

PARTICIPATION: BUILDING PERSPECTIVES

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A. Understanding Participation

a. 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.

Peter Oakely has reviewed work done on this subject by a number of academicians (i.e. Hague et al, 1977, Pearse and Stiefel, 1979, Lele, 1975, Upoff, 1985). On the basis of that he has categorised the different definitions of researchers (Peter and Stiefel, 1979, Cohen and Uphoff, 1977, Paul, 1987) on participation into following broad interpretations^(18,20):

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.

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

Participation as organisation: A section of literature support 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.

E.g. 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.

E.g. "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". (21).

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." (35)

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" (6)

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

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 predefined project, especially economic projects rather than for social transformation, and empowerment.

b 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 focused 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. (19,24)

Cohen and Uphoff (77) 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, which has its roots in the PR and PAR philosophy, highlights the political function of participation, that is to achieve power- to influence decisions that affect one's livelihood.

PAR 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". (2)

The core issue of **PR** 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 both researchers and participants; improvement of lives of those involved in the research process; transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationship. (16).

Collective action and knowledge construction

For achieving the political function PR and PAR schools 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.(9)

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 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." (Anisur rahman'83a.

Proponents of PR also recognise knowledge as the single most important basis of power and control(31), 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"(23)

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.⁽²⁴⁾ 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^(9, 24).

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 its political function is the cherished goal.

c Whose Participation?

For people's participation to be effective it is necessary to define the term "people" and "community" in detail. Community should not be considered as a homogenous unit, with few elites taken as effective representatives of the community. Participation of the periphery layer of the development circle should be aimed. It should be of the weakest, poorest, of the poor. "Putting the last first" should be an initiative which includes especially the women, dalits, old people.⁽⁴⁾

d. Nature of Participation

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

(i) 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 pre-designed 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.⁽²⁴⁾

(ii) 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⁽⁴⁾. However the reality of participation as "manipulative" or "co-opting" should not be ignored.⁽²⁴⁾

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 lipservice 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 goal is 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, implementors and policy makers, needing corrective action. Also the dilemma of external assistance and self reliance also need to be resolved for effective results.

(iii) Means vs End

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⁽¹⁸⁾ 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.^(13, 17, 18, 20)

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.⁽¹⁷⁾ 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. (17) 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(18)

(iv) Typology of Participation (15)

Taking the means and end debate further in development projects and programmes context participation is interpreted and implemented differently. Jules has drawn a typology of participation in development programmes.

Manipulative Participation : Participation is a pretence with people's representatives not elected, thus have no power

Passive Participation: People informed about pre-decided events/activities and their response are ignored

Participation by consultation.: People are consulted ; external agents define problem and information gathering process and control analysis . People thus do not participate in decision making

Participation for material incentives: People participate by contributing resources (labour) for material incentives; people not involved in learning process

Functional Participation: Participation seen by external agency as means to achieve project goals; predetermined objectives, shared decision making on minor activities. Cooption to serve external goals

Interactive Participation : People involved in joint analysis , action plan development, formation /strengthening local institutions. Interdisciplinary methodologies; systematic and structured learning process . People have control over local decisions and resource use decisions

Self mobilisation: independent initiatives by people to change systems; contact with external institutions for resource and technical advice; control over resource use; may /may not challenge existing distribution of wealth and power

Thus for development practitioners and policy makers the nature of participation is of critical importance.

e Principles of Participation -

The incorporation of participation as an integral component of development projects follows certain principle concepts.

The people as central to the development process should be involved in all the essential stages of the project cycle, with their knowledge on development issues respected and incorporated in the development interventions. Women's place as equal partners in development needs to be ascertained.. (19) Individual human development and emancipation, transformation of class

domination, and efficiency of a society in its undertaking are social values implicit in notion of participation.⁽²¹⁾ Importance of organisation, collective action, critical consciousness form the core of participation strategy.

B. Factors influencing Participation

An understanding of Popular Participation is incomplete without getting an overview of the factors which promote and hinder it. Only then can practitioners operationalise this concept effectively.

a. Factors promoting Participation

Factors promoting participation in the project context, with greater emphasis on its instrumental role will vary from those in its social change context.

