From Development to Participatory Development
by
Dr. Nalin R Jena
Human society has moved from Rousseau’s ‘state of nature’ to the contemporary modern or as some even call it post - modern society. Many scholars have tried to analyse and conceptualise this long historical process of transition. Spencer, a Sociologist traces this transition beginning with the stage of savagery moving to barbarism to industrial society. Max Weber another renowned sociologist conceptualises the transition from traditional to modern industrial society. Karl Marx the famous theoretician of the eighteenth century formulated the transition from primitive society to pastoral to feudal to capitalist society. Most of the economists conceptualise this process of transition from underdeveloped to developing to developed stage. What is important in this process of transition is a movement toward a perceived better stage and some deliberate attempt is made to give directionality to the change. Intervention for change as a major catalyst would have a history of about one hundred years. Inspite of such efforts what has resulted:

- It is a world where more than a billion people still languish in absolute poverty surviving at the bare margins of existence, below any common concept of human dignity.
- It is a world that calmly tolerates a huge global income disparity, with the top one billion people receiving 150 times more income than the bottom one billion, even as disparities only a tenth as large within nations are leading to convulsions in many countries.
- It is a world where many ethnic minorities still live like a separate nation within their own countries, creating tremendous potential for ethnic explosions.

Few people have the opportunity to participate fully in the economic and political lives of their nations.

Any attempt to analyse the present consequences of development necessitates critical understanding of the development models which have been designed and adopted, various development approaches followed and inevitably the concept of development.

The purpose of the following discussion is to familiarise the reader with various conceptualisations of development, development models, approaches, strategies and the current development thinking. The following discussion is divided into four integrated part. The first focuses on the concept of development; the second on models and approaches; the third refers to development strategies in India; the last one will highlight the contemporary thinking on development.

**THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT**

Though everybody aspires for development, yet there is no common definition of development. Development occupies the center of an incredibly complex and confusing semantic constellation. The history of the conception of the concept of development can be traced to the concept of evolution which has a very strong biological connotation. The development or evolution refers to the process through which organisms achieve their genetic potential. The transfer of the biological metaphor to the social sphere occurred in the last quarter of the 18th century. Since then the metaphor of development has undergone metamorphic change. However, the world always implies a favourable change, a step from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better. ‘Favorable change’, ‘superior’ and ‘better’ are not apolitical terms, in the sense that these terms did not carry the same meaning for all the peoples. Certain people defined these for others and
certain countries did for other countries. For instance, after World War II America wanted to establish its hegemony in the global scenario not only by imposing its model of development but also by permeating both the popular and intellectual mind. As a consequence, America defined about two billion people of the earth as underdeveloped. Underdevelopment became their identity and the ‘development’ of America or other co-called development countries became the development target for the undeveloped ones. Development and underdevelopment syndrome is still persisting. In this context too development connotes escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment. The purpose here is to highlight the debate and not to attempt an indepth critical analysis. This provides a broad contest for understanding of the concept of development which the succeeding section focuses on.

Initially development was considered as the subject matter of study and policy formulation by the economists. But later other social scientists too plunged into the area of development studies as development emerged crucial for society for human life. These apart, various bilateral and multilateral development agencies operating at international level do also formulate their own definitions of development. It will be worthwhile to have a look at various definitions.

The economists define development in terms of economic growth. The view of the economists is that accumulation of capital is the engine of growth. Land, capital and labour are the three important factors of production, and their increased use lead to economic growth. According to the classical economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus and John Stuart Mill, technological progress, population growth, division of labour, capital accumulation and investment were the crucial determinants of economic growth. A cursory look at various theories of economic development propounded by economists will help us to understand economic development in a better way.

While the earlier economists emphasised the role of the above mentioned basic factors, later scholars stressed the importance of continuing technical progress, for continuing economic growth. Estimates in the fifties indicated that 80-90 per cent of the increase in private non-agricultural output in the U.S. was due to something other than increased use of the basic factors of production. This increased output was believed to have been caused by technical progress. This emphasised the importance of technical progress, and human resource development underlying it, for economic development.

