

People's Participation in Development Projects

A critical review of current theory and practice

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Author's preface

The development community has entered an age concerned with participation. Emerging as a supposed alternative paradigm of development intervention in the late 1970s, the concept of participation both in strength and was widely taking up in the 1980s. Now somewhat remarkably it seems to be moving into an even higher gear in the 1990s. Participation seems to reach those corners of the development process which other concepts have failed to reach. The literature on 'participation in development' or 'participatory development' as it erroneously come to be called by some, is extensive. Participation sits at ease in all the major development sectors - agriculture, health and education, for example - and it would not be a total exaggeration to say that hardly a thought or an action in contemporary development practice has not been touched by its influence. Currently, we have participation in everything: planning, research, monitoring and evaluation, training, management and so on. The impression is one of widespread universal participation in development but the reality is somewhat different.

in light of the above it is impossible to produce one single text on the subject of participation which would completely satisfy even a substantial minority of the readership. participation is such an all-embracing concept which appears to have been taken up in one form or another by almost every kind of actor in the development process, that the potential for debate and disagreement is endless. This occasional paper is no exception.

The essential purpose of this paper is to try to pull together into one single text the many strands of interpretation and practice of participation over the past decade or so and to see where we might be with this concept at the moment. the approach is to try to identify what have been the main lines of thinking and the more concrete elements in the practice, across the sectors and to explain them. Some will ask for more detail but that cannot be done within this text otherwise it would go into volumes. The intention is to produce a relatively short summary of where we are today in terms of participation, which the reader can delve into in more detail if he or she wishes. The paper is not directed at any particular audience - government, international donor agencies or NGOs for example - but is a text which readers from any such institutions could use.

The material in the paper is drawn from literature gathered during two main periods of research: (i) research undertaken at different times in the late 1980s and early 1990s for institutions such as WHO, FAO, and ILO and (ii) research with the same institutions and with a range of European NGOs in preparation of a book entitled *Projects with People* which was published by ILO in 1991. It will be impossible for those who work with the concept of participation to have access to the wide range of literature consulted. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to make all of this available in a briefer form in one single text so that the reader can appreciate the many conceptual and practical dimensions of participation over the last decade or so.

It will be interesting to see whether participation makes it into the next century with the same vigour for life which it appears to have today.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. INTERPRETING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Participation as Collaboration

Participation as Specific Targeting of Project Benefits

Participation as Organization

Participation as Empowerment

Participation & Poverty

The Benefits of People's Participation

People's Participation in National Development

NGOs and Participation

2. IMPLEMENTING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

People's Organization - Cooperatives

Rural Workers' Organizations
Womens' Organizations

Agricultural Development

Resource Conservation

Forestry

Irrigation

Comment

3. IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED IN PROMOTING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

4. FUTURE AGENDA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

A refocusing of development strategies in the mid 1970s led to the emergence of people's participation as a central concern, and to an increasing recognition of the need for development strategies which were not primarily capital-centred, but seeking to involve people more directly in development processes. Initially these strategies laid emphasis on the notion of human resource development as an important adjunct to existing economic and capital-centred methods. In the 1980s, however, the interpretation broadened into a more general argument for wider people's participation in national development. The concern within the development community to promote effective people's participation was motivated by the wish to improve the distribution of the benefits of development; to devise more effective ways of reaching the lowest income groups and to re-emphasise development as a process concerning people. In the 1990s people's participation has strengthened into a well-established principle of development which has received support from Governments, International Development Agencies and Non Government Organisations (NGOs), and has been implemented across the sectors in many different countries.

More recently, this commitment to strengthen people's participation within the framework of development programmes and projects has taken place in the context of the increasing democratisation of political processes in many parts of the world. The opening up of political systems in Eastern Europe and in several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America has begun to unleash the energies of whole populations who had previously been excluded from direct involvement in political and development processes. While inequalities and imbalances in access to available social and economic services, to decision-making, and to resources for development continue to exist, a ground-swell of popular forces has begun to instigate changes for wider political involvement, greater bureaucratic accountability and more equitable access to national resources and decision-making processes. It is within this context that pressure has built up over the past decade. Furthermore, the UNDP (1990 - 93) Human Development Reports are the latest evidence of concern to widen people's choices, and to improve income and employment opportunities and people's health and education.

In the decade since the notion of participation became so dominant in the literature, there have always been two broadly different schools of thought:

- * One school saw "participation" as the key to the inclusion of human resources in development efforts; previously, development planners had overlooked the contributions that people could make and the skills that they could bring to development projects. If, therefore, one could incorporate the human element in such projects and persuade people to participate in them, then there would be a stronger chance that these projects would be successful.
- * The other school saw this "participation" in a very different light - as more linked to tackling the structural causes of people's poverty, rather than as yet another input into a development project. People are poor because they are excluded and have little influence upon the forces which affect their livelihoods. Participation is part of the process whereby such people seek to have some influence and to gain access to the resources which would help them sustain and improve their living standards.

Towards the end of the 1980s and certainly in the early 1990s, the dominant trend has become one built around the notion of **'participatory development'**. Whether this is the same as 'participation in development' is an issue to be debated. Major development agencies like FAO (Van Heck, 1990), UNICEF (1991) and the World Bank (1992 and 1994) have all latched on to the concept of 'participatory development' and have begun to see it as the antidote to the woes which befall their development programmes. The contrast between the above texts and that of Rahman (1993), who continues to provide incisive arguments for the importance of the very concept of 'participation' itself, is illustrative of this debate. Intriguingly Burkey's (1993) 'guide' to Participatory Rural Development is the first substantial piece of work which explains how NGOs are currently beginning to put the concept into practice.

After some fifteen years or so, 'participation' has achieved Heinekenesque status in that it seems to be able to reach parts of the development process that other concepts never reached. The list is long: participatory development, participatory evaluation, participatory planning, participatory research, participatory monitoring, participatory assessment and 'participation' in a whole range of sectors - forestry, irrigation, health and so on. Can we feel confident that this easy and widespread use of the term reflects a fundamental shift in thinking and practice?

