

Absenteeism in citizen participatory budgeting: challenges for local development management

Absenteísmo no orçamento participativo cidadão: desafios para a gestão do desenvolvimento local

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1.Introduction

The democratic transition in Peru in 2000 marked the beginning of a major reform of the State based on decentralization, with the aim of transferring political, administrative, and budgetary functions to local and regional governments. This reform, based on the Framework Law on Decentralization (No. 27783), had as one of its essential principles the democratic and participatory nature, an aspect that was ratified with the constitutional reform of decentralization approved by the Congress of the Republic in March 2002. According to this regulation, local governments were assigned the responsibility of promoting, supporting and regulating management instruments and budgets, thus guaranteeing citizen participation in the preparation of public agendas. However, despite legislative efforts, absenteeism in citizen participation has become a significant challenge for the management of local development.

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The district of Anco Huallo represents an emblematic case in the study of citizen participation in the management of local development. Despite the State's efforts to implement participatory mechanisms at the regional and local levels, the process of citizen participation in Anco Huallo has faced numerous limitations. These difficulties have revealed a persistent tension between representative democracy and participatory democracy, especially when local policies are designed and implemented without the full inclusion of citizens or with fragmented participation.

This research adopts a qualitative methodology with an exploratory and interpretative design to understand the perceptions, actions, and differences of the citizens of the district of Anco Huallo. Using techniques such as semi-structured interviews, directed observation and review of written documents, we sought to capture the reality lived in this context. Leaders of social organizations, former building authorities and municipal officials, selected for their participation and continuous dialogue, were interviewed.

Citizen participation is an essential component for the legitimization of public decisions and the strengthening of local democracy¹. In other words, it is citizen participation as a process of democratization of society, where citizenship is increasingly exercised, and the countryside is urbanized through the localization of politics². In this context, citizen participation in municipal management processes, especially through Participatory Budgeting, not only seeks individual and collective intervention in decision-making, but also the legitimization of such decisions³. However, absenteeism in citizen participation poses significant challenges for the management of local development, limiting the ability of communities to influence policies that directly affect them.

Citizen participation has gained increasing attention in the social and political sciences in Peru, especially in recent years. Initially, interest in this topic focused on researching and theorizing about civil society, spaces and mechanisms for participation, and the inclusion of sectors traditionally excluded from the public space and the national political agenda⁴. Today, there has been a significant shift in perspective, where "subaltern actors"

1 CEPAL, 2009. p.26.

2 HUBER, 2003. p.17.

3 SIMATOVIC, 2011.

4 ESPINOSA, 2009.

have come to occupy a central place in discussions and actions aimed at the public agenda, both at the national and local levels. This renewed approach promotes social policies that seek the “inclusion” of the most disadvantaged sectors, actors who, in the past, despite their efforts to organize and participate, were frequently repressed, limited, or excluded by local and national elites. Citizen participation, therefore, is understood as a fundamental process to democratize society, by allowing all sectors, especially the most vulnerable, to have a voice and influence in the decisions that affect their daily lives.

Citizen participation implies more than a simple act of intervention in public affairs; It is a concept that needs to be clearly defined, evaluated in its scope, and stripped of any superficial ideological content. In theory, citizen participation is the political and legal capacity of citizens to intervene, either individually or through their legitimate representatives, in the various processes of municipal management. This participation is especially relevant in those aspects that affect the material, social, political, economic, and cultural living conditions of the population⁵.

Add that the failure of the developmentalist model promoted by the Velasco government in the 60s and 70s, and the subsequent triumph of neoliberalism, led to a crisis of the institutions of representative democracy⁶. This situation caused a social and political fragmentation that forced the State, in the 90s, to refocus its attention on citizen participation. As a result, politics has become “localized,” giving local governments unprecedented power and resources, and creating complex spaces for direct citizen intervention in decision-making.

In Latin America, there is a recent trend to expand citizen participation mechanisms beyond traditional institutions of direct democracy, such as referendums and citizens’ initiatives, which in many cases have been underutilized. This trend seeks to integrate citizens not only at critical moments or in strategic political decisions, but also in the continuous management of public policies. Today’s citizen participation is increasingly linked to consultation and decision-making mechanisms in the definition of these policies, which contributes to recovering the notion of transparency in government acts⁷. In this context, it is expected that institutions report on the decisions

5 SEGURA, 2016.

6 HUBER, 2003.

7 GROMPONE, 2006.

they make and that, in addition to the mechanisms of control and balance between the powers of the State, there is a process of monitoring by society.

Complements this vision by pointing out that one of the most evident flaws in Latin America is the absence of a culture of accountability, which not only favors corruption, but also generates a disconnect between citizens and their representatives, making the former not feel truly represented⁸. This lack of accountability reinforces the importance of citizen participation as a means of ensuring transparency and accountability in public management.

In Peru, the decentralization initiated in 2002 aimed to transfer political, administrative, and budgetary powers to regional and local governments, in order to improve efficiency, legitimacy, transparency, participation and accountability in public management. This process seeks to get municipal authorities to act to articulate and involve citizens in local development, establishing mechanisms and spaces for their participation in decision-making.

Despite its limitations and inconsistencies, decentralization has been a key factor for institutional change in many municipalities in the highlands. These municipalities, together with various associations and organizations, have played an innovative role in promoting more sustainable and equitable territorial development. The concerted development plans developed by local authorities reflect this collective effort to identify medium- and long-term resources and opportunities. However, many municipalities still face significant challenges in the efficient and democratic management of their territories. They often lack effective development plans and continue with traditional practices, such as mayorism, short-term visions, authoritarianism, lack of transparency and corruption, which generates complaints from citizens⁹.

