

Interpreting Participation

The Dependency Syndrome

The "dependency syndrome" is an attitude and belief that a group or a community cannot solve its own problems without outside help. It is a weakness that is made worse by charity and handouts by the government or donors. A classic example is the communities in Afghanistan, who are considering every NGO to be a food donor like WFP and await to be told by the outsiders what to do for getting some benefit in return. In the post war period, they have stopped thinking for doing something on their own. Similarly, in Pakistan many so called development programmes have inculcated this dependency syndrome in the communities through the delivery of pre-conceived package. Such communities now believe that they need to get organised only to receive such packages.

If an outside agency, be it the government, NGO or a mission, comes to a community and constructs a human settlements facility (e.g. water supply), it is natural for the community members to see it as belonging to the outside agency. When that outside agency goes away or runs out of funds, the community members will have no motivation to repair and maintain the facility, or to sustain the service. In order for a facility to be used, and used effectively, by the community members, the community members must have a sense of "responsibility" and "ownership" for the facility. This ownership together with the ability to take up the role of external support programmes is the only way to combat the dependency syndrome in the dependent communities.

Unless the community as a whole has been involved in the decision-making about the facility (planning and management) and has willingly contributed to the costs of its construction, the sense of responsibility or ownership will be missing due to the fact that it was in one or the other way imposed by the outside agency on them. As a result, it will not be effectively used, maintained or sustained. It is impossible to build a human settlements facility or service and not expect that it has to be repaired and maintained. That is like trying to eat once and for all. For all this to happen, the development agency, donor or the government has to work with the people and after identification and prioritisation of the community needs, it plans and implement the projects and schemes with the active involvement of the community for bring that sense of ownership in the community members on the one hand and enable them to carryout such schemes on their own in the future.

In developing countries in particular, as the populations grow, governments are getting access to fewer and fewer resources per capita every year. It is simply no longer feasible for communities to be dependent upon central governments for human settlement facilities and services. The same is true with international donors: rich countries' governments, the UN, World Bank, international NGOs, simply do not have enough resources to give to every poor community, no matter how worthwhile the cause, around the world. So, the focus of the development agencies should be to combat the dependency syndrome of the communities and enable them through different capacity building programmes for undertaking development projects on their own.

Whereas it was once thought that community self reliance in itself was a good thing, it promoted grassroots democracy, human rights, self development and human dignity, now it has gone much farther than that. If communities cannot become more and more self reliant and empowered, they simply will not develop and so poverty and apathy will eventually destroy them.

Counteracting dependency is prime goal of the development programme and their social organisers (SOs). Dependency in the community must be reduced by every action the social organisers take. The field workers must keep in mind that their prime goal is to act for reducing communities' dependence on outside sources. When training a community organization in how to obtain resources, a donor agency should try to avoid giving the community anything for nothing as it encourages dependency. The SOs should always encourage community members by stating that they can carry out the project themselves and SOs are there to offer them some skills and tips, but the work must be done by the community. Applying this to financing a community project, the SOs must never offer to obtain project inputs for them.

As a social organiser, one can give them guidelines as to how to raise money and other resources, how to ensure that accounts are kept transparent and simple, and how to translate non-monetary donations into financial inputs,

but you must always emphasise that the actual obtaining of the resources must be done by the community or its community based organization (e.g. executive committee) working on its behalf, not the SOs.

Combating Dependency

Although the last two decades of the twentieth century have been dominated by efforts to promote participatory approaches around the world, the concept of participation in development is not entirely new. By the late 1940s, the early initiatives of development assistance and of planned interventions in underdeveloped countries to promote development and change had commenced. However, it was in the 1950s, and particularly in the 1960s, that these initiatives, via the actions of processes of community development, sought to involve local people in efforts to improve their communities. Community development in the 1960s built the infrastructure of rural and urban communities; it also developed local skills and abilities and encouraged local people to play a part in and to take some responsibility for supporting and implementing a range of physical infrastructure works. Community development at this time also sought to build community-based organisations to serve as vehicles through which local people could get actively involved. It promoted literacy campaigns to enable people to better understand and relate to existing administrative bodies and it sought to generate a sense of cohesiveness and solidarity among community members.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the community development movement flourish and, particularly in Africa and Asia, national programmes sought to build community infrastructure and to break down communities' exclusion from development activities. The style was quite generalised (although in West Africa Animation Rurale was seen as more didactic), and the community development worker was seen as a government official working at the interface between the outside forces of modernisation and the natural conservatism and suspicion of rural communities. Community development did promote communities' involvement but it was for an already agreed purpose. Control was usually exercised externally and communities were seen as contributing to and supporting the national development agenda and not necessarily as being instrumental in determining its content or direction.