1. **INTERPRETING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

In its broadest sense people's participation is a political process in which previously excluded classes or groups seek to become involved, have a voice in and generally gain access to the benefits of economic and social development. The seminal work of Freire (1972) and later studies by Elliot (1976), Roling (1978), Crouch and Chamala (1979) and Pearse (1980), for example, showed how, in many parts of the world, the majority of people had been excluded from the benefits of socio-economic development, and argued for strategies to redress this situation. Subsequent studies by Haque et.al. (1977) Devitt (1980), Chambers (1981), Korten and Alfonso (1981) FAO (1986) and the World Bank (1992) laid the basis for poverty-focused strategies aimed specifically at redressing the imbalances in development.

During the 1980s the concept of people's participation came to influence a broad spectrum of development activities - resource conservation, agricultural extension, forestry development and health, for example - and to bring about a re-examination of existing assumptions and practice.

People's participation in development, however, is a complex concept which defies any simple definition. In essence participation is concerned with a broad commitment to redress the imbalances of development activities, and to provide the conditions in which people can take an active role in the development process. In practice people's participation has been interpreted in a number of different ways. These interpretations range from the narrow scope of development programmes in which the participation is often passive and consultative, to, at the other extreme, the broad and active participation of people in all aspects of socio-economic development.

The interpretation of people's participation as agreed, for example, at the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) in 1979 provided a broad framework which has influenced the activities and thinking of many development agencies:

*"Participation by the people in the institutions and systems which govern their lives is a basic human right and also essential for realignment of **political power** in favour of disadvantaged groups and for social and economic development. Rural development strategies can realise their full potential only through the motivation, active involvement and organisation at the grass-roots level of rural people, with special emphasis on the least advantaged, in conceptualising and designing policies and programmes and in creating administrative, social and economic institutions, including co-operative and other voluntary forms of organisation for implementing and evaluating them."*

The widespread experience both of research into and in the practice of people's participation in the past decade has revealed a number of different interpretations of the concept. Inevitably interpretations of participation reflect both the ideological position of those initiating the participation process and also the content of that process. In a broad sense, the following distinct interpretations of people's participation in development have been identified in the practice of the past decade:

1.1 **Participation as Collaboration**

Urban and rural people in less developed countries voluntarily, or as a result of some persuasion or incentive, agree to collaborate with an externally-determined development project, often by contributing their labour and other resources in return for some perceived expected benefit. People's participation is thus **sponsored** by an external agency, be it Government or some other form of development organisation, and in many instances this participation is programmed as part of project **input**. In nation-wide health, literacy, resource conservation or agricultural production programmes, for example, people's collaboration will be sought as a means to ensure the success of the programme. While rural people may participate in the sense of collaborating with the programme, they rarely have any direct involvement in programme design, control or management so it could be argued that participation as collaboration is the interpretation which dominates much of the practice of current development programmes and projects.

1.2 Participation as Specific Targeting of Project Benefits

Increasingly in the past decade or so, people's participation has come to be seen in terms of including previously excluded groups, such as small farmers, the landless or the urban poor, by targeting **benefits** directly at them. As a result, the term '**project beneficiaries**' was coined and entered the development vocabulary. The key ingredients of this kind of participatory development are the **project**, the **external agency**, **inputs**, **beneficiaries** and **economic impact analysis**. As a reaction, however, to a rather crude participation equal benefits interpretation, emphasis is often put on people's direct involvement in different stages of project practice. Paul (1987) summarises this interpretation when, he defines community participation as 'an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receiving a share of the project benefits'. While clearly many development projects seek to put Paul's interpretation into practice, the extent to which people effectively influence the direction and execution of development projects not only varies considerably but is debatable.

It was Paul's (1987) work on behalf of the World Bank which introduced the development 'community' to the concept of 'beneficiaries'; and it is remarkable that so many development agencies, including NGOs, espoused it so uncritically. More recently, however, the vocabulary has changed again and since 1992 the term "**stakeholders**" has emerged for participatory development projects. The term is literally built around the notion of 'having a stake in something' and the resulting commitment and involvement which this should involve. Stakeholders are defined as 'those parties who either affect or are affected by the Bank's actions and policies' and are divided into three different categories:

- * **Borrowing Stakeholders:** Governments borrowing funds from the Bank
- * **Primary Stakeholders:** Those expected to benefit from or to be adversely affected by Bank-supported operations, particularly the poor and the marginalized.
- * **Secondary Stakeholders:** Those with technical expertise and public interest in Bank-supported policies and programmes, as well as those with links to primary stakeholders. For example, NGOs, intermediary organisations and technical and professional bodies. (World Bank, 1994)

Explanations for this change of terminology centre largely on the idea of people having a tangible and concrete 'stake' in a development project, as opposed to merely waiting at the end of the conveyor belt for the supposed benefits. These are very early days and this new concept has yet to be widely used. The notion of 'stakeholders' would seem to imply a more active involvement on the part of those people directly involved in or affected by a development project, as opposed to being passive beneficiaries of whatever results the project might achieve. "Stakeholders analysis" is the first step in this new approach, an analysis which should construct a matrix of the different groups who will have some kind of relationship with the development project. It will be intriguing to see how the concept of 'stakeholder' is translated to these different groups and what their reactions might be!

1.3 Participation as Organisation

It has long been argued in development practice that most people, and particularly rural people, cannot participate in development activities since they lack an organisational basis for participation. Few would disagree that organisation is fundamental to a process of people's participation, but there is disagreement on the nature and evolution of the organisation. In terms of participation, the distinction lies in the origin of the organisation; either such organisations are externally conceived and introduced into rural areas (co-operatives, farmers' associations or irrigation management committees, for example), or else they emerge and take structure themselves as a result of a process of participation. The more usual practice is the former and vigorous efforts have been made to ensure, for example, that co-operatives or farmers' associations authentic vehicles of popular participation. While undoubtedly many do 'participate', and this participation takes on both an economic and a political form, such externally conceived formal organisations have not achieved a sustained mass appeal. While the relationship between 'participation' and 'organization' remains fundamental, the interesting trend is the recognition of successful 'organization' as an internal, endogenous process fashioned by the people themselves and not one that has been dumped on people by an external agency.