It is essential to understand how citizen participation has evolved over time. The first significant experiences in Peru emerged in the 1980s, when the parties of the United Left, by assuming governmental responsibilities in the municipalities, introduced a new dynamic: direct collaboration with local organizations. This characteristic approach allowed for greater involvement of organizations in public management and decision-making¹⁰.

During the 1990s, many municipalities began to adopt roundtables, participation councils, and development committees as alternatives to growing

8 BRUNO, 2006.

9 REVESZ, 2006.

10 SIMATOVIC, 2011.

authoritarianism and clientelism. These mechanisms opened municipal management to popular participation and became planning methodologies, promoting a closer relationship with citizen rights and adapting normative and interpretative frameworks of Western democracies.

It highlights that citizen participation is crucial to legitimize public decisions by including various social interests. In addition, it facilitates the development of community skills, the building of capacities for teamwork, and increases coherence and creativity in the resolution of local problems¹¹. These aspects are essential for the sustainability and legitimacy of development initiatives.

Citizen participation in Peru has undergone a notable expansion by both the State and civil society. The country has a relatively broad legal framework for citizen participation, and almost all levels of government have established spaces for consultation and consensus on public policies between the State and civil society. Carrión also points out that in Peru one cannot talk about citizen participation without considering decentralization¹².

The return to democracy in the last decade has allowed the incorporation of citizen participation in local management through concerted planning processes and the Participatory Budget. New laws and constitutional reforms, including the Law on the Basis of Decentralization, have been enacted, which have facilitated progress in the political, fiscal and institutional aspects. These mechanisms seek to integrate citizen participation in decision-making, facing resistance and turning it into a state policy. Thus, both decentralization and citizen participation have been consolidated as key elements in the local and national public agenda¹³.

In Peru, citizen participation has historically emerged from organized civil society, while decentralization has been driven primarily by the State. This top-down approach has generated new spaces within the field of decentralization that, at times, have not adequately integrated the previous spaces for participation. In addition, rules imposed by the State may limit the inclusion of important sectors of civil society¹⁴.

11 LLONA, 2001.

12 CARRIÓN, 2004.

13 LLONA, 2001.

14 LÓPEZ, 1998.

The implementation of the Participatory Budget in Peru has aimed to integrate civil society, both organized and unorganized, in decision-making on state investment. According to Law No. 28056, the Participatory Budget allows the programming and prioritization of projects within the fiscal period.

This approach has led regional and local governments to organize the distribution of the Municipal Compensation Fund (FONCOMUN)¹⁵, initially generating great expectations of participation and collecting demands from social organizations and communities. Points out that Participatory Budgeting became a crucial mechanism for civil society to choose projects in accordance with their local development plans, although sometimes without considering how these projects would materialize¹⁶. This process allowed citizens and social organizations to meet with municipal technicians and discuss needs, breaking the monopoly of decisions previously in the hands of the political system. However, when it came to distributing FONCOMUN resources, problems arose: the demands of the communities were not always adequately met, as the resources were “*pulverized*”, with each community receiving only a small part, insufficient to meet its needs.

The Participatory Budget has revealed important limitations that, in many cases, have led to “disenchantment and disappointment” in municipalities such as those of Ayacucho. Although this mechanism sought to involve citizens in the execution and prioritization of works, the available economic resources were often insufficient to meet all demands, generating a sense of frustration¹⁷. In addition, in many localities, Participatory Budgeting has become a simple document rather than a real opportunity to drive change¹⁸.

Currently, there is a notable absenteeism in citizen participation, not only in the Participatory Budget process, but in local management in general. Despite having a broad legal framework on citizen participation, the reality shows that this participation is limited and increasingly distant.

It is crucial to explore the reasons behind the lack of commitment of citizens, municipal institutions, and organisations to complete the participatory

15 The Municipal Compensation Fund (FONCOMUN) is a fund established by the Peruvian Political Constitution, with the aim of promoting investment in the different municipalities of the country, with a redistributive criterion in favor of the most remote and depressed areas, prioritizing the allocation to rural and urban-marginal localities of the country.

16 LLONA, 2017.

17 SHACK; PORRAS, 2023.

18 RICCI, 2014.

process. Although there was initially agreement on the importance of participation, it seems that local authorities, in their attempt to comply with the regulations, only carry out superficial actions such as organizing meetings twice a year with agreements that are not fulfilled. Despite the increase in resources and the management of more projects, citizen and civil society participation has not grown in the same proportion¹⁹.

Citizen participation should not be considered a linear and homogeneous policy, but rather as the result of the struggles and confluences between various actors and political projects²⁰. In rural peasant communities, participation takes place through communal assemblies, where common problems are addressed, activities are scheduled and new leaders are elected. In these assemblies, convened by the president of the community, mainly men usually participate, with little female representation. The peasant community stands out as the most representative and legitimate organization in these rural spaces. Any external institution that wishes to implement a project or carry out an activity in these areas must coordinate with local leaders, who, in turn, involve the community members in the decision-making process.