Paul Rodan argued that a “big push” is needed to get out of the vicious circles operating in underdeveloped countries. This should be given through heavy investments in a variety of interdependent sectors and infrastructure. Joseph A. Schumpeter, another famous economist emphasised the role of innovation and innovators in economic development. To him entrepreneurial spirit and motivation are important factors for economic development.

Harvey Leibenstein emphasised that economic development occurs because of a special type of human response to motivations and incentives that are created by economic and social environment. There are considerable differences in attitudes towards work, accumulation, risk taking, etc. between the masses of people in the developed and underdeveloped areas. These attitudes are culturally determined. Leibenstein believed that accelerated economic development of modern times was to a great extent due to the replacement of subsistence orientation and traditional outlook by market orientation. For economic growth, a transformation of attitudes of a
sufficient number of people form traditional outlook and preference for honorific activities, to drive for profit making, monetary gains, and risk taking are necessary.

Expansion of knowledge is another important factor contributing to economic development. Arthur Lewis pointed out that besides efforts for accumulation of capital, accumulation of knowledge was an important proximate cause of economic growth. Economic growth depended both upon technical knowledge about things and living creatures, and also upon social knowledge about man and his relations with his fellowmen. The importance of education for economic development was again stressed by Frederik Harbison and Charles Myers. Harbison emphasised that human resources - not capital, nor income, nor material resources-constitute the ultimate basis of the wealth of nations. Human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political origination, and carry forward national development. Human resources are the energies, skills, talent and knowledge of people which are or whose potentially can, or should be applied to the production of goods or the rendering of useful services. Harbison classified the human resource problem of underdeveloped countries into two broad categories, viz., underdevelopment of skills and knowledge of persons in the labour force; and underutilisation of human energies and capacities.

Even though the pioneers of economic like Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall emphasised the role of education in economic development, subsequent economists did not show equal concern for human resource development.

It is clear from the above definitions preferred by the economists that growth of wealth through increased productivity is the central defining character of development.

Gradually social scientists other than economists tried to conceptualise development as development through conscious intervention was found to have profound societal impact. Touraine, for instance, does not view development simply as an economic fact. He views development as a passage from a rational to an industrial society, "whose features depend on the conditions of its birth, on the social movements that have struggled to shape and control it." In a sense therefore each society presents its unique passage to an industrial society whose features are the outcomes of the social movements that shape it. He analyses development as an action not a fact; it is therefore the state of a whole set of social relationships and conflicts... (it is) a mode of social existence and action". Some other social scientists define development as an increase in the capacity for controlled transformation of the social structure. It is argued that it is a move away from dependency to autarky - a move in the direction of development. Another similar definition come from an economist is that of Todaro. He views that "development, in its essence, must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desire for individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation or condition of life regarded materially and spiritually better." Gradually development was defined not purely in terms of economic development but it encompassed all the dimensions of life in a holistic perspective.

Another definition of development given recently in the context of South Asia needs mention here. This came from the South Commission which was chaired by Julius K Nyerere. The Commission says that "development is a process which enables human beings to realise their potential, build self-confidence, and leads lives of dignity and fulfillment. It is a process which frees people from the fear of want and exploitation. It is a movement away from political, economic, or social oppression.
Through development, political independence acquires its true significance. And it is a process of growth, a movement essentially springing from within the society that is developing. Development therefore implies growing self-reliance, both individual and collective. The base for a nation’s development must be its own resources, both human and material fully used to meet its own needs.

The above discussion presents - how the concept of development itself has undergone transition. Alongside the definitions a brief review of the indicators of development will further show the development goals, the models have strived for the transition.

INDICATORS OF DEVELOPMENT

In the beginning GNP was the most widely accepted and used indicator for economic well-being of people. Real GNP per capita means on the average we are economically better off. GNP came under heavy criticism as the indicator of development. Firstly, it does not include the value of physical and mental satisfaction components as well as social and cultural dimensions. Hence, GNP per capita is not a good measure of general social well-being, it is only a qualitative indicator of economic well-being available for international and intra-national comparisons over time and space.