While community development as a basic strategy of community involvement persisted into the 1970s, it has largely lost its predominance. Changing analyses and examinations of underdevelopment in the late 1970s and 1980s began to offer different explanations of the causes of people's poverty and to suggest different forms of project design. Poor people were seen as excluded and marginalised both from broader societal participation and also from direct involvement in development initiatives. Simultaneously, development policy makers and planners began to argue for societal level political participation and also to devise strategies whereby poor people could become more directly involved in development efforts. In development terms the last decade or so has been largely dominated by efforts to promote people's participation in development, which would involve a fundamental shift - both in attitudes and in methodology - if it was to break decades of top-down, on-participatory practice. Since the early 1990s the major donor development agencies have put their weight behind and committed resources to promoting participatory development, recognising the problems caused by non-participatory development.

Participation defined

Literature review has provided interesting insights to participation as seen by a number of researchers, academicians and practitioners. To find an ideal definition is difficult, as it is historically related with different ideologies, thus acquiring different meanings. While some view participation as a result of a bottom up empowering process, others see it more in a project context. Since the late 1970s there has been a range of interpretations of the meaning of participation in development. The following are a number of examples:

'With regard to rural development . . . participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.'¹

¹Cohen, John M. and Norman T. Uphoff. Rural Development Participation: Concepts and Measures for Project Design, Implementation and Evaluation. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Rural Development Committee, No. 2, 1977.

'Participation is concerned with . . . the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.'²

'Community participation [is] an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish.'³

'Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organisations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant!'⁴

'Participatory development stands for partnership which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being beneficiaries.' (OECD, 1994)

'Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.'⁵ The above reflect the broad nature of a process of participation and the fact that interpretation is linked to an agency's development perspective. There are, therefore, no universal interpretations or models of participation applicable to all development programmes and projects. Many development agencies are now making explicit statements on what they understand by participation and such statements are instrumental in determining strategy and methodology. Cohen and Uphoff's interpretation has had a major influence in terms of identifying the key-stages of the project cycle in which participation could occur: decision-making, implementation, benefits and evaluation. In a different way Pearse and Stiefel's interpretation has been similarly influential in suggesting a more structural and political role for participation and not one simply linked to development practice. Both of these interpretations set the tone in the 1980s for a considerable body of participatory practice, which evolved in the 1990s into the notion of stakeholding. Currently much of the debate and practice regarding participation is based upon the concept of stakeholders and the relative importance and influence that different stakeholders can have on the outcomes of development activities.

We can identify interpretation of participation in two broad and distinct areas of development. The distinctions between these are neither clear-cut nor mutually exclusive, but they do represent two different purposes and approaches to promoting participatory development:

PARTICIPATION as a MEANS: participation is seen as a process whereby local people cooperate or collaborate with externally introduced development programmes or projects. In this way participation becomes the means whereby such initiatives can be more effectively implemented. People's participation is sponsored by an external agency and it is seen as a technique to support the progress of the programme or project. The term 'participatory development' is more commonly used to describe this approach and it implies externally designed development activities implemented in a participatory manner. This approach would appear to be quite

² Pearse, A., & Stiefel, M. (1979). *Inquiry into participation: A research approach*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

³ Gray, Paul (1987, September). *Group Decision Support Systems*. *Decision Support systems*, 3.

⁴ Ghai, D. and Westendorff, D. (eds.) 1994. *Monitoring Social Progress in the 1990s: Data Constraints, Concerns and Priorities*. Avebury: UNRISD

⁵ World Bank 1994. *The World Bank and Participation*. Operations Policy Department. Washington DC: World Bank

widespread and essentially promotes participation as a means of ensuring the successful outcome of the activities undertaken.

There is need to differentiate between participation as means to an end and as an end itself, for achieving effective results. Participation when taken as means to an end is a way of harnessing the existing physical, economic and social resources of the rural people to achieve the previously established objectives of the development programme more efficiently and effectively. The strategy is to reform and improve. As an end in itself it is seen as a process, which unfolds over time, and its purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development initiatives and control its own developments. It involves a process of empowering and liberation for achieving power and the strategy is structural change.