1.4 Participation as Empowerment

Increasingly in the past decade participation as an exercise in of empowering people has gained wide public support and the term has been accepted into development vocabulary. As we have seen, WCARRD in 1979 emphasised the transfer of power as implicit in people's participation. Similarly in the 1980s a major UNRISD study took as its working definition of participation the empowering of excluded groups in order to increase their access to, and control over the resources of development. In 1990 an ECA conference on popular participation in Africa adopted the 'African Charter for Popular Participation' which stressed empowering, and called for an opening-up of political processes to accommodate freedom of opinions, and tolerance for rural people and their organisations. **Empowering**, however, is a term difficult to define and gives rise to different interpretations. Some see empowering as the development of skills and abilities to enable people to manage better, have a say in, or negotiate with existing development delivery systems. Others see it as more fundamentally political, and concerned with enabling people to decide upon and to take the actions which they believe are essential to their own development. While 'empowering' has appeared to slip easily into the vocabulary of a broad spectrum of

development practice, the recognition of its link with the taking of **action** is not always understood. Also there are doubts whether this practice fully understands the implicit meaning of the term.

In a sense the term 'empowering' has come to be very loosely used to describe any development project, process or activity which might have some impact upon people's abilities to relate to different political and administrative systems; to skills training, management techniques, organisational abilities and so on. Many development projects talk of 'empowering' in the sense of specifically enabling people to cope more effectively with and play a part in the every-day administrative and bureaucratic demands of a development projects' life. On the other hand, Friedman's (1992) study examines the notion of 'empowerment', in terms of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' and the central importance of 'power' in a political sense, not merely limited to a particular development activity.

More generally the seminal work by Dreze and Sen (1990) suggested that people's participation can have a powerful positive role in both collaborate and adversarial ways vis a vis national development policy. The collaboration of local people and the contribution of their resources, knowledge and skills are essential ingredients of many Government development programmes, in areas like land reform, crop production, literacy drives and public health campaigns. On the other hand, and in order to bring about changes and cause Government to act appropriately, local people may assume a more adversarial role and both bring pressure to bear on and to undertake action against Government policy and decisions. Similarly there is the distinction that can be drawn between participation as a **means** or as an **end**. Participation as a means illustrates the concept of participation as collaboration and is seen as the way in which Governments can call upon local people's labour, knowledge and skills in the implementation of rural development policy. Participation as an end, on the other hand, is a broader concept and more linked to breaking down existing barriers and constraints - political, social and psychological - to people's participation. Ditcher (1992) draws the same distinction but makes the comparison between participation as an '**element**' in development as opposed to participation as the **basis** for development. This comparison appears perhaps to have been at the heart of the 'stakeholder' concept since Dichter argued that, where participation is seen merely as an element, then people do not see themselves as having a direct 'stake' and the project will fail.

People's participation, therefore, cannot be described in one single, universal definition. In terms of development, people's participation has come to represent a major new influence on thinking and practice which takes on different forms and follows different directions in different contexts. It means, however, more than merely participating in development initiatives designed by others or consuming the benefits of development programmes and projects. People's participation is an active process of direct involvement in the political structures which govern national life, in the decision-making and implementation procedures of development programmes and projects and, most importantly, in the taking of action by people to confront and tackle the issues which affect their livelihoods in a whole range of activities and in many different context.

Finally in examining the concept, it is crucial to disaggregate in economic and political terms, the term 'people'. The 'people' is not a homogeneous entity, and in any society there will be divisions related to class, ownership, occupation, and also gender, community and culture. Rural people, for example, do not constitute a homogeneous body, and an examination of the economic and political structure of most rural areas will distinguish between, in broad terms, two recognisable groups. (i) elite and more powerful groups, who will exercise substantial control over policy

formulation, over important resources like land and who usually reap the advantages of development interventions; and (ii) the broad mass of excluded, disadvantaged people, commonly referred to as the rural poor, who exert little influence on the existing political structure, have only limited access to resources for development, and who gain little advantage from development interventions. The 'rural poor', however, do not constitute a universally recognisable group, and the issue of who are the 'rural poor' will be both specific to each particular context, and even subject to seasonal fluctuations. People's participation in development, therefore, refers to the process of broadening access to development initiatives, and to efforts to extend the benefits of national development policies to the previously excluded broad mass of the rural poor.

1.5 Participation and Poverty

The concept of people's participation emerged in the 1980s within the context of increasing concern for the persistent (rural) poverty still found in different parts of the world. While, with regional variations, there was an overall improvement in the incidence of rural poverty, from 52.69% of the rural population in 1980 to 48.54% in 1987, the total numbers have increased alarmingly. More significantly in the early 1990s the spectre of 'poverty' has returned to the development agenda. The World Bank's (1990) study clearly showed that despite major commitments dating back to the 1970s, poverty in numerical terms was on the increase. In 1993 the Inter-American Development Bank openly put 'poverty' back on the agenda for the Americas; and the spectre has scarcely been lifted from the African Continent. Increasingly it has been argued that, while poverty manifests itself in low income levels, high infant mortality rates and under-nutrition, the deciding factor is the **powerlessness** of the poor vis-a-vis economic and political forces which shape their livelihoods. Indeed the WCARRD statement (1979) encapsulates the two main lines of argument which link inextricably rural poverty with people's participation. There is both the need for a realignment of **political power** in rural areas in favour of the rural poor, as well as for radically different **strategies of rural development** intervention in order to effectively bring the poor within the processes of rural development thereby increasing their opportunities and access to development resources. For Dreze and Sen (1990) the tackling of rural poverty is linked to the notion of **positive freedom**, that is the enlarging and enriching of opportunities available to the rural poor. People's participation lies at the core of developing this positive freedom.