Tandon (1989) has enlisted the following enabling factors for community participation: *Encouraging climate* - political support within and outside the implementing agency; *Educational intervention* - enhancing the awareness of the community to develop own understanding of development needs; *Skill building* - skills for self management, technical skills; and *Collective forums* as mechanisms to generating and sustaining community participation. He has further identified certain strategies for catalysing participation which include community mobilisation, empowerment, creation or utilisation of existing structures, financing and training.⁽³⁴⁾

Oakely⁽¹⁹⁾, on the basis of an extensive review of literature including a recent World Bank review of participatory development and bank projects operations, has also identified a number of factors promoting people's participation in development projects.

These factors include :

- (i) **Structural factors** :Bureaucratic decentralisation and political support create enabling environment for participation .
- (ii) **Social factors** :Tradition ,and positive history of participation in community also facilitate community's participation in the programme /project.
- (iii) **Operational factors**:P roject mechanisms to promote participation, size of the project and local institutional co-operation are other factors which facilitate participation.;
- (iv) **Organisational factors** :Structure of organisation , whether it is system maintaining or system transforming and relationship of programme to wider national policy and to social ideological context has a strong bearing on people's participation. Mainstreaming of participation in implementing organisations is thus an important organisational component ⁽²¹⁾

A growing body of knowledge stresses that projects with people should become process of learning, enabling and empowering, with open ended time frames, no blue print approach, and participatory management and decentralisation of development organisations (4) Only then can they aim to go beyond meeting practical need to negotiate for political power, generate countervailing power and create spaces.

Organisation change and mainstreaming participation in organisation can be undertaken by identify sympathetic individuals, practices or opportunities within aid organisations or bureaucracies to shift top-down development approaches (17) Also appropriateness and objectives of organisations involved, the availability of competent managers and leaders and staff training and orientation on participation and participatory methods could activate the process.(19)

(v)Effective Community Organisation: An effective community organisation plays a central role in facilitating community's participation. World Bank report highlights the need for building and strengthening effective people's organisations as vehicles of participation and key institutional links between villagers and society. (35)

However others are against against creation of parallel structure to the state through local NGOs and local level organisation. They argue that as later are not elected, they are not accountable nor exercises political clout in the area. Instead they suggest local level organisations to join together in federations scaling up to carry greater political influence over state policy and draw on wider expertise. (Scoones and pretty)

In case of social movements and grassroots groups more traditional and vernacular ways of interaction and leadership, sensitive animators and spiritual dimension are some positive contributing factors(24). Along with that the structure and internal organisation of movement or group, with capacity to maintain permanent organisational structure; class homogeneity or heterogeneity; alliance with other organised movements and concrete goals also influence participation.(21)

(vii) Participatory Mechanisms

The report of the Learning Group on Participation has further specified six participatory mechanisms used in bank-country work. They are:

a. **Information sharing mechanisms:** at this stage the information was translated into local languages and written material disseminated using various media, use of information sharing seminars, presentations and public meeting was resorted to

b. Consultative mechanisms: consultative meetings with the stakeholders , with field visits and interview at different stages of the work

c. Joint assessment mechanism : participatory assessment and evaluation with stakeholders along with beneficiary assessment

d. Shared decision making mechanisms : participatory planning techniques, with use of workshops and retreats to determine positions, roles, meetings to resolve conflicts, and foster ownership, public reviews of draft documents and subsequent revisions

e. Collaborative mechanisms: formation of joint committees with stakeholder representatives, formation of joint working groups and task forces, joint work with user group, other stakeholder groups

f. Empowering mechanisms: capacity building of stakeholder organisations, strengthening the financial and legal status of stakeholder organisation, handover and management by stakeholders and support for new, spontaneous initiative by stakeholders

The first three mechanisms promote learning , enabling potential stakeholders to participate actively. The last three mechanisms provide opportunity to influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources.

The learning group further specifies three conditions in borrowing countries which affect PD - a. Favourable system of governance- participatory decision making structures, good relation between the government and stakeholder groups .Financial and organisational capacity for participation- strong local level organisational capacity; capable organisations representing the poor, strong capacity of local level development workers and government at centre and local level, and c. Previous experience with participatory approaches - history of PD within implementing agency and top level officials supporting participatory approaches. ADB also stresses key mechanisms to facilitate participation , which includes mechanisms for sharing information, for consultation,for collaborative decision making and to facilitate empowerment.

vii Psychological factors: There is also a view that participation will be meaningful and liberating if participating individuals act as free and unbiased human beings, and that all society develop commonly accepted creeds (religions, ideologies , traditions) which condition and produce inwardly unfree and biased people. (24)

viii Process of Conscientisation:For supporters of the political function of participation, dialogical and interaction methods are highlighted as factors which promote people's participation. People's power can be established and exercised by (i) learning to interact and organise ,by breaking relation of submission through praxis and through attitude change by outsiders and community actors, and (ii)by learning to recognise oneself within such contexts through collective research, critical recovery of history, valuing and applying folk culture and diffusion of new knowledge(2).