Both kind of participation imply possibility of very different power relations between members of a community as well as between them and the state and agency situation. The extent of empowerment and the involvement of the local population is more limited in the means approach. Most participatory approaches currently use participation as means. Participants' power to, their confidence in themselves, personal and collective abilities to exercise power within existing structural and institutional constraints are enhanced in means approach. Ideally, development approaches should incorporate participation both as means and end, however in practice it is difficult to bridge the gap between the two as both aim at different goals, with different strategies.

PARTICIPATION as an END: participation is seen as a goal in itself. This goal can be expressed as the empowering of people in terms of their acquiring the skills, knowledge and experience to take greater responsibility for their development. People's poverty can often be explained in terms of their exclusion and lack of access to and control of the resources, which they need to sustain and improve their lives. Participation is an instrument of change and it can help to break that exclusion and to provide poor people with the basis for their more direct involvement in development initiatives.

The critical issue to bear in mind is that people's participation in development is concerned with two things: i) structural relationships and the importance of developing people's capacities and skills to negotiate and to seek the resources and changes which they require in order to improve their lives; and ii) the methods and techniques whereby local people can be brought to play a part and to develop a stake in development programmes and projects. Both purposes are of equal importance; the former seeks to secure a more longer term and sustainable development for poor people, the latter is crucial in providing immediate access to the benefits of development.

Form	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Function
Nominal	Legitimisation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/Ends

(White, 1996)

The above shown Box synthesises the range of interpretations of participation along a continuum on which participation moves from being merely nominal and representing little meaningful or direct involvement in development; to a transformative participation, which results in people's empowerment and in direct and effective participation. It is a useful exercise to see participation in terms of a continuum and, within the project context, to seek to develop it into this transformative role. Another way of distinguishing between different forms of participation is to think in terms of levels or degrees of participation. These can be understood along a continuum and can range from participation as essentially an act of manipulation to a degree of participation in which stakeholders become partners in the development initiative and begin to assume full responsibility for its management:

- a) **Manipulation:** the lowest rung applies to situations of 'non-participation; where participation is

- contrived as the opportunity to indoctrinate.
- b) **Information:** when stakeholders are informed about their rights, responsibilities, and options, the first important step towards genuine participation takes place. The main drawback at this stage is that emphasis is placed on one-way communication, with neither channel for feedback nor power for negotiation.
 - c) **Consultation:** this level entails two-way communication, where stakeholders have the opportunity to express suggestions and concerns, but no assurance that their input will be used at all or as they intended. Therefore, it could be said that at this level stakeholders are 'participating in participation'. The most frequent approaches to consultation are chaired meetings where stakeholders do not contribute to the agenda, public hearings, and surveys.
 - d) **Consensus-building:** here stakeholders interact in order to understand each other and arrive at negotiated positions, which are tolerable to the entire group. A common drawback is that vulnerable individuals and groups tend to remain silent or passively acquiesce.
 - e) **Decision-making:** when consensus is acted upon through collective decisions, this marks the initiation of shared responsibilities for outcomes that may result. Negotiations at this stage reflect different degrees of leverage exercised by individuals and groups.
 - f) **Risk-sharing:** this level builds upon the preceding one but expands beyond decisions to encompass the effects of their results, a mix of beneficial, harmful, and natural consequences. Things being constantly in flux, there is always the element of risk, where even the best intended decisions may yield the least desired results. Hence accountability is fundamental at this level, especially when those with the greatest leverage may be the ones with the least at risk.
 - g) **Partnership:** this relationship entails exchange among equals working towards a mutual goal. Note that equal as applied here is not in terms of form, structure, or function but in terms of balance of respect. Since partnership builds upon the preceding levels, it assumes mutual responsibility and risk sharing.
 - h) **Self-management:** this is the pinnacle of participatory efforts, where stakeholders interact in learning processes, which optimise the well-being of all concerned.⁶

Why Participation?