The data presented above confirm the endemic nature of rural poverty, particularly in Asia where almost two thirds of the world's rural poor are found. They often go hungry, are frequently undernourished, and usually have no reliable access to services such as health, education and sanitation which could improve their lives. Historically, in terms of the benefits of rural development, the poor have been largely excluded. While universal commitment to the participation of the rural poor in development is increasing, the overall situation is less than favourable. The ILO, for example, has shown that a majority of the world's rural workers remain unorganised and unprotected and thus effectively excluded from any active role in development. The second WCARRD progress report noted that the majority of the rural poor continue to have inadequate influence on or participation in rural development. A graphic illustration is provided in an assessment of aid effectiveness in India. Despite a respectable growth rate, self-sufficiency in food, and official policy commitments to the eradication of poverty, India has not been able to reduce the absolute or relative number of rural people living in poverty. A study argued that the rural poor's lack of organisation and their inability to gain access to existing benefits or to tilt decisions in their favour lay at the heart of India's rural poverty. The conclusion is surely relevant beyond India.

In terms of (rural) poverty, therefore, the requirements are policies which not only encourage political engagement and debate, but which also provide opportunities for the poor to participate in the development and growth occurring in their areas. Such policies fall into two major categories: specific policies designed to improve the livelihoods of the poor by increasing their access to land, credit, public infrastructure and services; and policies which encourage bureaucratic decentralisation, the strengthening of local institutions, and improvement of the skills and capacities of the rural poor. Such policies argue that rural poverty will continue in unacceptable proportions unless the mass of rural people are effectively brought within not only the mainstream of development activities, but also, more broadly, into national political life.

Across the wide range of UN, Bilateral and Non-Government Agencies the evidence is of widespread commitment to promoting people's participation as a key principle in their development activities. Several recent studies confirm the increasing interest of the World Bank, for example, in building effective people's participation into projects it supports. Within the U.N system agencies such as the FAO, ILO, WHO, UNICEF and UNDP have already begun to promote actively people's participation, while UNIFEM is particularly concerned to promote greater women's involvement. On the other hand NGOs across the board, both national and international, have been promoting people's participation since the late 1970s (Oakley, 1991). Recent surveys confirm the central position that it has come to hold in the development strategies adopted by many development agencies and the ways in which these agencies are seeking to implement this complex process. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that decades of established development practice have been turned around and that a participatory approach is now the norm. For political and economic reasons, many Governments and Development Agencies are beginning to recognise the importance of popular participation and to concede to pressure for its more widespread implementation. But there is still a long way to go before participation becomes a fundamental principle of development strategy across the board.

Interestingly, there is evidence of a link between broad based people's participation in political and economic structures and national levels of economic growth and development. Research undertaken by Dasgupta (1990), for example, produced empirical evidence indicating a direct relationship between increases in gross national income per capita and levels of national political rights and involvement. Political rights and the freedom to participate in national political processes can have a profound effect upon national development performance by unleashing people's skills and energies and by providing more choices and opportunities for the individual to be productive and creative (Clayton 1994). Pluralist systems which provide space for adversarial politics can be critical in forcing Governments to recognise the disadvantages of 'exclusion' and to agree upon appropriate action. The **African Charter for Popular Participation** (1991), for example, is a reflection of this thinking, and a call to established political systems to concede greater freedom to people and to afford them more opportunities to make a direct contribution to national development. The opportunities for political pluralism and public pressure in many African countries may, at the moment, be somewhat limited but the long term consequences of increasing public dissatisfaction should not be underestimated. Recent studies by Rhaman (1993) in an Asian context and Friedmann (1992) in Latin America similarly examine the notion of 'participation' in the wider political context and suggest the inevitable ground-swell of discontent, if movements from below continue to be frustrated.

1.6 *The Benefits of People's Participation*

Effective people's participation inevitably challenges both Governments and vested interest groups, who feel that their traditional power base could be undermined by the promotion of popular involvement. Furthermore there may be grounds for some scepticism as to the efficacy of people's participation and also some concern that participation might give rise to expectations that cannot be fulfilled. More generally, however, arguments in favour of promoting greater participation in development appear both convincing and realistic. Issues such as participation as a basic right, the importance of tapping local indigenous knowledge, skills and practices and building them into development programmes, and a general feeling of the need for a more 'bottom-up' approach to development have all been raised in favour. In a more general sense we have seen, in studies by Dasgupta (1990), the evidence of a link between broad popular political participation and national economic and social development programmes and projects. So it is generally felt that there would be several benefits resulting from moves in this direction (Oakley, 1991):

Efficiency: Participation implies a greater chance that resources available to development projects will be used more efficiently. Participation can, for example, help minimise misunderstanding or possible disagreements, and thus the time and energy, often spent by professional staff explaining or convincing people of a project's benefits, can be reduced. Participation is also cost-effective since, if people are taking responsibility for a project, then fewer expensive outside resources will be required and highly paid professional staff will not get tied down in the detail of project administration. It, therefore, allows for more efficient use of the resources available to a project. There is, however, another side to the coin: arguments to justify the resource efficiency of participation in development projects can be met with accusations that this cost-effectiveness often results in governments and agencies making fewer funds available for development work, transferring the burden of project costs on to local people in effect.

Effectiveness: Participation will also make projects more effective as instruments of development. Projects are invariably external mechanisms which are supposed to benefit the people of a particular area. Participation which allows these people to have a voice in determining objectives, to support project administration and to make their local knowledge, skills and resources available must result in more effective projects. A major reason why many projects have not been effective in achieving objectives in the past is because local people were not involved. Effectiveness equals the successful realisation of objectives, and participation can help to ensure this.

Self-reliance: This all-embracing term covers a wide range of benefits which participation can bring. Participation helps to break the mentality of dependence which characterises much development work and, instead it promotes self-awareness and confidence, making people examine their problems and to think positively about solutions. Participation is concerned with human development and increases people's sense of control over issues which affect their lives, helps them learn how to plan and implement and, on a broader front, prepares them for involvement at regional or even national level. In essence, participation is a "good thing" in that it breaks people's isolation and lays the groundwork for them to have not only a more substantial influence on development, but also a greater independence and control over their lives.

Coverage: Most government programmes and many agency-directed or supported development projects reach only a limited, and usually privileged, number of people. In many

southern countries delivery services have contact with only a fraction of the population. Participation will extend this coverage, bringing more people within the direct influence of development activities, which, in turn could broaden the mass appeal of such services.