Alejandro Diez, in his analysis of the formation of communities and the crisis of representativeness during the 1990s in the Peruvian coast and highlands, observes that “we have become accustomed to a representative democratic system for the election of national and local leaders”²¹. This approach is key to understanding whether the new forms of citizen participation promoted by the State have improved inclusion or, on the contrary, have generated polarization and weakness in the process.

Peasant communities, with a “democratic tradition” older than the current electoral system, have their own mechanisms for the renewal of leaders and organizational strengthening. However, the integration of these traditional methods with the new mechanisms of participation established by the State presents significant challenges. Despite the broad regulatory framework of the State and standardized processes for citizen participation, local creativity, styles, and particularities are often underestimated. State-imposed participation tends to be homogeneous and one-dimensional, ignoring the diverse and sometimes conflicting realities of rural spaces²².

19 CEPLAN, 2023.

20 PANFICHI, 2006.

21 DIEZ, 2022.

22 FERNÁNDEZ, L. J.; FERNÁNDEZ, M., SOLOAGA, 2019.

Despite the importance of citizen participation in Participatory Budgeting, this reality is often not adequately considered by those who design and implement state policies. Since 2004, the Participatory Budget has been implemented in most local and regional governments in Peru, introducing a uniformizing vision for decision-making through decentralization. This mechanism sought to include organized civil society in the management of the budget assigned by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, known as FONCOMUN, allowing the prioritization of the needs and demands of citizens.

2. Participatory budgeting: loss of public confidence

The first experience of the Participatory Budget in the district of Anco Huallo allowed the creation of the Local Coordination Council²³ and the Citizen Vigilance Committee²⁴, in charge of monitoring and controlling the established priorities. However, as Hermes Cabrera Laura points out, these agencies faced serious difficulties due to the lack of adequate training and the absence of regulations to guide their functions. As a result, one of the members mentioned that the Council and the Committee “came to nothing”.

In 2006, Participatory Budgeting began with numerous gaps and limitations. The execution of the works proposed by the community, such as the construction of irrigation canals in agricultural areas, did not materialize. In the middle of the year, government programs emerged that required counterpart or co-financing for the improvement of neighborhood roads, which led the mayor to redirect the budget towards these social programs instead of the works prioritized by the community. This decision and the non-compliance of the projects generated a feeling of deception among the population, which perceived the situation as a lack of commitment to local needs.

The limitations in the fulfillment of the agreements and the continuous demands in the workshops generated discontent. Despite this, the process continued, although the commitment of the municipal authorities to citizen

23 The Law on the Bases of Decentralization defined the CCRs and the CCLs as the fundamental spaces for citizen participation for consultation, coordination and agreement on medium-term development plans and annual investment budgets.

24 The Citizen Oversight Committee, in accordance with the Framework Law on Participatory Budgeting, is constituted at the end of the prioritization process, whose members are representatives of Organized Civil Society, whose function is to monitor and monitor the progress of the priorities established in the Participatory Budgets.

participation was initially scarce. The Participatory Budget was seen more as a technical space than as a tool to improve the relationship between local government and citizens.

Towards the end of the administration in 2006, municipal authorities began to recognize the value of Participatory Budgeting and to become more actively involved. This change in attitude was evident when the district of Anco Huallo became a provincial reference, and some councilors and technicians were invited to share their experience in Chile and Bolivia. Decentralization is a process of institutional construction that requires a deep knowledge of the reality of the State, political organizations, the dynamics of regional societies and the role of citizen participation. Identifying the associated risks should not be interpreted as resistance to change, but as an opportunity to strengthen its implementation²⁵.

The reform of the State during the democratic transition and the introduction of the Participatory Budget from 2002 onwards generated great expectations in some sectors of Peruvian society. However, in rural areas, the proposal for the new reform was met with skepticism, due to previous experiences of failed reforms, such as the interrupted decentralization process that left rural communities frustrated²⁶.

Despite the doubts, the new laws and provisions were formalized, guiding local governments to plan, agree, manage, and prioritize the needs of their citizens. In the District Municipality of Anco Huallo, the implementation of the Participatory Budget revealed significant challenges. Municipal authorities, many of whom were new to their positions, did not receive adequate training on decentralization, citizen participation, and the Participatory Budget itself. This contrasts with the initial enthusiasm promoted by the National Decentralization Council²⁷.

In a context where social organizations such as the Mother's and Glass of Milk Clubs were still marked by clientelistic practices, the distrust was palpable. As one resident reflected, "when President Fujimori's term ended, we believed that there would no longer be support for the poor, but then we were told that there would be more support for our communities, which gave us some peace of mind". This disenchantment and lack of confidence

25 GROMPONE, 2006.

26 KOECHLIN, 2017.

27 BANDA, 2018.

in the new system reflect the difficulty of overcoming the legacy of previous political practices and the need for a more effective and transparent implementation of the Participatory Budget.

When the Participatory Budget was implemented in 2004 in the District Municipality of Anco Huallo, the communal authorities and grassroots social organizations, accustomed to the clientelistic logic of the Fujimori government, were skeptical. In the past, the government had carried out works in the communities through the FONCODES²⁸ Executing Nuclei, without mediation or real community participation. Now, with the new approach of the Participatory Budget, the municipality was expected to allocate funds to communities and social organizations, promoting participation, consultation, and planning. This transition generated discontent and confusion among residents. This testimony from Pablo Gómez states: “When the municipality began to plan the priorities of the people through the Participatory Budget, people thought that we would hand out cash for them to distribute among themselves. We had to explain that the funds were for specific works”.