An important question requiring attention is the need for community's participation in development initiatives. Participation in development has gained importance due to different reasons. While some promote it for bringing about social change other see it more as a good business proposition. Literature has focussed on the two key functions which are to be carried out by participation as seen in the development and empowerment context.

i. Instrumental function (Project focus)

The seventies critical analysis of failure of development projects gave rise to the recognition of the instrumental function of people's participation. People's participation in the project cycle was sought by international agencies and increasingly by national agencies for achieving efficient project accomplishments, with low cost and greater chance of sustainability of the programme. Cohen and Uphoff found that local participation in decision-making during implementation was more critical to project success than at initial design. It was one of the two main factors to promote project success, leading to increase in farmers' income, agricultural knowledge, self-help capacity and sustaining of project benefits.

ii. Political function (Power focus)

Empowerment approach highlights the political function of participation that is to achieve power- to influence decisions that affect one's livelihood. The development theorists see participation as a process, which combines scientific research and political action to bring about a radical change in social and economic structures and foster people's power for the benefit of those who have been exploited. They define people's power as " capacity of the grassroots groups which are exploited socially and economically to articulate and systematise knowledge (both of their own and that which comes from outside) in such a way that they can become protagonists in advancement of their society and in defence of their own class and group interests".

The core issue of rural development is also power: transformation of power structures and relationships as well as empowerment of oppressed people. It aims at three kinds of change- development of critical consciousness of

⁶ Adapted from UNCDF, 1996.

both researchers and participants; improvement of lives of those involved in the research process; transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationship.

Collective action and knowledge construction: For achieving the political function development practitioners have recognised the significance of collective action and people's participation in knowledge construction. Practitioners of both schools focus on the concept of Conscientisation as means to achieve people's power. 'Conscientisation' as a concept was introduced by Friere's work in the area of pedagogy of literacy. Friere's dialogic approach to adult education engages individuals in critical analysis and organised action to improve their situations. In these dialogue educators and students move towards critical consciousness of forces of oppression and liberation possibility. PAR is generated by praxis of the people, by collective action-reflection. It involves a process of progressive conscientisation. Through collective self reflection of their problem, people o become more aware of the dimensions of their reality and what can be done by themselves to transform it. With this awareness they decide upon and take collective action and analyse its results to promote their awareness (knowledge) further.

Proponents of PR also recognise knowledge as the single most important basis of power and control, highlighting the concept of Conscientisation and method of thematic investigation of Friere. It aims to play a liberating role in learning process of individual, groups and movements by three process of collective investigation of problem and issues, collective analysis of problem and underlying structural causes of problem and collective action for solution of problem." Organising and collective action for changing power structures are integral components of both these schools of thought.

iii. Social Function (Poverty focus)

There is also a view that participatory approaches would enable development to meet basic needs and remove poverty. World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) 1979 statement links rural poverty with people's participation. It calls for shift of political power in rural areas in favour of rural poor and also for different strategies of rural development intervention in order to bring the poor within the processes of rural development. This would increase their opportunity and access to development resources.

iv. Psychological Function

A section of literature also stresses function of participation to achieve inner freedom and of the oppressed as well as the oppressor. The political, instrumental, social and psychological functions do not occur independently. However in recent times though people's participation is being practised more for its instrumental role, but it's political function is the cherished goal.

Nature of Participation.

Participation not only has different definitions and functions but there has also been considerable debate on its nature.

- A. Transitive vs. Intransitive Participation Though participation has been viewed mostly as 'transitive' -oriented towards a goal, (project or political context) however there is a view that it can also be 'intransitive' - without predesigned purpose. This would include recovery of own inner freedom, of loving, creating and other similar processes. This aspect of participation has been largely ignored in development discourse and needs more attention.
- B. Manipulative vs. Spontaneous Participation There is also a line of concern that in its transitive mode participation is mostly used as a "cosmetic label" to provide an illusion of aiming at moral goals. However the reality of participation as "manipulative" or "co-opting" should not be ignored.

Manipulative Participation

Participation is increasingly being manipulated- that is being driven outside agenda of the donor, government, private sector, NGOs and the community members themselves: Many times government of developing countries manipulate participation to gain greater productivity at low cost and overcome financial constraints, by making the poor bear the cost. It is also being used for political advantage by using it to negotiate and reduce resistance to conventional development policy and programmes For donors, people's participation in donor driven economic acts and policy at times is being manipulated to support the powerful. Private sector may also pay lip-

service to people's participation for their direct involvement in development business (privatisation of development) It is worthwhile to recognise that some Activists or NGOs as change agents also suffer from existential duality of the oppressed, thus manipulate participation for maintaining their control over the community. Manipulators are not always the "outside" forces. There are many cases when members of community may become clients of the programme, (co-option) thus supporting centralisation

Spontaneous Participation

On the other hand spontaneous participation is when the process is an outcome of a process of critical investigation, collective analysis and collective action by the community and is being controlled from within the community. The goals are for empowerment and social change. For participation to play its political, instrumental and social role effectively its manipulation is an area of concern for development practitioners, implementers and policy makers, needing corrective action. Also the dilemma of external assistance and self-reliance also need to be resolved for effective results. Participation can further be seen and used in different form as follows.

