

While the headline writers focus on the re-establishment of a forum for national negotiations, at regional and local level numerous initiatives are under way to promote meaningful participation and development in all aspects of our society.

In a quiet and often clumsy manner, democracy is finding and defining itself through the committed efforts of people who seldom enjoy the limelight that falls on their national leaders.

In most cases, these regional forums address issues of an economic and developmental nature, and some are also concerned with local and regional government restructuring. What is clear from the composition and objectives of these forums is that the legacy of apartheid planning has at least taught us harsh lessons about planning initiatives.

Perhaps the most important lesson is that unless there is a legitimate, representative and participative process, no outcome or product, no matter how technically correct, will be acceptable.

Many of the participants have accepted this principle very reluctantly, coerced by the need to acquire funding for development. However, it is hoped that this will eventually become the norm.

It would seem that already there is growing support for the idea that broader public and institutional participation in planning and decision-making should become entrenched in the way in which we conduct our (regional) political affairs.

Besides allowing for a wide range of opinions to be heard, this process also ensures broader accountability from the political players in the interim and post interim periods.

By **KOBUS VAN LOGGERENBERG**

It is not enough simply to have people on board – even though they cannot participate effectively because of a lack of skills and experience, or they are deliberately frustrating the process because of fear or lack of understanding about the need for a new dispensation.

If one takes a brief look at existing regional forums a very encouraging picture emerges.

In the Cape Province at least three major regional initiatives are in progress. The Western Cape Economic and Development Forum seeks to reach consensus on strategies for economic development and on actions

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## Forums build vision of democratic future

An encouraging picture is emerging from regional development forums

which its members should take to achieve these within appropriate time frames.

While the main focus is on the metropolitan area, the forum is also concerned with the development of the Western Cape hinterland. There are several commissions within the forum, each dealing with issues such as job creation, economic growth and restructuring, urban development, as well as rural and agricultural development. Idasa's Western Cape office plays a pivotal role in facilitating and managing this process.

The Eastern Cape Regional Economic and Development Forum is set to address the economic growth and viability of that region, but focusing first on the Port

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