Although the first Participatory Budgeting workshops were well received due to incentives such as food and small gifts, organizers faced difficulties in achieving meaningful participation. There was no clear distinction between potential participants and attendees, and when prioritizing projects, multiple conflicting demands emerged. Each representative requested works for his or her community or organization, while the limited amount of the FONCOMUN was not enough to meet all the needs, a former member of the management mentions:

Although the instructions for the Participatory Budget indicated that the elaboration should be with the participation of community leaders and representatives, many community members attended the workshops. We couldn't tell them that it was only for authorities. When it came to prioritizing, almost everyone wanted to give their opinion on the construction of an evangelical church or the communal house. The lack of consensus took away our time to collectivize the demands.

28 The Fund for Cooperation for Social Development (Foncodes) is a national program of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (Midis) that generates sustainable economic opportunities for rural households in extreme poverty, and facilitates the articulation between private actors of the demand and supply of goods and services required to strengthen their enterprises, reducing the exclusion processes that prevent these families from being able to articulate themselves in the markets.

From the perspective of the officials and organizers, the massive participation in the Participatory Budgeting workshops generated unforeseen costs in food and materials, which were not contemplated in the initial planning. Due to these financial difficulties, the Technical Team decided to restrict the call for future workshops, limiting participation to a few community authorities. A former municipal official says:

When many community members participated, we had not foreseen expenses for food. The municipality could not assume these unforeseen events, since the financing for the Participatory Budget had to be covered with money from the Foncomun.

Likewise, the municipal authorities found that the Participatory Budget became a source of discomfort due to the constant complaints and claims of citizens. This environment was not well received by the officials and was handled inadequately:

The Participatory Budget generated a lot of spending on transportation of participants, food and, sometimes, lodging. For this reason, in the following district workshops, only the authorities were summoned. They preferred that only they attended, since they felt uncomfortable with questions about the execution of works such as the construction of the communal house or the road. The pressure from the community members for answers and the number of demands was not well received by the authorities

As a result, the authorities began to see the space of the Participatory Budget more as a technical instance and less as a deliberative space for good governance and citizen participation. The original intention of the Participatory Budget was to strengthen the relationship between local government and citizens, promoting a democratic approach based on shared commitments and responsibilities. However, this view was eroded by a lack of preparation and widespread discontent.

The first management of the Participatory Budget, under the leadership of Mayor Virgilio Aquise and completed in December 2006, faced numerous challenges. Despite the difficulties, a certain political openness towards local management was observed. A member of the Technical Team of the Participatory Budget during the meeting, pointed out that in the last

year of management the relationship with peasant communities and social organizations was improved, which gave greater legitimacy to the process. However, he also expressed his concern about the continuity of the commitments made by the new incoming authorities, since each administration has its own priorities:

At the end of the municipal administration in 2007, the new Mayor brings with him a different team and a different vision of the development of the district.

In rural areas, municipal authorities are usually elected with low percentages of votes due to the number of candidate lists. This generates a lack of effective representation and makes it difficult to guarantee good governance, since the administrations are affected by disputes between political adversaries. In this context, electoral promises, and the fulfillment of offers tend to carry more weight than established state policies, since the new mayor will prioritize satisfying his constituents or aligning himself with the policies of the national government.

In the District Municipality of Anco Huallo, the new administration that took office in 2007 decided to prioritize works not contemplated in the Participatory Budget of fiscal year 2006 and did not continue with the projects of the previous administration. The mayor justified this decision by pointing out that, during his campaign, he had promised the construction of a large “Municipal Coliseum” to promote sports and youth in the district:

It is difficult to be Mayor because of expectations and criticism. Fulfilling electoral promises is complicated, especially when the law requires specific profiles for the works and there are urgent needs. However, people want to see concrete results, and the Colosseum is a significant work that is benefiting young people.

During his term, the mayor fulfilled his promise to start the construction of a Municipal Coliseum. However, the execution of this project lasted approximately three years. Despite this background, the management of the Municipal Coliseum became a symbol of the mayor's priorities. What is questionable is that, during the implementation of the Participatory Budget, resources from the FONCOMUN were diverted to finance projects not included in the list of priorities established by the participatory budgets.

This resulted in the postponement of works previously prioritized by citizens, such as electrification projects in marginalized neighborhoods and the construction of the dam.

At an open town hall meeting held on June 9, 2007, attendees expressed their dissatisfaction with the management, mentioning:

A report on the Participatory Budget and respect for previously prioritized projects. They also expressed concerns about the Coliseum and proposed giving priority to other works that would be more beneficial to the population, such as the implementation of fish farms.

The lack of commitment on the part of the new management to comply with the agreements of the Participatory Budget showed a lack of willingness to develop the participatory process. This neglect and non-compliance with established priorities generated growing discontent and mistrust among citizens, negatively affecting participation in future participatory budgets and reflecting a growing gap between the expectations of the population and the reality of local public management.

3. Absenteeism from Citizen participation in the framework of the Participatory Budget

The projects prioritized through the Participatory Budget became an extensive list of ideas without real execution, which left the population with frustrated expectations. For the Participatory Budget to have legitimacy and for the agreements signed to be effective, it is essential that citizen initiatives are carried out and that the commitments of the authorities are fulfilled. The new building management that began in 2007 faced the challenge of developing the Participatory Budget for 2008. To do this, they hired two external facilitators with experience in the field to train newly arrived municipal officials and community authorities. The facilitators guided the participants in an informative assembly on the importance of the Participatory Budget, the Concerted Development Plan, decentralization, and project prioritization mechanisms. Topics such as the Institutional Opening Budget, transparency and oversight were also addressed, as well as the relevance of the Municipal Ordinance that legitimized the development of the Participatory Budget and the need for its dissemination through the local media.