Participation as contribution

Here participation implies voluntary or other form of contributions by rural people to predetermined programmes and projects in return for some perceived expected benefits. This reflects the project or programme nature of participation (passive participation), not linked to changing fundamental problems. No institutionalised base of participation exists in this definition. For example, "participation is considered a voluntary contribution by the people to one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticising its content."⁷

Participation as organisation

A section of literature supports the view of organisation as a fundamental instrument of participation. The organisations are either

(a) Externally conceived where implementing agencies reform formal organisations or create new within existing socio-political framework.

(b) Emerging as a result of the process of participation. The later is more difficult to achieve as it may evoke hostility of existing national and local structures. An alternative view recognises the importance of organisation but seeks to encourage rural people to determine its nature and structure. For example, WCARRD: "... active organisation of the poor can only be brought about by adequate people's organisations at the local level."

Participation as empowering

This view sees participation as developing the skills and abilities to enable rural people to manage better and decide on aspects, which they feel appropriate. It equates participation with achieving some kind of power: access to and control of resources necessary to protect livelihood, and working towards structural changes. For example, the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.

Participation in a project framework

The eighties had witnessed attempts for upscaling participation, with key international agencies mainstreaming participation in their projects /programmes. Defining participation by the international agencies thus added another important dimension to the participation debate. The Bank-wide Learning Group on Participatory Development, which was launched in December 1990, defined participation as "a process, through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them."⁸

⁷ (Economic Commission for Latin America : 'Popular participation in Development ' in Community Development Journal (Oxford) Vol 8, No 3 , 1973)

⁸ Number of bilateral agencies have also defined participation in their programme . An interesting insight on definitions of different international development agencies has been the March 1997 IAGP report" Mainstreaming Participation: Experiences and lessons of the Inter- Agency Group on Participation"

While GTZ defines participation as " Target groups are to be included in the identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating of programmes and projects executed by the agency." for OECD it implies "... people of the countries concerned must be "owners "of their development policies and programs". Similarly for UNDP participation is when "... people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives."⁹

To find an ideal definition of participation thus is a difficult task. The definitions fall between a continuum of an exclusive social context to a project context, on the other end. Its modern definition however is increasingly in the context of pre-defined project, especially economic projects rather than for social transformation, and empowerment.

The Pros and Cons of Participation

There are arguments for and against the promotion of greater people's participation. These arguments are less concerned with societal level participation in democratic and representative institutions, but more with people's participation in development activities. They can be summarised as follows:

Arguments for PARTICIPATION:

- i. People's participation can increase the efficiency of development activities in that, by involving local resources and skills, it can make better use of expensive external costs;
- ii. it can also increase the effectiveness of such activities by ensuring people's involvement, using of local knowledge and understanding problems and stay relevant to local needs;
- iii. participation helps to build local capacities and develop the abilities of local people to manage and to negotiate development activities;
- iv. participation can increase coverage when local people are able to assume some of the burden of responsibility and thus help to extend the range of activities of a development activity;
- v. participation can lead to better targeting of benefits to the poorest via the identification of stakeholders to be most affected by the activities;
- vi. crucially participation can help to secure the sustainability of the activities as beneficiaries assume ownership and are willing to maintain its momentum; and
- vii. participation can often help to improve the status of women by providing the opportunity for them to play a part in development work.

Arguments against PARTICIPATION:

- i. Participation costs time and money; it is essentially a process with no guaranteed impact upon the end product. Participation can greatly add to the costs of a development activity and therefore its benefits have to be carefully calculated;
- ii. processes of participation are irrelevant and a luxury in situations of poverty and it will be hard to justify expenditure on such a process where people need to be fed and their livelihoods secured;
- iii. participation can be a destabilising force in that it can unbalance existing socio-political relationships and threaten the continuity of development work;
- iv. participation is driven by 'ideological fervour' and is less concerned with seeking to secure direct benefits for people from development activities than with promoting an ideological perspective into development; and
- v. participation can result in the shifting of the burden onto the poor and the relinquishing by national governments of their responsibilities to promote development with equity.