GNP was succeeded by many other indicators such as Per Capita Public Expenditure on Community Facilities and Services; Adelman and Morris Indicators of development; Physical Quality of Life Index, Measures of Income Inequality, etc. Per Capita Public Expenditure on Community Facilities and Services basically takes the consumption of goods and services by its inhabitants into consideration. This measure assumes that the availability of facilities mainly infrastructural and services represent ‘real income’ and therefore constitute part of the level of living. Adelman and Morris Indicators of Development was developed by Adelman and Morris used forty indicators of socio-cultural, political and economic development to analyse the process of development in seventy-four development countries. Some of these indicators are traditional, such as per capita GNP, some are non-traditional, e.g. strength of demotic institutions, degree of national integration, extent of social mobility and the like. Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) as a measure of quality of life supplements per capita real GNP which is the most widely used measure of economic growth. It does not attempt to incorporate everything of measurable welfare but measures the progress that is being made in satisfying certain basic needs of the poorest people. It has three components, namely, infant mortality, life expectancy at age one, and basic literacy. This is fairly easy to compute and understand and sensitive to changes in distribution of benefits of development, but does not reflect the values of any specific cultures. Measures of Income Inequality takes inequality of income as the major indicator of development. A country with a higher per capita real GNP but with a less equitable distribution of income would rank lower in terms of aggregate economic welfare than the one with the same level of per capita real GNP but with a more equitable distribution of income.

All the above indicators of development are essentially preoccupied with economic denominators.

The above discussion also reflects the global perspective of development. Upto the first decade of development (i.e. upto 1970) the GNP growth was considered a natural indicator of development.
There were at least two major assumptions about this growth strategy: (1) that a certain amount of inequality was necessary to produce the amount of saving and investment which were important preconditions for economic growth. (2) The second assumption was that the GNP growth will automatically ‘trickle down’ to the lower income groups. Both these assumptions proved fallacious and the theory that the development path will proceed from initial inequality to greater equality proved unfounded.

The consequence of such a policy for many developing countries was that the limited capital available indigenously, coupled with foreign investments introduced a typically modern industrial sector which went on expanding in the form of modern enclaves without creating the necessary linkages within the domestic economy. As a result, these countries could not develop any capacity to absorb increases of population or the requirements of their entire economies. This created a dualism within the economies with enclaves of prosperity amidst the masses of rural poor, exacerbating inequalities. The ‘trickle’ never reached ‘down’ to the bottom. This strategy of development created more problems that it could resolve for the society as a whole.

In order to counter the failure of the GNP growth strategy the ‘basic needs’ approach was evolved; (1) “to relieve as quickly as is possible absolute poverty through intensive direct assistance to those in desperate circumstances; (2) to meet the ‘basic needs’ of all in terms of material wants such as food, clothing, shelter and fuel, and also, as some argue, social needs such as education, human right and what is called ‘participation’ in social life through employment and political involvement”.

However, interestingly the ‘enthronement of basic needs’ did not imply the ‘dethronement of GNP’. In early 90s another new paradigm of development called human development moved to the center stage. This we will discuss after a brief discussion on the Indian perspective of development.

THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

A review of rural development programmes and policies followed in India after Independence, reveal four strategies of development.

1. **Growth - oriented strategy**: This is based on the philosophy that economic growth is the key to development. The role of the state in this strategy is to build infrastructure, and maintain a favorable climate to stimulate the growth of rural enterprises. This critical assumption of this strategy is that the benefits of increased production will gradually ‘trickle down’ to the poor. The regulation and coordination of the activities of private and public agencies is primarily through market mechanisms. This paradigm formed the basis of the predominant agricultural development strategy of the 1960s when programme like the Intensive Agriculture District Programme (IDAP), the Intensive Cattle Development Programme (ICDP), the High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP) were launched. But this paradigm failed to make any dent in the basic problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality and had to be abandoned.

2. **Welfare - oriented Strategy**: this seeks to promote the well-being of the rural population in general and rural poor in particular, through large scale social programme like the Minimum Needs Programme, Applied Nutrition
Programme and Mid-Day Meals Programme. The primary means used in this strategy are free provision/distribution of goods, services and civic amenities in rural areas.

The critical assumptions of this strategy are that people are not competent to identify and resolve their problems and that the government specialists can identify their needs and meet these needs with the financial and administrative resources available with the government. The role of villagers is that of passive receptors of services. The performance of the programme is judged by the quantity of goods, services and civic amenities delivered. The welfare-oriented programmes present a mixed picture; the rural poor have benefited significantly through some programmes in a few areas but not in others. There are two major criticisms of this strategy, (i) it has created dependence; and (ii) it requires resources that are beyond the means of governments.