Within the framework of the Participatory Budget, the first informative assembly of 2007 in the District of Anco Huallo was not attended by an experienced public official or a representative of the Decentralization Council. Instead, an external facilitator was in charge of interpreting and explaining the guidelines of the National Decentralization Council to an audience that was largely unaware of the issue. The assembly, instead of clarifying doubts, may have generated confusion due to the complexity of the rules and laws related to the development of the Participatory Budget at the local level.

The first zonal workshop of the 2007 Participatory Budget was held on June 10 in the town of Totorabamba, an agricultural community located north of the district capital. According to the minutes of the workshop, only four representatives of the six annexes that belong to that community and two directors of educational institutions attended. Despite the low attendance, the workshop was held with those present, who did not exceed eight participants, as indicated by the signatures of the attendees who approved the prioritized projects in the zonal table.

During the workshop, the consultant of the district municipality of Anco Huallo stressed that the Participatory Budget should have the active participation of the population and that the budget (FONCOMUN) should be distributed according to the strategic axes established in the Local Concerted Development Plan. However, one of the attendees expressed his dissatisfaction with the failure to fulfill the commitments assumed:

The projects selected in the 2006 Participatory Budget had not been implemented this year. In addition, the Committee requested that priority be given to projects that would benefit children, and the participants demanded that the commitments to prioritize the projects mentioned be fulfilled.

This episode illustrates the lack of commitment and absenteeism in citizen participation, underscoring the need for greater transparency and compliance with commitments within the framework of the Participatory Budget to maintain the trust of the population.

The discomfort and dissatisfaction generated by the non-compliance with the prioritized projects are evident. Faced with this situation, the Municipal Manager, a member of the Technical Team of the Participatory Budget, tried to mitigate the situation, resorting to a common tactic, blaming the previous management:

the previous administration did not present on December 27 (2006) the PIA (Institutional Opening Budget) signed by the previous Mayor and the technical team.

However, this strategy seems more like an attempt to avoid responsibilities than a real solution, since the former Mayor, in a public hearing of accountability held a day earlier, declared:

until December 30, 2006, documents were signed for the delivery of the position, announcing the works executed.

This statement highlights the uncertainties of a process that, instead of seeking corrective measures to strengthen relations between the local government and citizens, generates mistrust. In this context, citizens will see their credibility with the authorities reduced, and, as a consequence, the Participatory Budget will lose legitimacy in the future.

One participant pointed out that the participants in the zonal workshop did not attend because of their agreement with the Participatory Budget or because of positive expectations regarding this process. In reality, his attendance was due to the intention of complaining to the municipal authorities for the failure to execute the prioritized works and for the cut in the budget from FONCOMUN. This discontent was not an isolated case, but a constant in the rest of the zonal tables, which forced the municipal authorities and the technical team to justify the lack of execution of the projects of the Participatory Budget of previous years.

An example of this situation was evidenced in the zonal workshop of the Village of Chuparo, where, as soon as the event began, which was attended by only eleven participants, it was explained that:

the projects defined in the 2007 Participatory Budget have not been prioritized because the previous management did not present the Institutional Opening Budget (PIA) with the prioritized projects. The new management, which took office on January 3, 2007, improved the PIA, considering co-financing with projects in the various population centers.

While the first workshops usually lasted up to six hours, dedicated to guiding and explaining project prioritization strategies and the importance

of citizen participation, the successive workshops in the remaining zonal tables lasted less than two hours. This indicated that there was no longer space or time to attend to the demands of citizens. The sessions became monotonous and technical, gradually turning citizens into passive listeners of a process whose initial purpose was to empower citizen participation.

The facilitator expressed his disagreement with the low attendance of the population for the prioritization of projects. According to the minutes of the Participatory Budget of 2007, four projects were prioritized per population center, adding up to a total of 28 at the district level. These projects, aimed at improving productive infrastructure, basic sanitation, education, health, and capacity building, represented an extensive list of citizens' dreams and aspirations, the realization of which was uncertain. The paradox was that only in the central workshop was the budget available for the prioritization of projects made known.

After reading the list of prioritized projects for execution in 2008 and clarifying the available budget, the 36 participants at the workshop proceeded, as dictated by the norm and directive, to the formation of the Citizen Oversight Committee. In theory, this committee should oversee and monitor the progress of the prioritized projects, in addition to informing the public. It was made up of nine members, all men, who represented the different communities of the district of Anco Huallo, with the strategy that each one would supervise and follow up on the agreements established in their respective areas.

However, one of the members of the 2007 Citizen Oversight Committee says that the committee was, in practice, just a name on paper. They did not meet even once after their formation, and neither were a regulation drawn up that established the functions to be fulfilled. In addition, since the proposed works were not executed, there was no need to carry out the follow-up. Except for the construction of three sports slabs in three annexes of the 28 prioritized projects, the Committee went unnoticed and without any action.

