown in Table 5.

### **INSERT TABLE 5**

Further internal analyses of the associations between the different variables reveal that most managers (between 59.6 percent and 77.2 percent) and board members (between 65.5

percent and 84.5 percent) always participate in the decision-making regarding systemic planning, organization and sustainable management, and empowerment. Note that the highest levels of participation of managers and board members are observed when establishing processes in order to implement projects and setting the organization's mission and policies, respectively. In contrast, a high percentage of operational staff (between 42.5 percent and 61.4 percent) never or only sometimes participate in these processes; this low level of participation is especially notable when setting the budget in the post and selecting communities and target groups to work with.

Finally, in Table 6 we observe the significance of the relationship between the identification variable '*field of work*' and each of the items included in the questionnaire.

#### **INSERT TABLE 6**

Results reveal that there is also a significant association between the field of work of the organization and the level of participation in the decision-making and action-taking processes. This level is higher in organizations whose mission and objectives are linked to the fields of economic development, health, ecology and environment, reaching values such as 73.7 percent, 86.4 percent and 87.5 percent when setting the organization's mission and policies, defining inclusive objectives and establishing processes in order to implement projects, respectively. Paradoxically, the level of participation is low in the fields of social integration, human rights, participation and community development, and education, training and research, where a high percentage of CDAs (up to 72.2 percent) recognize that they never or only sometimes involve themselves in some of the considered issues.

Table 7 presents the outcomes of the dialogical focus groups, which reveal the factors inhibiting and facilitating participation in decision-making and action-taking processes, as perceived by the CDAs.

#### **INSERT TABLE 7**

From the input of the participants' dialogical focus groups, it is worth highlighting that although they identified the limiting factors which compromised the quality of their participation and organizational culture they were immersed in, they were also able to recognize and articulate together what the facilitating factors could be to move from their prevailing organizational culture to a more relational and participatory one. However, they all stated that their formal and non-formal training did not address the competences needed to be able to reverse the current situation to the desired change. Training in fields such as team leadership, facilitation skills and financial management were highlighted as urgently needed. Participants stated that if they were given the opportunity to be trained in numeracy, financial and accounting literacy they would find themselves empowered to give input and negotiate when internal decisions were taken on the budget relating to their role and tasks with development projects carried out.

Concern was also expressed that the current reduction and instability of jobs were deterrents to giving any input and/or opinion about decisions related to the budget or other areas that might jeopardize their continuity in post. Trust was another key and transversal factor to all the decision-making and action-taking processes, mentioned by all participants: the absence of trust within the working team and organizational culture considerably limited any attempt to build deep and constructive relationships and interactions among CDAs addressing the changes needed.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to explore what inhibits and fosters the participation of CDAs in decision-making and action-taking processes within their posts in the organizational culture. Both methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, have proved to be appropriate to select participants who stated ‘never’ or ‘always’ having the opportunity to become engaged in the following areas: (i) systemic planning such as collectively setting the organization’s mission and policies, defining project objectives and selecting organizations to network with. These CDAs, as directors, managers and operating staff, emphasized that ‘funding rules and dictates, unfortunately, how the mission, objectives and internal policies are set’. It is relevant to point out that it was the operating staff who emphasized the issue of beliefs and needs being hijacked by funding strategies approved by board members. (ii) organization and sustainable management, i.e. processes which involve implementing projects, selecting communities and target groups to work with and setting the budget for roles and tasks within the post. Regarding this area, CDAs' comments highlighted that even though the participatory mechanisms are in place, ‘they are not trusted as effective within a culture in which a unilateral control comes before efforts for collaborative management’. A risk adverse culture does not give space to pilot alternative team management methods and techniques. ‘Participation does not guarantee improving managerial styles. It might delay the generation and implementation of decisions and become counterproductive’. This explains why managers and directors prefer to exercise unilateral control. With regard to (iii) empowerment, understood as the capacity of CDAs to select the required training to become competent and/or more competent in their role, opinions were expressed, such as: ‘Impossible to reconcile work, family and training, when training is still considered a liability and expense for the organization’, ‘Reconciling work and family is incompatible with the hourly working demands under a very tight budget’.

Significant relationships have been found to exist between the gender of CDAs, the geographical area in which they work, the position of responsibility they hold and their field of work, and how frequently they perceive themselves participating in decision-making and action-taking processes. In this respect, although participation by both genders is noted in the processes studied, a high percentage of women do not exercise their right and responsibility to participate in decision-making processes at budget allocation and in selecting the training they considered necessary, revealing a deficit of participation based on gender within the organizations studied. This deficit is shown by CDAs mainly in urban areas. The study also reveals that there are significant differences regarding the post of responsibility and the field of work, with a high percentage of CDAs (operational staff and those who work in fields of social integration, and education, training and research) not participating to a great extent in systemic planning, organization and sustainable management, and empowerment.