Participation can mean all things to all people and both its protagonists and its opponents marshal their arguments carefully. It is important, therefore, when promoting participation within a particular project, to be sure exactly what benefits it would bring, what would be its added-value and, equally, what could be some of the unforeseen consequences of its implementation.

⁹ (IGP document Monitoring and Evaluation draft March 7,1996.)

Five Key Operational Issues in Promoting Participation

- i. It is critical that efforts to promote participatory development understand and examine the political and cultural context in which participation is to occur. Participation does not take place in a vacuum, but its development and progress will be influenced by a variety of factors inherent in the context. Time should be made available, therefore, at the beginning of any participatory project, to identify and to analyse the factors, which could influence the process. In this respect a stakeholder analysis is a useful first step.
- ii. In the preparation and design stages of the programme or project, it must be clearly understood that participatory processes do not necessarily follow structural, pre-determined and linear directions. Participation must not be seen merely as an input into a project, but as an underlining operational principle, which should underpin all activities. Participation must be intrinsic to the project's development and not simply an activity, which is used from time to time to provoke beneficiaries' interest.
- iii. 'Participation in development' is not the same as 'participatory development'. Projects must seek to promote a real and authentic involvement of people in the development process and not merely seek to make the more common, top-down and technocratic approach to project development more participatory. Participation implies a radical change in project operations and not simply the adjusting of the project planning cycle, for example, to allow for a degree of local involvement.
- iv. A key element in the promotion of a participatory form of development is the training, which staff receives in its methodologies and techniques. In the past decade or so participation has revolutionised project practice and yet many staff have yet to move beyond the level of a general understanding. At the operational level it is imperative that staff be trained in participatory development in order that they can be effective in promoting and guiding it. At a higher level, this raises the issue of the mainstreaming of participation, its principles, its approaches and its methods across the board within an institution.
- v. In order to be able to understand its progress and to judge its contribution to the outcome of the project, it will be critical to set up and to operate mechanisms at the project level to monitor participation within the project and, subsequently, to evaluate its effect. To date this has proved to be a major difficulty in participatory projects and many development agencies are struggling to devise appropriate systems.

Strategies for Participation

In promoting participatory development it is important to consider and decide how this is to be done. It is not enough simply to declare a commitment to participation. A strategy must be devised which should purposefully guide the promotion of participation within the project. A major reason why people's participation is not consistent or effective in many projects is because time and resources have not been given to thinking through how it is to be promoted. Clearly a project cannot afford to spend an excessive amount of time on this promotion; hence the importance of devising a strategy and of promoting people's participation in accordance with the expectations of the project. Project management must be able to take a long-term view of the expected development of the project and be prepared to promote the form of participation, which would be most appropriate. We can structure this examination of a strategy for participation around four key aspects; the initial questions, the basic principles in promoting participation, participation as a sequence of actions and the key stages in a participatory strategy.

1. Asking the Initial Questions

- I. What might be the reaction of national and local authorities to efforts to promote participatory development? National and local political systems do have an effect upon the political climate at the local level and it can not be assumed that efforts to increase people's say in and responsibility for local development processes will be looked upon with approval. It will be critical to assess the potential for a participatory form of development within the context of the national political climate in order to avoid any major dysfunctions or adverse reactions once the project has got underway.

- ii. What are the social, political, and cultural factors within the area in which the project is to be developed, which could influence people's participation? This question is fundamental to understanding the likely reaction to a participatory project and will inform project management of the kinds of obstacles which the project might encounter. It should also reveal those factors, which could facilitate local people's participation.
- iii. What local traditional practices or organisations could play an effective role in promoting participation? The answer to this question will be fundamental in designing the methodology of the project and it has been shown that, where participatory projects can be built upon existing patterns or structures of participation, they can be more effective. Participatory development projects are introduced into areas and regions where traditional forms of community co-operation and support will already exist and such projects should seek to adopt their ideas to these existing mechanisms and not invent entirely new structures.
- iv. What would be the likely reaction of local people to efforts to get them more involved in, to make a contribution towards and to assume some responsibility for the proposed development project? In order to answer this question, it may be necessary to find out what other development initiatives have taken place in the area in the past decade or so and what consequences they had for the local population. Participation demands time, energy and resources on the part of local people and it would be useful to assess what demands the project might make upon them and what the likely response would be.
- v. What resources, skills and time does the project have to promote participation? A careful and realistic assessment of the projects own potential to promote participation is a prerequisite to the design of an appropriate strategy.