Sustainability: Experience suggests that externally-motivated development projects frequently fail to sustain themselves, once the initial level of project support or inputs either diminishes or is withdrawn. Participation is seen as the antidote to this situation in that it can ensure that local people maintain the project's dynamic. Arguments which link sustainability with participation are largely economic ("the maintenance of an acceptable flow of benefits from the project's investment after its completion"), but others touch on issues of project ownership, political support and the maintenance of delivery systems. On a more general level, sustainability refers to continuity and sees participation as fundamental to a self-sustaining momentum of development in a particular area.

In a general sense, people themselves benefit from greater access to and involvement in efforts to promote national development. They can assume more positive attitudes, learn and develop new skills and take on more responsibility for development initiatives. On the other hand, however, there could be a downside associated with more widespread popular participation. Wider political debate could bring more drawn out decision-making processes and the resources needed for skills training, for example, may not be forthcoming. There is a school of thought which believes that increased people's participation will involve both **costs** and **risks** which may throw development projects into jeopardy. Money and time could be wasted in the lengthy process of considering local people's point of view and expectations might be raised which would then prove impossible to fulfil. The counter-argument stresses that the positive benefits of people's participation will outweigh fears of costs and risks as a more active, better trained and politically responsible people becomes involved in national development.

1.7 People's Participation in National Development

Over the past decade the policies and programmes of many Governments, particularly in developing countries, have begun, under pressure, to recognise the importance of people's participation. There are several reasons for this progress. First, in many countries democratic pressures resulting in internal political change have led to calls for greater participation. Political liberalisation and an increasing recognition of the pluralist nature of many nations have encouraged the emergence of people's organisations and movements and their demands from below for more popular involvement in national politics. On issues of structural adjustment in national economic policy, countries like Ghana, Cameroon and Bolivia, for example, have pursued policies of consultation and have promoted of popular understanding of the policies involved. Second, continual economic difficulties have convinced many countries, particularly in Africa, of the need to bring about more effective popular participation as a means of mobilising resources for development in rural areas. Third, Governments have come to accept that the effective management of a country's natural resource base requires the active participation of the people, if these resources are not to be uncontrollably exploited and degraded. Although a recent World Bank (1990) study noted that the rhetoric of national policy on participation was still far ahead of

practice, it concluded that participation was becoming increasingly prominent in national policy agendas and that the recent spread of democratic pressures could only reinforce this trend.

Overall, however, the situation is still inconclusive. While resources, both technical and financial, have been made available by development agencies across a broad spectrum of development activities, it would appear that popular participation has not yet become a fully operational and unambiguous element in national development strategies. There is still little evidence to support the argument that popular participation is now a fundamental and active component of rural development strategies in developing countries. Certainly the notion of popular participation has entered the **language** of national development policy, but there is less clear evidence that it has consolidated its position. Such consolidation would be a function of two interlinked processes of change: the opening up of national political systems, which encourage broad-based people's participation, and a radical reorientation of development programme and project practice. While there are now some examples of the latter across the development agency spectrum, there are few signs yet of an emerging trend to institutionalise the notion of popular participation into national development strategy.

1.8 NGOs and Participation

Inevitably in the more general debate, the role of NGOs is raised. Do NGOs intrinsically seek to promote people's participation? If so, how good are NGOs at doing this? Do NGOs have a better track record than other development agencies in promoting people's participation? and so on. The answers to such questions could be quite straightforward, but the caveats are many! With such a broad range of agencies operating under the banner of NGO in so many different contexts with an equally broad range of approaches - which NGOs can typify the NGO community? But we do speak of "NGOs in Development" and several studies have spanned the NGO universe and made statements about their effectiveness and approach to development. Cernea (1989), Clarke (1991), Carroll (1992) Riddell and Robinson (1993) have all examined the notion of NGOs and Development and have sought to construct some kind of balance sheet of the supposed "advantages" and "disadvantages" of NGOs as development agencies. Such analyses inevitably touch upon "approach" and "relations" at the project level, and have helped to build up a body of opinion and evidence that, at this level, NGOs generally are relatively sensitive towards, and successful at, promoting people's participation. In the 1970s and 1980s NGOs played a major role in moves to develop alternative paradigms of project intervention. They are more "grassroots" in their focus than most other development agencies, and their philosophies easily espouse people-centred development approaches. All solid evidence that, by their very nature, NGOs are natural promoters of people's participation.

Yet to date **substantial** evidence to support the sorts of claims noted above about the positive role played by NGOs is still lacking. In part this is due to a confusion concerning to what level of NGO we are referring: **Northern "Donor" NGO, Southern Intermediary NGO or Grassroots Level Popular Organisation**. It is also due to the paucity of substantive, empirical research based upon the work of NGOs in the field. Carroll's (1992) seminal work on intermediary NGOs suggests that it is in fact the grassroots level organisation which are more "effective" in promoting participation. Farrington and Bebbington's (1993) research confirms on the other hand, a "strong feeling" among intermediary NGOs that they are both more efficient and have been more effective in promoting people's participation in development projects at the grassroots level. More recently, however, Carroll (1994) casts doubt upon the supposed "extraordinary participatory

qualities "of intermediary NGOs in terms of promoting the participation of their project beneficiaries. Where NGOs essentially supply services, there is little effective participation; where they seek to promote "capacity-building", the evidence is more favourable and participation is equated with "empowerment". Carroll (1994) summarises his findings by suggesting a number of indicators that should be looked for when assessing the "participatory qualities" of NGOs:

- Participation is an institutional objective of the NGO.
- Field presence (proportion of staff in provincial or district centres as against metropolitan areas).
- Staff incentives and training which support participation.
- Iterative planning in consultation with local communities.
- Bottom-up accountability mechanisms.
- Contribution of cash, labour, raw material or local facilities by local communities which makes the communities clients of the intermediary.
- Horizontal and vertical linkages to other institutions.
- The NGO has prior experience in the target community and is aware of local conditions.
- The community/beneficiaries have a positive perception of the NGO.
- The NGO and its personnel have keen understanding of and sensitivity to issues concerning women and other marginalized groups.
- The philosophy of the NGO on community participation is reflected in other work it has undertaken.

