

People's Participation : Grass - Root Approach of Development

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INTRODUCTION

Everybody speaks of people's participation a bureaucrat going into rural area in his brand new imported jeep, and having a few words with village people, comes back to his office and speaks jubilantly of "People's Participation in Development Programme". That is just poppy-cock.

The more important level of understanding of participation is to examine how it is beginning to emerge in a practice in development projects. There is little specific literature on this aspect of participation and few example of any systematic inquiry into the functioning of participation at the project level. The only substantial source of information is project documentation. Both international governmental and non-governmental organisation keep files, or some such equivalent, on the projects they support, and these files are the most substantial source of information on the practice of participation. An examination of both the conventional and the project based literature confirms the noticeable gap between writings on the theory and concept of participation and evidence of its practice. There are of course, a number of well documented supposedly participatory projects: SFDP (Nepal), Grameen Bank (Bangladesh).

Understanding Participation

The tragedy of underdevelopment is not that the ordinary people have remained poor or are becoming poor, but that they have been inhibited from developing as humans. Elites have taken over the right to develop society and by this very act and claim have distorted the natural and profound popular notion of development. For no one can develop others - one can only stretch or diminish others by trying to develop them. While it is impossible to pinpoint changes in development thinking with any historical accuracy, there is no doubt the mid.- 1970s saw the start of fundamental shift away from the domination of the modernisation paradigm of development thinking and intervention and a move towards a systematic search for alternatives. The past 25 years have witnessed a searching re-examination of the nature and purpose of development, and this re-examination has correspondingly influenced practice. The reexamination threw up a whole new form of analysis-dependency theory-

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that has steadily influenced the different dimensions of development intervention.

The central issued of this search for development alternatives was that development had become capital centred as opposed to people centred; it had by - passed marginalised people in its concern to build and construct. The counter-argument stated although physical development was important, it must be approached in such a way that people had both a central role and some control over it. While it is possible to show that many of these capital centred efforts improved the lives of some rural, in most Third World countries the majority of them have benefitted little or have even become worse off. This capital centred development helped to improve the material livelihoods of some and to develop their talents, skill and abilities but it has been less successful in more widely promoting people's involvement in the development process i.e. participation, involvement and control (PIC Principle). For too long development has been concerned largely with seeking to build national productive and physical capacities and measuring success with broad statistics and quantitative increases. Early in the debate economists were arguing that development did not start with these physical goods but with people with their education, organisation and discipline. Without these three all resources remain latent untapped potential. Development has to be seen as a process of humanisation and therefore, people should be centred to be any kind of development process.

Rural development is the participation of people in mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external change agents and outside resources. People can only develop themselves by participation is decision, involvement in activities and control in project operation to guarantee the benefit accruing from the project which affect their well-being. People are not being developed when they are herded like animals into new ventures. This is the succinct statement of what is variously referred to in the literature as another development, alternative development, people centred development, counter development or participatory development and has stressed the need to adopt the basis and approach of development to the social, political and economic context of the people involved. It does not argue that improvements in the physical environments of the rural poor, e.g. new crop varieties, better water supply or health facilities, are not necessary, indeed, lives of millions of rural people in the Third World have suffered in grinding poverty. Firstly poverty is structural and has its roots in the economic and, political conditions which influence rural people's livelihoods. In order to begin to tackle this poverty, it is important to develop the abilities of rural people to have a say in, and to have some influence on, the forces which control their livelihoods. Secondly, development programmes and projects have largely by-passed the vast majority of rural poor, there is need, therefore, to

development intervention to ensure that this neglected majority has a chance to benefit from development is the need for a greater participation of rural people in development process. This participation will not only change the nature and direction of development interventions but will lead to a type of development which is more respectful of poor people's position and interest.

CHALLENGE OF PARTICIPATION

Underdevelopment, as well as being a function of physical impoverishment, is also a state of mind and that understanding it as a state of mind, or as a level of consciousness, is critical in bringing about change. In this respect broad, sweeping commitments of process such as *participation* need to understand the powerful contextual barriers which perpetuate people's isolation or lack of involvement in development. These barriers entrench a state of mind which a process of participation seeks to reverse best known is culture of silence which makes rural people having no voice no access and no participation in development activities. Poverty is not just lack of physical resources for development, it also implies powerlessness or the inability to exert influence upon the forces which shape one's livelihood. On one level, therefore, the challenge to a concept such as participation is to seek to make contact with and involve rural people whose lives are dominated by *culture silence*.

On another level, the challenge to participation is also to reverse to style and approach to development intervention that dominates non-participatory development practices. As in case of Nepal, the existing planning procedures for the project are not based on the understanding of the critical ingredients of participation, namely participation in decision making, participation in implementation, participation in benefit sharing, and participation in evaluation. When the villagers undertake projects on their own the participation of the local people in terms of all these dimensions is total. But when it comes to planning of activities under the development project, their participation is only partial and limited to need identification and subsequent implementation of a few rural works. In most other sectoral activities the participation of the people all the village level is simply non-existent.