There is a need to formulate an appropriate set of questions before the project begins in order to get a realistic assessment of both the potential for participation and the likely difficulties, which the process would encounter. Therefore, the first meeting to discuss the implementation of a participatory project should begin with the question: 'What questions do we need to ask?'

2. Principles of Participatory Development

After the above questions have been asked (and answered) the next step is to establish the basis or the set of principles, which will provide the overall framework of approach that the project will adopt. This is an equally critical step since, without such a framework, a participatory project will not be able to construct an appropriate strategy nor determine how the project is to be implemented. Participatory development is not 'blue-print' development but it is a strategy, which constructs its approach in relation to the demands of the project context. In this respect, some basic principles will help to determine what this approach should be. In the practice of participatory development to date, the following are the kinds of key principles, which have been seen to be more important:

- i. **The PRIMACY of PEOPLE:** whatever the purpose or ultimate goal of the project, people's interests, their needs and their wishes must be allowed to underpin the key decisions and actions relating to the project. It is not a question of including people as and when it is felt by project management to be convenient; people must sit centre-stage and their interests taken into consideration during the whole course of the project.
- ii. **People's KNOWLEDGE and SKILLS** must be seen as a potentially positive contribution to the project: a project which does not seek to make use of local knowledge and skills may not only be less effective but will also be squandering a useful resource. A participatory project should seek every possibility to base its activities upon local resources, both to avoid situations of dependence on external ones and also to help develop local capabilities, which will be important if the development is to be sustained. Participation is to do with developing people's capacities and this can best be achieved by building on and strengthening their existing knowledge and expertise.
- iii. **People's Participation must empower WOMEN:** participatory development should seek to improve gender inequalities through providing a means by which women can take part in decision-making. Women's participation must be transformative, not be merely tokenistic; while there are often enormous social and cultural barriers, which hinder women's participation, participatory development should seek to bring about change and to create the circumstances where women's voices can also be heard. This is a sensitive and critical issue, but efforts to involve women in an appropriate manner must be central.

iv. **AUTONOMY as opposed to CONTROL:** as far as it is realistic to do so, seek to invest as much responsibility as possible for the project with the local people, and thus avoid having absolute control in the hands of project staff. Such a principle is not always realistic and it should not be pushed too far in such circumstances; but there must be a discernible move to minimise the control of project staff and to maximise the potential responsibility of local people.

v. **Local ACTIONS as opposed to local RESPONSES:** encouraging local people to make decisions and to take action within the broad parameters of the project, as opposed to merely responding passively to initiatives proposed by others. The more that these kinds of local initiatives can be encouraged, the more a sense of ownership will develop among local people; but the major obstacle may be project staff who are unwilling or unable to promote local ownership of project activities and outcomes.

vi. **Allow for some SPONTANEITY in project DIRECTION:** promoting people's participation will mean that, as far as it is reasonably possible, the project should be allowed to develop in accordance with the abilities of local people to play an increasing role and to begin to assume some responsibility. Unless the project is able to plan for and to accommodate people's participation, it will remain a straightjacket and may push on to predetermined objectives regardless of whether local people are on board or not. Participatory projects do often take longer but, if they are truly participatory, the outcome is more positive and sustainable.

3. Participation as a Sequence of Actions

It is widely understood that participation is not a one-off input into a project but it is a process, which should be an intrinsic part and characteristic of a project throughout its duration. This process evolves through a series of stages, but these stages will vary according to the nature and purpose of the project. There is no universal or common set of stages in the process of participation and development agencies at different levels will structure a series of stages, which are most appropriate to the project. Already there are a considerable number of examples of how development agencies have gone about promoting participation as a series of actions at different stages during the lifetime of a project.