On the other hand, grassroots social organizations did not follow up on the agreements either, waiting for the goodwill of the authorities. This inaction reflects a clientelistic vision, as Grompone (2006) points out, where clientelism and cooptation are a latent threat. It is not uncommon to find that 90% of the works executed in the province of Chincheros carry a plaque with the name of the political authority that carried them out, and their inaugurations become a feast and a rejoicing for the authority before the beneficiaries.

Despite the accumulated experience, the Technical Team convened the first informative assembly on June 6, 2008, which was affected by the non-attendance of the authorities and officials responsible for legitimizing the process. This lack of commitment weakened the continuity of the Participatory Budget, aggravated by political conflicts between some councilors and the mayor, who clashed over non-compliance in the execution of priority works in their respective communities. Since the councilors acted as intermediaries between the neighbors and the municipal administration, the frequent absence of the mayor of the city exacerbated the disenchantment and lack of coordination.

As a result, the 2008 Participatory Budget did not materialize. No clear commitments or priorities were set, and the municipal authority continued to execute projects at its discretion. In this context, the 2008 Participatory Budget was reduced to a mere informative assembly, as stated in the year's minute book. This reflects a lack of continuity in the process and underlines the growing citizen disenchantment, which translates into greater absenteeism in future editions of the Participatory Budget.

In 2008, in the district of Anco Huallo, two key institutions were created: the Roundtable for the Fight Against Poverty and the Defense Front. These organizations were born with the aim of strengthening citizen participation, and at first, they had significant support from the population, which saw in them an opportunity to assume a leading role in local decision-making.

This internal conflict was quickly taken advantage of by the municipal authority, which chose to coordinate directly with the mayors of the Populated Centers, who had recently risen politically. The municipal authority, trusting these mayors more than the leaders of grassroots social organizations, fostered a relationship of dependency through the economic incentive law implemented in 2008. This incentive, intended for the Populated Centers, was managed and conditioned by the district mayor, granting certain privileges to the mayors of the Populated Centers, who became unconditional allies, forced to sign documents in favor of the municipal management.

Regarding the development of the Participatory Budget in the district, the process showed a clear tendency to disinterest on the part of the municipal authorities. According to the schedule of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the process was to be carried out between May and July, but this varied over the years. In 2007, the prioritization workshops were held on schedule; however, in 2008, although the process began in June, the

workshops in the Populated Centers were not completed. For 2009, the Participatory Budget was attempted to be resumed, but the prioritization workshops began only in October, thus failing to meet the deadlines established by the MEF. This delay shows that the Participatory Budget was not a priority for municipal management, limiting itself to complying with the process formally and after the deadline.

In 2009, the Participatory Budget in the district of Anco Huallo was carried out in a merely formal way, complying with the regulations but without a real commitment to citizen participation. According to a member of the Technical Team, the FONCOMUN funds were mainly used as a counterpart for the construction of the premises of the “Micaela Bastidas” University in the Collpapampa annex, which to date has not been functional. In addition, works such as the “Amador Venegas” Municipal Coliseum and the remodeling of the “Alan García” Plaza Mayor continued, which minimized the need to involve citizens in the participatory process.

The name “Alan García” given to the square under remodeling did not respond to a recognition for government works, but to a strategy to ensure state financing, which did not materialize, leaving the work unfinished. Despite the call for the 2009 Participatory Budget, local authorities, such as the former mayor of the Village of Totorabamba, mention that participation was limited since many attended more to thank for non-prioritized works than for a real interest in the process.

According to those interviewed, although there was a slight increase in participation in some zonal roundtables compared to previous years, the invitation was made late and without due publicity. This fact, added to the fact that the invitation was made in October, a critical month for agricultural activities, led to many community members not attending or seeing the invitation as informal. In some areas, the low attendance was so notable that the workshops were held in the mayor’s office, which shows the lack of interest and disorganization in the process.

The Participatory Budget process in Anco Huallo was losing credibility over the years due to the failure to comply with the established agreements, which generated distrust among citizens. During the 2009 central workshop, several participants expressed frustration at the lack of implementation of previously prioritized projects, as shown by one of the interventions, who suggested meeting previous years’ budgets first before considering new projects.

Despite the fact that 38 projects were prioritized in 2009, many of them had already been considered in the 2007 Participatory Budget and were still not executed. The district mayor, instead of prioritizing citizen participation, focused his efforts on completing works such as the “Amador Venegas” Municipal Coliseum and the remodeling of the “Alan García” Plaza de Armas, using them as platforms for his political campaign in the 2010 elections.

The mayor organized his first accountability of 2009 at the new Municipal Coliseum, seeking to highlight the fulfillment of his campaign promises and win electoral support. However, his focus on elections and the updating of the district concerted development plan, with the help of supporters, showed that the participatory process was relegated to the background, further reducing its legitimacy and effectiveness.

In 2011, Américo Chávez Elguera assumed the mayor's office, having won popular support through his radio station and social activities, which allowed him to be elected with the backing of a regional political movement. However, once in office, he distanced himself from those who initially supported him, including the political party that brought him to the mayor's office, and began to collaborate with former mayors, generating the perception of a “co-government” between the two. This relationship, along with the lack of experience in his team and the hiring of family and friends in the municipality, caused discontent among citizens.

During the first months of his administration, he focused on projects financed by the Regional Government, such as the construction of the Modelo de Uripa market and the paving of streets. Although these works were important for political visibility, they were not aligned with the priorities established in previous Participatory Budgeting processes, reflecting a disconnect between municipal management and citizen demands.