3. **Responsive Strategy**: this is aimed at helping rural people help themselves through their own organization and other support systems. Its concern is with responding to the felt needs of the rural people as defined by them. The role of the government is to facilitate the self-help efforts of villagers by providing technologies and resource that are not locally available. The critical assumption of this strategy is that the rural poor will identify and resolve their problems if provided with minimal support and otherwise left to their own devices and initiatives. Community participation in and control of project activities is the primary performance indicator of this strategy. India’s Operation Flood which was launched in 1970 in eighteen milksheds in 10 states is a good example of this strategy. Operation Flood aimed at modernizing and developing India’s dairy industry through a three-tier cooperative structure along the Amula pattern. Many voluntary agencies are also following this paradigm of development.

4. **Integrated or Holistic Strategy**: This combines all the positive features of the earlier three strategies and is designed to achieve simultaneously the goals of growth, welfare, equity and community participation. This paradigm takes very comprehensive but integrated view of the basic problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality seeks to address the physical, economic technological, social motivational, organisational and political bases of these problems.

The multiple goals of this strategy are sought to be achieved by building the capacity of the community to involve themselves in development in partnership with the government. The critical assumption underlying this approach is that the government can restructure societal power relationships, and centralised.

Bureaucracies can learn to share power with community groups. The successful implementation of this strategy requires complex decentralised matrix structures with permanent mechanisms for vertical and lateral integration, a combination of specialist and generalist skills, institutional
leadership, social intervention capability and systems management. The anti-poverty programmes lunched in India in the 1970s - among them the Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Training of Rural Youth for Self - Employment - were intended to follow this paradigm. But given the existing organisational structure which does not have many of the prerequisites discussed earlier for the successful implementation of this strategy, this paradigm also did not yield the desired results.

India economy has witnessed very lop-sided development. India agriculture in the fifties contributed nearly 59% to the GDP approximately 75% of the population depended on agriculture. In 1984 this contribution to the GNP reduced to 32.8%. The total work force at present is 22.25 crores (agricultural and non-agricultural) of this 14.80 crores are in agricultural occupations (67%) and 7.45 crores are in non-agricultural (mainly urban-industrial) occupations (33%). Thus 32-8% of the GDP is accounted for by 67% of the agricultural work force whilst 67.2% of the GDP is accounted for by only 33% of the non-agriculture work force. This pattern of change can be interpreted to mean that the decline in the contribution of agriculture to GDP is accompanied by a distressingly incommensurate shift of work force from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. This is one paradox of unequal development.

Of the total non-agricultural work force only 2.42 crores (or about 32.5%) are in the organised sector, the rest 5.03 crores (67.5%) are in the informal sector. The rate of growth of agriculture based on food crops production have averaged around 2.5% per annum. Corresponding growth of the population registers approximately 2.3 per annum. Production of food grain has increased from about 50 mt in the 50s to a phenomenal 150 mt in 80s. India can now boost of a buffer stock of 25 – 30 mt of food grains. And yet rural poverty is abounding with 30% of the rural population below the poverty line. Production and distribution are inconsistently related and poverty co-exists with self-sufficiency in food grains. Poverty and unemployment figures have been on the increase even though the official statistics make us believe the reverse. As for inequality, though the official figures show no increase in the indices (assets, income, consumption), they admit to the situation not having improved. The growth rates have been uneven and hesitant across space, sectors and classes.

To put the consequences of development sharply - the very pattern of economic development has been based on undercutting the tenuous resource base of the poor - the rates of deforestation the spread of arid lands, declining productivity of the soil, destructions of traditional means of survival resulting in the creation of a sharply growing pauperised labor force.

This situation is not peculiar to India alone. One can find the same pattern in all the post-colonial Third World countries.