The above is a very useful guide in this on-going debate. Essentially Carroll is arguing that there is a direct link between field presence and operational structure and the ability of an NGO to promote people's participation. He also argues that the notion of participation has not been limited to the public discourse of the NGO but that it has been internalised in several facets of its institutional practice, for example, training, planning and processes of accountability. While the evidence upon which Carroll draws is largely from intermediary Southern NGOs, it is not impossible to apply the same kind of criteria in assessing the performance of Northern NGOs.

Essentially the framework of Northern NGOs @@@@ Southern NGOs @@@@ Project Partners makes it impossible to formulate any universal assessment in universal terms of the current state of play of NGOs and people's participation. The overall framework needs to be split into its component parts which, while inter-related, represent the different levels at which people's participation could be understood. In this respect Carroll's (1994) indicators could be applied at these different levels. At the Northern NGO level the issue takes on a particular focus; the question will be largely concerned with the importance attached to promoting people's participation and the amount of support, which is given in terms of funding. At the Southern NGO level the issue

becomes more critical, in the sense that the approach and actions of the NGO locally can determine the promotion, or otherwise, of people's participation. At the project level the very nature of the project will starkly portray the issue to be addressed; the context, mechanisms and outcomes of the project will be direct evidence of the nature and level of participation. At the Northern and Southern NGO level there is the additional assertion that, if "participation" is not a clear organisational characteristic, then it will be almost impossible for such non-participatory organisations themselves to seek to promote participatory development. Then it is argued that such pre-conditions like a capacity to adapt, transparency in policy and decision making and the existence of an organisational culture of participation will be critical in creating an institutional climate favourable to promoting people's participation.

A conclusion, based more on gut-feeling than hard evidence, would suggest that NGOs are usually "better" at promoting people's participation than Governments or the large Multi-national Development Agencies. The invariably small size of the majority of NGOs, their close involvement at the project level, the more general "people-centred" focus of their development work, and their project-level methodologies, all combine to give credence to this point of view. The strong point in this extended chain of NGO relationships is at the project level; the weak point is that much of the practice at this level is not formally recorded and it is thus not more generally available as evidence of NGOs' work. We need this hard evidence at the project level of participation in problem identification, project-design, planning, implementation and evaluation to be convinced that NGOs at this level are more "participatory". We also need evidence that all of this can be sustained, that NGOs at this level have set their sights beyond simply the promotion of participation in project activities but that they are also looking towards the wider arena of building the capacity of local level structures and building the institutional links necessary for effective participation at a more overall policy and decision-making level.

2. **IMPLEMENTING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

2.1 *People's Organisations*

It is widely argued that organisations have a fundamental role to play in providing the means whereby people can effectively participate in development activities. The lack of effective structures for people's participation has been seen as a major constraint upon more widespread development. Too many urban and rural people have no links with development activities and no means of forging such links. The promotion of a whole range of organisations at the grass roots level has gone a long way to filling this vacuum. There are two main reasons why rural organisations are important: they facilitate access for the rural poor to available services and inputs for rural development, and they provide the structure through which people can influence the direction and implementation of development. Recent World Bank Studies (1988) confirm the link between grassroots organisations and effective people's participation, and similarly the crucial importance of such organisations in sustainable development. Participatory organisations of the rural poor have emerged as key elements in strategies for effective and sustainable rural development. There is a wide diversity of rural organisations currently functioning in different parts of the world. Among the more formal types of rural organisations there are co-operatives, rural workers' organisations, village, peasant or farmer associations, trade unions, credit unions, and women's groups. Equally in many countries there are informal, local self-help groups which also provide an organisational base for participation. While the purpose of such organisations is fundamentally to achieve certain benefits for their members via their own collective action, Governments have often sought to use them for broader development activities and also for social mobilisation in favour of Government programmes. A continual struggle is waged between the **autonomy** of such organisations on the one hand, and Government **control** on the other. Where such organisations federate at the national and international levels, the balance in favour of local autonomy becomes stronger.

2.1.1 *Co-operatives*

The most common form of rural producer organisation is the co-operative which throughout the developing world continues to play a significant role in rural development, even though many are still at an early stage of development and operate in difficult socio-economic circumstances. In Africa co-operatives in Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana and Togo, for example, have had some success in stimulating oil palm production and widening the use of new farm equipment. In Latin America, Brazilian agricultural marketing co-operatives are particularly strong; in 1985 Brazilian co-operatives marketed 83% of wheat and 68% of milk produced in the country; in Colombia in 1985 small farmer co-operatives marketed 35% of fresh milk and 6% of total coffee exports. In Asia, 97% of grain crops are marketed through co-operatives in Indonesia, 27% in India, and 15% in the Philippines. In terms of food security, therefore, co-operatives play an important role, particularly in Asia and Latin America. In command economies like Vietnam, Laos and Mozambique, for example, co-operatives have traditionally had a dominant economic role; recent changes in Vietnam, however, have seen the abolition of planning obligations on co-operatives and the permitting of greater production and marketing freedom. A UN (1989) review concluded that co-operatives are an integral part of rural development strategies in most developing countries. According to ICA statistics, some 53% of co-operatives in developing countries are in the rural agricultural sector and are the most widespread form of organisation available to rural people.

The UN review (1989) concluded that while co-operatives had become highly useful as an instrument to promote rural development, they were less effective in tackling the problem of the 'poorest of the poor'. In the absence, however, of reliable data or information to support such a contention, it remains unproven. This is not to argue that co-operatives cannot tackle the problems of the poorest, but that less formal, pre-co-operative groups or structures may be more appropriate. But after several decades of undisputed influence in rural development in the market sector, the performance of the co-operative, and particularly its usefulness as a vehicle to reach more widely the 'poorest of the poor' and involve them in development activities, has been brought into question. In the 1990s the co-operative movement appears to confront a number of issues:

- (i) The need to go 'back to basics' and to reaffirm simple co-operative principles; indeed this was the theme at the ICA Congress in 1992;
- (ii) The need to disassociate the co-operative movement from any image as a government tool, to renegotiate its relationship with Government and to assert basic principles of 'autonomy' and 'self-reliance'. Such a process of de-officialization is currently under way in countries like as Senegal, Niger and Ethiopia;
- (iii) To strengthen the role of rural co-operatives in national food security strategies, in particular, in ways which include the rural poor;
- (iv) At both national and international levels, to improve the data base available on rural co-operatives and their growth and effectiveness in rural development.