There should be a logical sequence of actions and events, which is an important feature of participatory development. Participation has to be developed and this development has to be projected over a period of time and the appropriate action taken at its different stages. This perspective is fundamental to participatory development and it will be essential for country office staff to adopt this approach in order to map out the likely evolution of people's participation. The danger is that staff will see participation merely as an input to be brought into activities as appropriate and will not recognise the critical importance of allowing it to develop over a period of time. Given that there is no universal model of the stages of a process of participation, the following are a series of examples, which are intended to illustrate the kinds of identified stages.

The above examples show the range of actions that are undertaken in projects to promote participation. The purpose is not to suggest that such and such a way is how participation is promoted, but to underline the importance of seeing participation as a process with several dimensions and of the need to develop a plan for its promotion. The examples illustrate the range from a more technocratic approach, which sees participation more as a means, to a less structured looser approach that sees participation more as part of an overall goal of the project. All these examples, however, reinforce the argument that participation has to be planned and developed and that it should be seen as important as the other activities associated with project development. Indeed the central issue is that participation should be the basic operating mechanism within the project and should characterise all of the project's activities ranging from initial analysis, needs determination, planning, monitoring, evaluation and so on.

What has gone wrong with participation?

Recent years have seen growing criticism of development strategies followed for the past three decades with only minor adjustments. These conventional strategies have seen development primarily as a series of technical transfers aimed at boosting production and generating wealth. In practice, conventional projects usually target medium to large-scale "progressive" producers, supporting them with technology, credit and extension advice in

the hope that improvements will gradually extend to more "backward" strata of rural society. In many cases, however, the channelling of development assistance to the better-off has led to concentration of land and capital, marginalisation of small farmers and alarming growth in the number of landless labourers, which is simply widening the gap between rich and poor.

The basic fault in the conventional approach is that the rural poor are rarely consulted in development planning and usually have no active role in development activities. This is because the vast majority of the poor have no organisational structure to represent their interests. Isolated, under-educated and often dependent on rural elite, they lack the means to win greater access to resources and markets, and to prevent the imposition of unworkable programmes or technologies.

A study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of 40 "poverty-oriented" rural development projects from around the world revealed that the poorest of the poor are frequently excluded from project activities and benefits. In Mali, a project used village development associations to channel inputs to small farmers. However, these associations existed only in better-off villages. As a result the project did not reach poor villages that had no community organisations and no prospect of forming them.

A dairy development programme in India supplied credit mainly to larger farmers who had enough land to keep more than one animal; the poor had resources for no more than one buffalo. In Nepal, prosperous farmers exerted pressure to participate in a project intended to benefit the poor. The ILO study concluded: "Until important changes are introduced in the way poverty-oriented projects are conceived and set up, the claim that they will necessarily alleviate poverty - or, at least, improve equity - remains questionable." In Pakistan, both in the Ngo and government sector, the rules of business of development do not focus on the poorest; for example, Agriculture Extension Department works through progressive growers, which are not the poor persons of a village and NGOs provide micro-credit to those who they know can repay and won't hurt their 100% recovery target.

The lesson is clear

Unless the rural poor are given the means to participate fully in development, they will continue to be excluded from its benefits. And the means as described earlier is their own representative NGOs with both meso and micro-level organisations. The rude realisation after seeing the external NGOs running the show in the name of the poor for years has provoked new interest in an alternative rural development strategy of people's participation through local institutions controlled and run by the poor.

Discussions about participation are never easy, mainly because there are so many, contradictory and ambivalent notions of the concept and the practices involved. In a very general way, participation may be defined here as a complex social, technical and institutional process through which communities may become more fully involved in their own development, more particularly taking an active part in the design, implementation and evaluation of specific development initiatives.

Participation by rural people in the community organisations and other institutions that govern their lives is a basic human right. If rural development was to realise this potential; the disadvantaged rural people had to be organised and actively involved in designing policies and programmes and in controlling social and economic institutions. There is a close link between participation and voluntary, autonomous and democratic organisations representing the poor. The donor agencies are showing great interest in close co-operation with organisations of intended beneficiaries, and it is being proposed that the assistance be channelled through small farmer and peasant groups. But limiting this participation to the micro-level would never solve the problem unless the local institutions are developed at the meso-level as well.

"The process of social transformation is one of struggle from below, in which subordinate social sectors redefine their identities and their rights, in an attempt to widen their space for action and extend the boundaries of their social and political citizenship. In this struggle the socio-political space into which the subordinate sectors are incorporated is itself redefined. History, then, is the history of transformation of the stages at the same time as an account of the entry of the actors on to that stage."

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