**New Paradigm of Development**

The 1990s have given birth to new development ethos. This follows two clearly distinguishable lines. In the North, it calls redevelopment, i.e. to development gain what was maldeveloped or is now obsolete. In south, redevelopment also requires dismantling what was left by the ‘adjustment
processes’ of the ‘80s. Conceptually and politically, redevelopment is now taking the shape of sustainable development, for ‘our common future’, as prescribed by the Brundtland Commission. The current decade has also given birth to a new bureaucratic exercise to give development another lease of life. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published in 1990 the first Human Development Report. This created a new paradigm of development called human development paradigm. This paradigm states that the real objective of development is to increase people’s development choices. It further explicates that income is one aspect of these choices- and an extremely important one - but it is not the sum-total of human existence. Health, education, a good physical environment and freedom to name a few other components of well – being - may be just as important. The aim should be growth that is:

- Participatory - allowing for private initiative and broad - based people’s initiatives.
- Distributed Well - benefiting all people.
- Sustainable - since raising future production may demand current sacrifices.

The concept of human development was further elaborated along the following lines.

People must be at the centre of human development. Development has to be woven around people, not people around development. It has to be development of the people, by the people and for the people.

The above notion of people - oriented development did not occur for the first time in the Human Development Report. It, in fact, originated in the world confidence on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), 1979 which emphasized people’s participation in development. It was recognised that participation of people is neither a mere input into a project nor meant to yield certain tangible benefits to the people. It is rather a process which enables the deprived sections to gain control over their own life situation, resources, knowledge and ideology.

Other development scholars too talked about people-centered development or people’s participation in development as an alternative approach to development. The concept of participation also assumes the same level of ambiguity as the concept of development. It is worthwhile to focus on the concept of participation.

CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

What is participation?

Conceptualisation of popular participation is not a sudden intellectual construct, rather it has crystallised within a historical context over a period of time. Very clearly, it can be historically traced that participation as a concept and a strategy of development is an outcome of a profound disillusionment with established development strategy in post - Industrial Revolution period. Specially, the experiences of the fifties and the sixties have demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the top – down, GNP - focused, growth centered strategy of development based on processional expertise and modernising technologies. The development strategy followed during this period emphasised economic growth and
Participatory Research In Asia

industrialisation in the context of increasingly centralised planning and control over the distribution of resources.

It is widely accepted that the term participation is too dynamic to have a static and universal definition. Furthermore, participation is shrouded with a variety of interpretations ranging from “manipulative participation” to “authentic participation”. Making political capital out of participation is often a hidden agenda behind the former interpretation whereas the later stresses on genuine people’s involvement as an ongoing process and an end in itself. Hence, an effort can be made to highlight the major strands with regard to various conceptualisations and interpretations.

There are, as Peter Oakley, et al., (1991), identifies, two proudly distinguishable schools of thought on conceptualisation of participation.

(a) One school views participation in the contest of development project as the key input in terms of the inclusion of human resource in development efforts. This enhances the chance of success of the project.

(b) The other school underscores participation as a process whereby the common people seek to have some influence and to gain access to the resources which would help them sustain and improve their life situation.

These schools relate to the means and end debate on participation. To elucidate further, participation as a means implies the use of participation as a strategic component to achieve some predetermined goal or objective. In this sense, participation is essentially a short term exercise, limited to achievement of certain goal. Participation as an end is an entirely different concept. Here, participation is seen as a process which unfolds over time and whose purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development activities.

Peter Oakley et al., (1991), have classified three broad interpretations of participation as follow:

i) Participation as contribution

Here, participation forms the core of the participatory element in the project. Participation as contribution implies voluntary or other forms of contributions by rural people to predetermined projects and programme.

ii) Participation as organisation

This is a complex process and a debatable one. This approach revolves around the origin of the organisational from which would serve as the vehicle of participation; either such organisations are externally conceived and introduced (co – operatives, farmer’s association, etc.) or else they emerge and take structures themselves as a result of the process of participation.

iii) Participation as a process of empowerment:

During the last decade, the notion of participation as an exercise of empowering rural people has gained wider support. In 1979, the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) emphasised the importance of a transfer of power as implicit in
participation. It is a process which enables the deprived sections to gain control over their own life situation, resources, knowledge and ideology.

While the above interpretations represent different streams of thoughts and conceptualisations, they should not be treated as separate and discrete categories. Local people’s contribution is prerequisite to organisation and empowerment, at the same time organisation which is a fundamental ingredient of the process of empowering, is also a prerequisite to local people’s contribution.