For the foreseeable future co-operatives of different types will continue to be a noticeable feature of the economic and political landscape of rural areas. Broad assessments are difficult, but a general conclusion must be that, while co-operatives have a clear and significant role in agricultural development in certain regions of the world, more generally they have not achieved the wider economic and political participation of rural people. Whether the possible 'reforms' outlined above will help to revise this trend remains to be seen. Despite their apparent egalitarian principles, co-operatives have spread in rural areas essentially as instruments of government agricultural development policy. In many respects they have served their purpose and brought tangible economic and politic benefits to some farmers. It is another matter, however, to anticipate a rejuvenated co-operative sector will broaden the base of farmer participation.

2.1.2 Rural Workers Organisations

Rural Workers' Organisations (RWOs) are important instruments of grass-roots participation in many parts of the world. RWOs, however, cover a broad area of organisations and it is important to distinguish between two main groupings. First there are organisations of rural wage earners who are more commonly found on plantations and in larger agricultural enterprises. Rural wage earners constitute a substantial part of the rural population, often between 20-40%. Their lives are invariably precarious; many seasonal, casual and even permanent rural wage earners

have no security of employment, little access to social security and are excluded from development activities. RWOs provide the means to tackle these problems and to bring rural workers within the ambit of national development. But in many countries the political commitment to strengthening RWOs is still lacking. Furthermore it is not uncommon for larger landowners to change to less labour intensive crops in order to avoid unionisation among rural workers.

Second, there is a range of organisations which represent the interests of such groups as small and marginal farmers, small-scale fishermen and the self-employed. In Latin America peasant unions have emerged as effective representative bodies which seek not only to improve the socio-economic conditions of their members, but also to exert political pressure where more fundamental changes are required. Unions of rural people in countries like India, Brazil and Bolivia have broadened their base and periodically formed social and political movements to exert pressure for change. More particularly the General Agricultural Workers Union (Ghana) and the Federacion Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (Ecuador) are examples of country-level unions which have been particularly effective in implementing programmes of rural development and exerting pressure for change.

Despite the pressure of such bodies as the Pan African Federation of African Trade Unions (PAFATU) and the increasing strength of National Federation of Peasant Unions in several Latin American countries, in many countries organisations of the rural poor continue to face the problem of the lack of political space. For example, ILO Regional Seminars between 1987-89 reported depressingly on the lack of recognition given to RWOs as a basic means of involving rural workers in development activities. However, there has been a greater unionisation of rural women, particularly in Africa and Latin America, and a move by unions not only to care for the welfare of their members, but to engage in more entrepreneurial and employment generating activities. In Asia, for example, RWOs like the Bangladesh Agricultural Workers Association, the Rural Labour Union in India and the Federation of Free Workers in the Philippines are undertaking a wide range of rural development activities. Furthermore, it would appear that organisations of the rural poor are becoming more sensitive to the potential of and more willing to engage in political pressure while at the same time building up their own technical expertise to promote development.

The clear issue which emerged from the activities of the broad range of workers' or peasant organisations in the 1980s was the direct relationship between their ability to represent their members' interests legitimately and effectively and the prevailing political climate. This was inevitable given the fact that many rural organisations take an essentially structural view of their members' disadvantages and are not prepared to assume the social welfare functions of the State. There will always be tension and a potential for conflict between such organisations and Government as long as the latter seek to dictate the rules of engagement in national development. But it is in such organisations that the basis for authentic people's participation lies and inevitably the dialogue between them and Government will continue with differing degrees of forcefulness.

2.1.3 Women's Organisations

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s women's organisations gained increasing importance as vehicles for action and activities to promote development for women. Working through local women's organisations, especially at the grassroots level, has proven to be one of the

most effective ways of reaching women and reinforcing their efforts to gain access to resources and to undertake viable economic activities. The credit for this success must be given to the women themselves who have found that by working together they can better overcome the severe disadvantages they face. The growing number and strength of women's organisations at all levels is a continuing expression of women's determination to benefit more fully from development.

Left out of formal structures dominated by men, women tend to form separate groups where they share compatible interests and goals with other women, and operate within a structure of greater equality than that found in mixed-gender groups. In general, their groups are highly independent of external agents or central institutions. They take many forms within and between regions and countries and include: (a) grass-roots organisations (b) organisations affiliated to a political party (c) worker-based organisations (d) groups and organisations set-up with external funding as part of a project (e) traditional, service-orientated women's organisations that are of long-standing in many countries (f) women's professional associations and (g) research organisations.

Several trends in women's organisations have been gathering momentum throughout the last decade. Some of the traditional service-orientated organisations have begun to shift from a social-welfare orientation to a development one and from a family-centred approach to a woman-centred one. There is also a growing tendency for informal grass-roots women's groups to institutionalise and develop more solid administrative and management structures as they grow in strength and size. Furthermore, more Governments and intergovernmental agencies are recognising the actual and potential role of women's groups and organisations in promoting agricultural and rural development.

A participatory approach would not deliberately promote women's and men's participation on a separate basis, but would see them as equal constituents. But such a principle is culturally specific and cannot be dogmatic. More generally the emerging approach seeks to support 'women's projects' with the tools and mechanisms to enable women, both practically and strategically, to improve their livelihoods. Women are seen as partners of and equal constituents in development activities, and the promotion of their greater involvement constitutes a major challenge to existing perceptions of how development projects should be set up and run.