b Obstacles to Participation

For popular participation to be a reality an awareness of these obstacles and subsequent development of mechanisms to overcome them becomes essential. When participation is taken as means the obstacles are associated more with operational procedures, while when it is taken as end the obstacles are associated more with structural and institutional relationships at national and local level.⁽¹⁸⁾

(i) Structural: A centralised political ideology encouraging central control rather than people centred development and existence of social stratification with inbuilt dominant relation of power and production obstruct people's participation^(18,19). Also existence of anti participatory structures like modern technology, bureaucracies, industrial enterprises; anti participatory character of ideologies (stereotypes and myths of class, caste, race, gender) ⁽²¹⁾ also hinder participation. Inherent bias in legal system to maintain status quo and ignorance by rural poor of their rights are some other obstacles to people's participation.⁽²⁰⁾

(ii) Administrative: A centralised administrative structure retain control over decisions making, resource allocation and information and knowledge which rural people require to participate in development activities., thus hindering participation. ⁽²⁰⁾

(iii) Socio-cultural: Further the ignorance of people about their rights, the prevalent social, economic and gender stratification alienate the people from the development process, strengthening their dependence on the elites. The existing cultural norms and values like the culture of silence, the women's role are some such processes.⁽¹⁹⁾

(iv) Operational : Overcentralised planning, inadequate delivery mechanism, lack of local coordination, inappropriate project technology and irrelevant project content affect achieving empowering participation.⁽¹⁸⁾ Organisational needs of development agencies place constraints on PD-esp. at planning stage.⁽¹⁷⁾

(v) Organisational structure: Bureaucratic organisation structure, with participation aims to meet project needs only also obstructs genuine people's participation.^(17, 19)

(vi) Community Organisation: Aspects related to community organisation may also obstruct participation if local organisations become centres of formal power controlled by few. Also lack of leadership, organisational skills, experience to run projects, aggregating rural poor as homogenous mass ⁽²⁰⁾

C. Consequences of Participation

Why is people's participation an important aspect in development? The answer to this question has been dealt with in the work of number of researchers. The impact of participation is both negative and positive in nature in a programme, project context.

Benefit

Positively, this alternate development process enhances the *efficiency* of development project on hand (being cost, time-resource-effective in nature and tapping authentic needs). As the process

allows people to determine the objective, it therefore enhances successful completion of the objective, thus making the projects as *effective* instruments of rural development.⁽¹⁹⁾ Participatory processes bring to the projects close knowledge of field reality not available to foreign technicians and government bureaucrats, network of relations imp for success of project and long term investment in rural areas, and co-operation of grassroots organisations for development activities. The grassroots organisation become infrastructure through which investment is made⁽²⁴⁾

The process also increases the *self-reliance* of people, giving them dignity of worth, shifting focus from passive dependence to active independence. The coverage and scope of development project also gets an impetus, with the *sustainability* of the project outcomes being insured as a result of the community participating in the development process.⁽¹⁹⁾

The main findings of the learning group was that participation can in many circumstances improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of projects and strengthen ownership and commitment of government and stakeholders. Community participation strategies are found to be particularly important in reaching the poor.⁽³⁵⁾ Observed benefits in bank financed projects included: increase in uptake of project service, decreased operational cost, increased rates of return and increased income of primary producers.

Cost

Recent survey of participation related cost of 42 bank financed participatory projects revealed that for the bank in using participatory approaches in lending operations were largely incurred during preparation and early supervision⁽³⁵⁾ For the bank the most costly element of participatory preparation was the *salary cost* of professionals skilled in participation. Projects involving participation required more supervision during early implementation, to strengthen or create local organisational structures and collaborative mechanisms. However a number of task managers believe that this extra effort spent in the early years of the project will be offset by lower intensity supervision in later years.

Qualitative cost incurred in Participatory ESW were partial relinquishing of control over the process and conclusions, agenda could be changed resulting in delay and possible reduction in technical quality of some of the work. The participation related costs to borrower include use of part of loan to finance participatory activities like workshops and field visits, negotiation time with other stake holders, partial yielding of control during design and implementation. And for the poor the cost included added time spent on organisational matters and cost sharing contributions

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