It is naive to define popular participation in rigid terms. Rather it is suggested that participation must always be described in terms of its specific context. In this way the varied conceptual interpretations can be accommodated provided they can be justified within the particular context under consideration. This requirement recognises the variety of interpretations, and at the same time provides scope for a specific definition within a contextual frame of reference.

Results from Participation

As already mentioned, the very definition of participation imbibes some of the results obtained from the practice of participation. However, results or benefits ought to be explained and analysed distinctly as they become significant in view of its sustained practice and the plausibility of replicability. A good amount of literature on participation do point out various outcomes, both positive and negative, of participation (Mishra, 1984; Uphoff, 1986; Oakley, 1991) we will briefly scan the literature before we focus on the deliberation in the Workshop on this aspect.

Oakley et al., (1991) have summarized the major arguments with regard to the results of participation and classified them into six categories, viz. efficiency, effectiveness, self-reliance, coverage and sustainability. These categories need some expansion for better clarity. While participation implies a greater chance that resources available to development projects will be used more efficiently, it also ensures effectiveness as an instrument of rural development. Participation helps to achieve self-reliance in the sense that it breaks the mentality of dependence which characterises much of the development work, and as a result, promotes self - awareness and confidence. This creates capacity among the rural people to examine their problems and seek solution to them. People’s participation enables the project to enlarge its coverage and renders sustainability to the programme/project. Experiences show that externally motivated development projects frequently fail to sustain themselves once the initial level of project support or inputs either diminishes or are withdrawn. Participation is seen as the antidote to this situation in that it can ensure that local people maintain the project’s dynamics (ibid).

The World Development Report 1992 also supports that projects are more successful if they are participatory in design and implementation. A review of thirty completed projects from the 1970s found an average rate of return of 18 percent for projects that were judged culturally appropriate but only nine percent for the projects that did not include mechanisms of social and cultural adaptation. A more detailed study of fifty - two USAID projects similarly found a strong correlation between participation and project success, especially when participation took place through
It may not be absolutely convincing that participation has clear practical advantages for development projects. Participation may have adverse effect as well. As Oakley et al. (1991) points out participation may cause delay, increase cost and given an opportunity to the people to oppose the project. The world development report 1992 also mentions that participation tends to be expensive and can cause or enhance local conflicts by reinforcing the power of local elite by way of decentralising decision-making (World bank. 1992).

Who Participates?

The term people’s participation is too generic. What does ‘people’ mean or who are included in people’s participation? Does the scope for people's participation in any programme provide ‘equal opportunity’ to all social categories and classes for effective participation? Even if when the term person is further narrowed to “rural people” or “community” does it ensure equal condition for effective participation for each one?

The Human Development Report of UNDP (1993) notes that despite the accumulating forces for greater participation, large number of people continue to be excluded from the benefits of development, especially the poorest segments of society, people in rural areas, many religious and ethnic minorities and, in almost every country, women.

The Human Development Report (1993) further identifies some of the categories individually as follow which are often excluded from the framework of participation;

i) **The poor**

For the poor, their abject penury is a formidable barrier to their entry into many aspects of social, economic and political life. In many developing countries, the disparity between haves and have-nots is very wide. For millions of people all over the world, every day struggle for survival absorbs so much of time and energy that it minimises chances of equal participation.

ii) **Women**

Women are the world’s largest excluded category even though they make up half the adult population, and often contribute much more than their share to society, inside and outside the home. But they are largely excluded from positions of power because of the dominant patriarchal structure.

iii) **Minorities, indigenous peoples and tribals**

These social categories are always on the periphery in our modern society. They often find it difficult to participate fully in societies that consistently operate in favour of the dominant groups. Sometimes, this discrimination is embedded in the legal framework denying these groups equal access to education, employment opportunities or to political representations. Such exclusion is generally less a matter of official policy than everyday practice.
iv) Rural People

Rural people have also restricted participation opportunity in economic and social life in the developing world just because of their spatial existence. The rural per capita income in many countries is around half that in towns and cities. And rural people have much less access to government services. Despite making up around two-thirds of the population, they receive on an average less than a quarter of the education, health, water and sanitation services.

v) The disabled

The disabled constitute about 10% of the world’s population. They include all those who have experienced injury, trauma or disease that results in long-term physical or mental changes. This group is often subject to deliberate negligence and seclusion from the mainstream.