CDAs discussed the reasons why they perceived not having been able to develop an organizational culture with which they could identify and participate in the decision-making processes described above. They considered it highly appropriate to have had the opportunity to review with their peers the empirical evidence they had given individually on the frequency of participation about decision-making and action-taking processes. CDAs were aware that this lack of participation in key governance, managerial and facilitation areas, did not allow them to be committed fully to building a sense of belonging and collective ownership. The study reveals that there is a deficit of mechanisms, and sometimes internal political willingness, to foster and to build a participatory organizational culture.

The narrative and arguments developed and gathered in the dialogical focus groups clearly demonstrated that CDAs recognized the factors influencing good governance and participatory management, as put forward by Goldsmith and Clutterbuck (1998): leadership, autonomy and control. However, leadership is still being exercised through a one-way, top-

down managerial style, rather than engaging leadership behaviours to support group effectiveness, as well as team leadership activities which potentially shape emergent cognition and behavioural processes that facilitate team effectiveness (Benoliel and Somech 2015, citing Kozlowski *et al.*, 2009). Regarding autonomy, this is perceived as dysfunctional, when it reinforces individualistic behaviours which limit learning and teaching opportunities among group members. In the name of autonomy, relevant information is atomized across different departments or is being held under unilateral control without any collective accountability. This unilateral control mode defines how power is exercised among CDAs. As well as being coercive, this use of power does not permit alternative understandings and practices to thrive. CDAs confirmed that the enabling factors in which a participatory organizational culture could take root are not present yet.

As expressed by CDAs on various occasions, the lack of identity and sense of belonging to the organization reduces key collective and performative interactions among CDAs as stated by the Equipo Claves (1998). CDAs seem to be acting outside a participatory organizational culture.

Thus, although the democratization of power has been a constant demand on the part of CDAs, this study reveals that it is not necessarily in relation to the current lack of participatory processes, but more about participating in the design and definition of the processes themselves and how to implement them across the organization.

## **Conclusion**

The existence of third sector organizations has been linked to a mature and democratic organization of civil society, counterbalancing the multilayered power structures of the public and private sector in organizing people's social, cultural and economic life. This third sector mission infers a completely different *modus operandi*. The study emphasizes the need

expressed by CDAs for an ethical and democratic competence-based training, which could capture the notions of complexity, transformation and processes from the reality in which these organizations operate. The participatory processes and mechanisms deficit that the findings reveal will not be resolved by accident; nor will it respond to the leadership of one person alone. Likewise, a continuing systematic ‘copycatting’ of the private, profit-oriented organizational and management structure is not appropriate, given the nature and values of third sector organizations.

A critical review of current organizational management models trainings is needed by CDAs themselves, as the current ones seem not to take into account democratizing and socializing participatory structures and power at different levels of the organization. CDAs have expressed the importance of an organizational culture which claims to be responsive to the lifeworld of people they work with and for.

If CDAs in the third sector want to remain key players in building a sustainable and fair social, cultural, environmental society, there is a need to develop, design and apply a holistic CDA participatory process-driven training competence framework. This should allow CDAs to intervene effectively and in a transformational manner within the complexity of the reality they act within.

While this study focuses on Peru, it is argued that factors inhibiting and facilitating participatory governance have wider relevance in socially-oriented organizations, if a participatory organizational culture is to be exercised. CDAs demand an ethical and democratic competence-based training, which would empower them to democratize their organizational structures.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the project EMA3-372558, financed by the Erasmus Mundus programme of the European Union.

*Catalina Quiroz-Niño is a Visiting Fellow and Visiting Lecturer at York St. John University, School of Education. She jointly wrote and coordinated a three year (2012-2015) Erasmus Mundus project about the Social and Solidarity Economy in Higher Education, which comprised universities in Latin America, Europe and Africa. Her doctoral studies focus on the relationship between the Social and Solidarity Economy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. She has extensive experience of co-designing educative and community based projects in the third sector in Latin America and Europe.*

*Francisco J. Blanco-Encomienda is an Associate Professor of Quantitative Methods for Economics and Business at the Faculty of Education, Economy and Technology of Ceuta, University of Granada. He participated in the Erasmus Mundus Social and Solidarity Economy project led by York St. John University as data analyst.*

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