The 2011 Participatory Budget was limited to a single central workshop with only 26 participants, without conducting the zonal workshops that were critical for citizen participation, especially in rural communities. This approach reflects the lack of promotion and support for citizen participation in the process, which contributed to absenteeism and loss of confidence in municipal management.

During the Participatory Budget process, the municipal management of Anco Huallo prioritized 21 projects, mainly infrastructure. However, the little participation of the main authorities, such as the mayor and the councilors, revealed a general lack of interest in deepening this system of

local management. In 2012, this lack of interest resulted in growing questioning by the population, which criticized the administrative inefficiency, the lack of transparency and the execution of works that did not respond to the true community priorities.

The municipality, aware of the criticism, passed an ordinance to improve the Participatory Budgeting process, introducing the “Results-Based Budgeting” approach and hiring external facilitators to guide the process. This new approach generated greater expectations among citizens, especially in rural areas, due to the opportunity to promote competitive projects with the support of different ministries. Despite these improvements, the process still faced challenges, reflecting the complex relationship between municipal authorities and the community.

The low citizen participation in the Cercado de Uripa, despite being one of the largest and most organized communities, stands out as a critical problem. The lack of commitment of local authorities and poor communication with the population have contributed to this situation. The citizens of Uripa are aware of management irregularities through local media and public opinion, while in the rural area, the authority tries to maintain a positive image by promoting government programs, although these benefits are not always reflected in transparent management.

In contrast, the urban community faces an environment of distrust and corruption, evidenced by anonymous pamphlets denouncing problems in the municipal administration. A neighbor, upon discovering nepotism and corruption in the execution of works, requested the vacancy of the Deputy Mayor, who was dismissed for embezzlement. Despite these efforts, the lack of action on the part of social organizations such as the Defense Front, due to their proximity to authority, limits the impact of these demands.

These problems of corruption and lack of transparency have hindered progress towards effective citizen participation and the consolidation of grassroots social organizations. The absence of oversight by civil society and the lack of leadership committed to democratization aggravate the situation. These issues will be addressed in greater depth in the following sections.

4. Challenges in management for local development

During the investigation upon entering the second floor of the “Municipal Palace” of Anco Huallo, the first impression is to find a computer turned off with the sign “Citizen Module”. This module, which was supposed to provide information on transparency, municipal management and citizen participation, was not operational. Despite the fact that the module promised access to information on transparency, allowed questions to be asked of the mayor, and addressed project management, an official confirms that it has not worked for a while and that citizens were not showing interest in its use, indicating that it did not serve its purpose. This digital communication initiative was part of the USAID - Peru, Communes project, promoted during the second APRA government under the slogan “Peru advances” and was implemented in 2007. However, it was discontinued due to high maintenance costs.

In addition, the municipal portal created in that same administration is not updated. Although Uripa has had access to the internet for the last 10 years, the commune has not effectively used this tool to make its actions transparent. In the last 8 years, the municipality has received more than 90 million Nuevos Soles (23 million US dollars) from various funds, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The Transparency Law and the Organic Law of Municipalities require that public hearings be held at least twice a year to be accountable to citizens. However, in the District Municipality of Anco Huallo, accountability is carried out informally and is seen as a minor procedure. During an accountability in June 2013, documents were distributed with figures and financial concepts that are difficult for citizens to interpret. In addition, the speaker of this surrender was not the mayor, the councilors, or the municipal manager, but an external advisor, which contravenes the MEF regulations.

An obvious sign of the poor state of the municipality is the little knowledge on the part of the authorities about the execution of works, the projects underway and the steps taken. In addition, from civil society, there is a notable lack of motivation to participate in public accountability hearings. This is because citizens do not feel listened to or considered by the municipal management. Table 1 clearly illustrates this absence of citizen participation in accountability processes.

TABLE 1 – Participants in public hearing of the District Municipality of Anco Huallo

Public Hearing	Date of Completion	Participants
Public Hearing 2007	June 09, 2007	30
Public Hearing 2008	December 20, 2008	50
Public Hearing 2009	August 22, 2009	10
Public Hearing 2009	September 05, 2010	38
Public Hearing 2010	January 30, 2010	15
Public Hearing 2011	Not carried out	-
Public Hearing 2012	June 13, 2013	10
Total participants		11

Source: Prepared by the author based on the minutes of the public hearing of Accountability.

The first rendering of accounts took place on June 9, 2007, in the Plaza de Armas of the municipality. This hearing was attended by 30 attendees, including interested citizens and leaders, according to the corresponding minutes. During the session, the representative of the Defense Front requested a justification for the delay in holding the public hearing and the non-execution of works provided for in the Participatory Budget of the previous year. The mayor's response was that the first call, scheduled for June 2, could not be carried out due to problems of plane availability.

Since the beginning of the administration in 2007, there has been a notable absence of citizen participation in public accountability hearings. One resident expressed the generalized disinterest with the following observation: "Why go, if what we decide in the Participatory Budgets is not taken into account? What are we going to hear from the mayor?"

In 2007, despite the complaints of leaders and neighbors, only one public hearing was held. In the following year, the hearing was held near the end of the year and with little citizen attendance. The report of December 20, 2008, details that, due to the low attendance, the hearing was moved to the town hall of the municipality. It was suggested that the reports be broadcast by radio or copies sent to the villagers, as participation was minimal.