Obstacles to participation

The preceding discussion reveals that certain social categories and collectivities remain peripheral in term of popular participation, in any development endeavor. This indicates that mere recommendation or the effort to evoke participation does not ensure participation. This is because, participation does not occur in a vacuum, rather in socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. There are forces which inhibit popular participation. The Human Development Report 1993 states, “Participation is a plant that does not grow easily in the human environment. Powerful vested interests, driven by personal greed, erect numerous obstacles to block off the routes to people’s political and economic power”, (UNDP, 1993). The Report mentions that legal systems, bureaucratic constraints, social norms and maldistribution of assets are some of the major obstacles to the practice of participation (ibid). Oakley et al. (1991), reviewing the evidence, has divided the obstacles into three headings, viz. structural, administrative and social. Both the above categorisations, though different in nomenclature, more or less speak the same.

The obstacles can be grouped under four broad categories, viz. socio-cultural, socio-psychological, project-related and politico-administrative.

(a) Socio-cultural:

The social structure of a particular society may also act either as facilitative or inhibiting agent for people’s participation. The social hierarchy and social stratification backed by the ideology and institutions often deny access to the lower strata to participate in any matter in equal term with the people of higher strata. The system of stratification also distributes social power which, in turn, plays a major part in deciding the role of each social strata or category even within the same stratum or category.

The foremost hindering factor for people’s participation is the widespread poverty and ignorance of the people. Unequal distribution of wealth and power in our society has created an unequal structure in which a large majority of people are dominated and subservient. These people are historically kept out of decision-making process. Their penury and ignorance has further contributed to their disadvantaged social position. Such unequal social structure and relation of domination are
institutionalised by various customs, traditions and a number of other cultural ethos in our society. Even religion in certain circumstances plays an inhibitive role for participation.

(b) Social-psychological

Socio-psychological factors do emanate from socio-cultural conditions of a given community or society. The unequal social structure creates the condition of alienation for the have-nots. And this alienation in turn generates fear among the subalterns to demand their share of participation in every sphere of life. The traditional social structure guiding social, economic and political relations and the development processes have created dependence mentality among the poor, marginalised sections which has reduced the impetus among them to take self-initiatives for their own development.

(c) Politico-administrative

A centralized political system, even as seen in many democratic political systems, encourages centralised bureaucratic structures which, in turn does not favour the notion of people’s participation, as the bureaucracy believes that the ‘ignorant’ rural people are not competent to participate in any matter related to development that crucially affects their life. Similarly, planning of development programmes and projects is often centralised and planning procedures discourage local involvement. What emerged consensually in the workshop was the ‘professional’ attitude of and the ‘expertise’ culture prevalent among the planners and project implementors undermine people’s knowledge and involvement in the process of development. This apart, rampant corruption closes the option for people’s participation. The attitude and commitment of the political leadership both at micro and macro levels play a major role in providing scope to participation. In our country, as the participants unequivocally pointed out, the political leaders are apathetic towards people’s participation. The situation is further aggravated by preponderant presence of middle men pretending as ‘true’ representatives of people.

(d) Project related

Even if the socio-cultural, socio-psychological and socio-administrative conditions are conducive for popular participation, a great deal depends upon the nature and design of the project or programme to be executed. Often a project formulated centrally obliterates the possibility for people’s participation and people’s agenda. At the level of implementation, the implementing personnel often lack proper understanding of participation, and therefore, tend to undermine its importance. Gaining people’s confidence to execute a project eliciting people’s participation is crucial and a difficult task. As widely evidenced in our country, the project bureaucracy often fails to establish their credibility and gain confidence of the common people. Both low and excessive incentives promised or rendered by the project may prove to be a hindrance for people’s participation.

Besides all these, past experiences of the people with some other project propounding people’s participation play a major role in motivating the people, positively or negatively, to participate in a given project.

The obstacles mentioned above are just indicative of the factors which may cause non-participation or thwart the attempt to practice participation. The obstacles are much more complex than presented above. Often, more than one factor operates
simultaneously in a complex manner. Hence any attempt to identify the obstacle has to be made in appropriate context and has to be analysed in totality.