Inadequacies of total dependence upon a professionally dominant style of intervention has led to the emergence of bottom-up development, putting people first and putting the last first, radical shift from external professional to the local people.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION OF PARTICIPATION

Participation defies any single attempt at definition or interpretation, yet it will be useful to review briefly some of the more important and

contrasting statements on participation. In a more limited way, the following four statements summarise this range of interpretation:

- Participation is considered a voluntary contribution by the people in 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 contents.
- With regard to rural development participation includes people's involvement in decision making process, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits or development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.
- Participation is concerned with the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulate institutions in given social situation on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.
- Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish.

While all of the above have added richness to the inquiry and stretched wide concept of participation, essentially there are three broad enterpretation of participation.

— Participation As Contribution

The dominant interpretation in development projects in the Third World sees participation as implying voluntary or other forms of contributions by rural people to predetermined programmes and projects. Health, water supply, forestry, infrastructural and natural resource conservation projects predominantly stress rural people's contributions as implicit in the participation and indeed fundamental to success, and whatever the guise under which they they are presented, they form the core of the participatory element in the project.

— Paticipation As Organisation

Organisation is a fundamental instrument of participation, Few would dispute this contention, but would disagree on the nature and evolution of the organisation. The distinction lies between the orgin of the organisational form which will serve as the vechile for participation, either such organisations are externally conceived and introduced like co-operatives, farmers associations, irrigation management committees etc. or else they emerge and take structure themselves as a result of the process of participation, like permanent committee of the general body of a co-operative society.

— Participation As Empowering

Participation as an exercise of empowering rural people has gained wider support since 1980s. In 1979 the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) emphasised the importance of transfer of power as implicit in participation. Since then empowering has become an accepted term in development literature. It is, however, a term difficult to define and give rise to alternative explanations. Some see empowering as the development of skills and abilities to enable rural people to manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development delivery systems, others see it as more fundamental and essentially concerned with enabling rural people to decide upon and to take the actions which they believe are essential to their development. Whatever the disagreements in perspective, the relationship between participation and power is now widely recognised.

— Synthesis of Three Broad Interpretation Of Participation

As with earlier statements on participation, it is not possible to treat the above as discrete and inseparable categories. A development project might ostensibly contain elements of all three, although this is highly unlikely. A broad and recognisable distinction could be drawn, however, between participation as contribution on the one hand, and participation as organisation and empowering on the other. Certainly organisation is a fundamental ingredient of a process of empowering, similarly it is often a prerequisite to local people's contribution.

EXAMPLIFY : NEPAL

Participatory Development programme currently operating in 72 districts in the form of Participatory District Development Programme, seeks to empower people to take increasingly greater control over their own development and to enhance their capacities to mobilise and channel the resources required for poverty alleviation. Participatory Development Programme (PDP) embodied into Participation, Involvement and Control (PIC) principle works simultaneously at the local and central levels.

At the Micro level

PDDP provides support for improving the governance system and social empowerment process at the village level through the development of self-governing community institutions.

At the Meso level

PDDP provides support for the strengthening of development programming and management capabilities of the District Development Committees.

At The Macro Level

PDDP supports the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Local Development to formulate policies that reflect and support local self-development initiatives.

OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION

The practice of participation does not occur in a vacuum. There are number of factors which are susceptible, in both negative and a positive way, to a whole range of influences. A number of problems emerge with practice of participation or more fundamentally, serious obstacles which can frustrate attempts at participatory development. These can be examined under the following broad heading.

— Structural Obstacles

In countries where the prevailing ideology does not encourage openness or citizens comments but prefers to maintain the direction and decision making concerning state affairs in strictly controlled hands, the prevailing political environment will not be conducive to genuine participation. Similarly legal system can also frustrate efforts to promote participation, as legal sanctity of caste system.

— Administrative Obstacles

Centralised governments encourage centralised administrative structure which by their very nature are major obstacles to people's participation. These administrative structures retain control over decision making, resource allocation and the information and knowledge which rural people will require if they are to play an effective part in development activities.

— Social Obstacles

Probably the most frequent and powerful social obstacles to the participation of rural people in development projects is a mentality of dependence which deeply and historically ingrained in their lives. In many Third World countries rural people for generations have been dominated by and dependent upon local elite groups which has made them accustomed to leaving decisions and initiatives to their *leaders*. This dependent mentality is further reinforced by the fact that mere *survival* is for most rural people their greatest challenge and consumes much of their energies, leaving them precious little time to participate. Similarly, heterogeneous groups of rural people in terms of economic and social unit also frustrate efforts to promote participation.

CONCLUSION

An apparent widespread recognition of the importance of participation in development, not everybody is convinced either that it is necessarily always a good thing or that to date it has clear practical advantages for development projects. But more specifically there are series of arguments which see participation is extremely useful to the functioning of development projects which are more substantive running as follows:

- PIC : Participation Involvement Control Principle has been most effective in development.
- Efficiency : Participation implies a greater chance that resources available to development projects will be used more efficiently.
- Effectiveness : Participation will also make projects more effective as instruments of rural development.
- Self-reliance : This all embracing term covers a wide range of benefits which participation can bring. Essentially, self-reliance refers to the positive effects on rural people of participating in development projects.
- Coverage : Most government and many agency directed or supported development projects reach only a limited, and usually privileged, number of rural people. Participation will extend this coverage in that it will bring more rural people within the direct influence of development activities.
- Sustainability : Externally motivated development projects fail to sustain themselves once the initial level of project support is withdrawn. Participation is seen as the antidote to this situation in that it can ensure that local people maintain the project's dynamics.

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