Public hearings should be spaces where authorities are held accountable for their actions and publicly justify their actions, while citizens have the

right to receive clear and transparent information. However, in the district municipality of Anco Huallo, these hearings often lack legitimacy. The population perceives that the authorities communicate only what is convenient for them and that the information provided is difficult to verify due to the lack of tools and knowledge to interpret the data. This leads many people to consider these hearings as a waste of time, with no tangible benefits.

Citizens prefer to attend communal assemblies convened by the community president rather than public accountability hearings organized by the mayor of the municipality. This phenomenon is reflected in the following excerpt from the accountability minutes: “At the beginning of the public hearing, the President of the Uripa Defense Front, and the President of the community, convened a communal assembly for the same day and time, despite the fact that a public hearing had been scheduled. This led to the population being provoked to attend the assembly first. The Mayor, when taking the floor, clarified that the call to the hearing had been made in advance. The Governor proposed to put to a vote whether the hearing or the assembly should be held first, and the result was in favor of the communal assembly.”

Why does the population prefer to attend a communal assembly instead of a public hearing of accountability? Although local government is one of the most important institutions in rural areas, and accountability should be a priority, in Anco Huallo this perception is different. Based on the investigation, information was requested on the attendance records, and it was discovered that in the communal assembly of August 22, 2009, convened on the same day as the public hearing, 290 community members signed. The agendas discussed at this assembly included crucial issues such as communal lands, sale of communal forestation and water management. In contrast, at the public hearing on the same date organized by the municipality, only 38 people attended.

In communal assemblies, men and women interact directly with their authorities, debating agendas and respecting the opinions of all participants. Decisions about communal resources, such as water and land, are made transparently and in a context of solidarity and reciprocity. In addition, the assemblies are held in Quechua, the predominant language in rural areas, which facilitates participation.

On the other hand, public accountability hearings present significant barriers. Citizens must register in advance and wait their turn to speak, while authorities dominate the time with technical reports in Spanish. This

creates a separation between established norms and local practices, making audiences perceived as less relevant and useful to the community.

The low citizen participation in public accountability hearings, despite rescheduling and early calls, is a clear sign of the disconnect between municipal authorities and the needs of the population.

In 2011, the new municipal management chose not to hold the public accountability hearing, prioritizing instead the execution of large-scale works. The accountability for fiscal year 2012 was only carried out in June 2013.

The lack of citizen participation is not limited only to accountability processes but is also manifested in the supervision and control of the projects executed in the district of Anco Huallo. This lack of supervision may have contributed to the poor execution of several works. For example, the project “Expansion of the Sewerage System and Health Education in the district of Anco Huallo”, which received more than 3 million nuevos soles, collapsed in a few years. Similarly, the street paving project, with a budget of 7 million nuevos soles, shows cracks and damage before its completion.

5. Conclusions

The research reveals that the mechanisms of citizen participation promoted by the State and decentralization in the district municipality of Anco Huallo failed to consolidate themselves as effective tools of municipal management. Instead of generating an innovative participatory process, there was a growing disenchantment and disappointment among social actors, who did not see their expectations reflected in the practice of Participatory Budgeting. The local authorities used this space in a clientelistic manner, limiting it to a simple collection of demands without a real impact on the institutionality of the local government, which contributed to the distancing between the authorities and the citizens.

In addition, citizen participation was affected by the creation of new institutions such as the Population Centers, which were managed directly by the mayors, excluding social organizations and local leaders from the decentralization process. The lack of interest and participation in accountability reflect a perception of distrust towards the authorities and a lack of tools to interpret the information presented. Despite the efforts made, the research shows that the process of decentralization and citizen participation in Anco Huallo has had difficulties adapting to local realities and meeting its objectives, underscoring the need for a more inclusive and contextualized approach.

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze absenteeism in citizen participation in the district of Anco Huallo (Chincheros – Peru), identifying its causes and evaluating its impact on local development management. Using interviews with key actors such as mayors and former authorities, as well as the review of official documents. The results reveal that State-driven participation mechanisms and decentralization were not consolidated as effective management tools. Instead of promoting a participatory process, they generated distrust and disappointment among social actors, who perceived the Participatory Budget as a mere clientelistic exercise with no real impact. In addition, the creation of Population Centers managed by mayors excluded social organizations and local leaders, intensifying mistrust and reducing citizen participation. The research highlights the need for a more inclusive and locally tailored approach to improve the decentralization process.

Keywords: Absenteeism; citizen participation; decentralization; distrust.

RESUMO: Este estudo busca analisar o absenteísmo na participação cidadã no distrito de Anco Huallo (Chincheros – Peru), identificando suas causas e avaliando seu impacto na gestão do desenvolvimento local. Utilizando entrevistas com atores-chave como prefeitos e ex-autoridades, além da análise de documentos oficiais. Os resultados revelam que os mecanismos de participação impulsionados pelo Estado e a descentralização não se consolidaram como ferramentas eficazes de gestão. Em vez de promover um processo participativo, eles geraram desconfiança e decepção entre os atores sociais, que perceberam o Orçamento Participativo como um mero exercício clientelista sem impacto real. Além disso, a criação de Centros Populacionais geridos pelos prefeitos excluiu organizações sociais e líderes locais, intensificando a desconfiança e reduzindo a participação cidadã. A pesquisa destaca a necessidade de uma abordagem mais inclusiva e adaptada localmente para melhorar o processo de descentralização.

Palavras-chave: Absenteísmo; participação cidadã; descentralização; desconfiança.

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