**Principles for promoting participation:**
Any strategy formulated for development intervention is evolved on the basis of a set of broad and specific principles. These principles play crucial role in deciding the nature of intervention as well as the methods, and act as basic guides to practice. The absence of principle to guide the practice of participation may turn it into a fiasco. It is in this context important to identify the basic principles of practice that will provide solid foundation to participation and translate it into action.

Review of literature reveals a set of principles which should guide any participatory development strategy (Oakley, 1987, 1991; World Bank, 1992; UNDP, 1993). The major principles, pointed out, are centrality of people, people's knowledge and institutions and increased access to information. As a principle, participatory approach must emphasise on involvement of women and other categories of people mentioned in the earlier section dealing with 'who participates'. However, these principles should not be treated as dictum.

(a) **The centrality of people**
People are central to participation development. Participation development intervention must be based on the needs of the people as identified by them, their analysis of issues and their decisions. It also implies an implicit faith that people, irrespective of their condition of poverty and oppression, can progressively transform their environment with the help of, but not dominated by, external agents. In essence, participatory development demands that common and subaltern populace should move from being objects to becoming subjects of development project and programmes. Any effort to promote popular participation should strengthen local capacity and mobilise local resources.

(b) **Local Knowledge and resources**
A major corollary to the people - oriented participatory development is the principles that people’s knowledge or local knowledge should be given primacy in development action. Attempt to undermine people’s knowledge will never create a condition in which the target people can associate themselves with the project.

(c) **People including women and other marginalized categories**
A third fundamental principle of participatory development emphasises the marginalised categories including women as equal partner in the process of development. This principle is, to a large extent, a reaction to a dominant feature of other development strategies which, for so long, have largely directed at dominant categories in the society. Participatory development practice should emphasise upon women’s participation as the equal partner in the development and as equal right holder in terms of existing control over their social economic and political life.

Besides these three broad principles, there are other specific principles which are related to specific projects and programmes directed at specific social groups, communities and categories. As far as the project is concerned, it should have clear objective ensuring distributive justice and continuing benefits to the people.
The above delineation makes it clear as to how complex and elusive is the very concept of participation and its practice is. However, participation cannot be regarded simply as some kind of physical or tangible input into a development project. It is much more than that. It has much wider connotation and implications. Furthermore, participation occurs within social, cultural, political and economic milieu, which in a great way, influence the nature and form of participation. This further clarifies that simply to proclaim a commitment to participation will not ensure its unchallenged practice.

Conclusions:

Conceptually participation in development process is a complex phenomenon and cannot be presented in universally acceptable terms. Analyses of participation, therefore, throw up a whole range of issues and questions which are crucial to conceptualisation and practice of participation. Any effort for effective popular participation has to take the nature of social, cultural, economic and political context, type of social group and collectivity, and the incentive structure, into cognisance. Participation may proceed at different speed for different countries and regions, and its form and extent may vary from one stage of development to another.

In the changing global and situations, popular participation as a strategy of development assumes immense importance. New social tensions and conflicts are proliferating at the grass roots all over the world challenging the nature and direction of systemic forces which have been marginalising and disempowering a large section of people including women. Persistent struggles are visible for empowerment, for control over resources, ideology and information. What is crucial at this point, is to comprehend this collective urge, aspirations and action for greater participation of the common people in every sphere of life and control over the forces that shape their lives. It cannot be refuted that it is not possible to undermine this concerted human endeavor for empowerment which is a natural phenomenon?

The most important task, today, is to probe, whether popular participation has any causal connection with empowerment; whether participation has any meaningful results for the marginalised populace? ; Whether participation has to be an essential component of any development process? What are the preconditions for participation? The probing has to be done in every context in all countries and various levels. This will enable the planners and development practitioners to formulate an effective strategy for participatory development.
SUGGESTED READINGS

NIRD, Hyderabad (India)

Zed Books Ltd. London


© 1996 PRIA. The text may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided credit is given to PRIA. To obtain permission for uses beyond those outlined in the Creative Commons license, please contact PRIA Library at library@pria.org. Please use the following citation:

Participatory Research in Asia
42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi-110062
Ph:+91-011-29960931/32/33
Web: www.pria.org