2.2 *Agricultural Development*

Substantial efforts have been made in the past decade to reverse the dominant trend of top-down, technologically-led and professionally-dominated agricultural development programmes and to make them more participatory and responsive to farmers' needs. Three principal features emerged. First, the targeting of inputs and credit to the rural poor, the strengthening of agricultural delivery systems and the development of grass roots-based organisations to facilitate poor farmers' access. Second, the widespread adoption by many countries (India, Kenya, Peru and Thailand, for example) of the **Training and Visit System** of agricultural extension which was expected to revolutionise the access of small farmers to extension services (but whose essentially top-down delivery and targeting of better-off farmers have greatly reduced its usefulness as a participatory strategy). Third, a fundamental re-examination of the research-extension-farmer relationship and

the emergence of **farmer participatory research (FPA)**, with its emphasis upon farmers' knowledge and their direct involvement in the research process, as a major new element in agricultural development strategy.

Of these principal features, the more recent emergence of farmer participatory research with its respect for farmers' knowledge and potential for targeting the poor, reflects a more radical strategy of effective farmer participation, and stands in stark contrast to the more dominant delivery system approach. Chambers (1993) explains how increasingly during the 1980s agricultural professionals and field workers worked directly with small and resource-poor farmers to find solutions to their problems. All of these efforts lead to a re-examination of concepts and practice and the emergence of a new paradigm for agricultural research and extension: **farmers first**. This 'new' approach emphasises the need to change age-old practises of relating to rural people. It stresses the importance of deliberately facilitating farmers' participation, developing their capacities and undertaking appropriate research with their involvement, all within a context of fundamental shifts in professional understanding and behaviour. Whatever its level of application in the field, and there is a suspicion that to date the 'paradigm' is still largely NGO-led (ODI, 1993), there can be no doubt that traditional practices of agricultural extension have been thoroughly shaken up, theoretically at least, and there are alternatives to the simple technology-transfer model.

In recent years also a major element in promoting wider participation in agricultural development programmes has been the provision of credit to small and marginal farmers, hitherto excluded from institutionalised credit programmes. In 1991 the FAO estimated that only 5% of farmers in Africa and 15% in Latin America and Asia had any access to formal credit. Several major donor agencies, such as FAO, IFAD and the World Bank, see a link between increasing farmer participation and access to institutionalised credit. A number of rural credit programmes, such as the SFDP (Nepal), the Grameen Bank (Bangladesh), BKK (Indonesia) and the Small-holder Credit Programme (Jamaica) were set up with the specific objective of targeting credit to those farmers who traditionally had not benefited from credit programmes. Although to date such programmes have reached only a fraction of the rural poor, and there is evidence that some of the credit can be monopolised by the better-off, the movement towards making credit available to the rural poor is progressing. Recent experience suggests a number of important trends:

- A change in emphasis to give credit in response to the farmers priorities and not those of the lender;
- An increasing dissatisfaction with Banks, and a continuing search for alternative financial institutions which are closer to farmers' control;
- The strengthening of **credit unions** as alternative institutions; for example, in the Cameroon the Credit Union Movement has become the most reliable national rural financial institution;
- The channelling of credit to **small rural groups** (e.g. Grameen Bank); in this respect the work of the Asian and Pacific Regional Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA) illustrates how a wide range of self-help groups can take responsibility for rural credit (GTZ, 1987).

While credit as a key element in agricultural development is indisputable, the link between credit and greater people's participation is still unproven. While a number of major programmes have been shown to have had a substantial, if geographically limited impact, they have lacked a wider and more political appeal. Credit programmes interpret participation in terms of the number of beneficiaries; And, while benefiting from access to economic resources is a valid, if transient, interpretation of participation, these programmes often lack the basis both for future sustainability and, more importantly, for wider institutional involvement.

Despite these recent advances, however, there is still much to be done to improve substantially the agricultural production base of small farmers. FAO's Global Consultation of Agricultural Extension in 1989 confirmed this view and argued that time and resources were required to reverse decades of top-down practice. Greater farmer participation in agricultural development has become synonymous with **benefits**, but there are still many awaiting their chance to share in the benefits of agricultural development programmes. A recent World Bank study (1990) underlined the difficulties of promoting greater farmer participation (in agricultural development) but confirmed that this participation was vital to ensure success. The research-extension link is fundamental to increasing agricultural production and it is in **farmer participatory research** that future developments might concentrate. But the implications will be far reaching.

Decades of agricultural development practice based upon external technological transfer will need to be replaced by approaches which recognise indigenous agricultural practices, seek to build on local knowledge, and bring farmers more directly into the agricultural research process. Richard's (1985) seminal work on West Africa has shown both the strength and the potential of **indigenous agricultural systems** and these systems could be the basis for a more sustainable agricultural development. Such an approach will have implications not only for the determining of national agricultural development policy, but also for the professionalisation of agricultural delivery services, the training curricula of extension workers and the role of national agricultural extension services (Chambers, 1993).

2.3 *Resource Conservation*

Resource conservation programmes and projects have also taken on board the need for active people's participation. The 1980s were both a decade of increasing awareness of the rapidly deteriorating natural resource base of many countries, particularly in Africa, and also of the emergence of environmentally sustainable development as an important major concern. Both issues are inter-related and, in each case, people's participation has begun to assume an important role. In many cases previous strategies of resource conservation were essentially top-down, professionally controlled and highly technological interventions in which rural people were **taught** how better to protect their natural resources and to contribute to Government programmes. These strategies have begun to give way to one based upon building up people's collective **understanding** of conservation issues, persuading them to alter their individual resource management **behaviour**, explaining to them the **causes** of resource degradation. An international conference organised by the University of Leiden in 1990 and an FAO study (1989) concluded that Government's role in conservation management should change from that of implementing specific conservation projects

to one of facilitating and making it possible for rural people to participate in strategies of more productive and sustainable forms of land management. The lesson to be learned from wider experience of participatory approaches to resource conservation, is that the potential for conflict exists between individual and collective interests. Participating approaches often assume a collective resource conservation interest at the community level which may not be the case, and that can lead to difficulties in the face of individually-determined resource control interests.

2.4 Forestry

In forestry conservation and development people's participation has also become increasingly influential. In the past decade there has been a worldwide recognition of the dramatic destruction of existing forestry resources and of the critical role of forests and their products in the livelihoods of millions of rural people. The widespread Sahelian drought in the 1970s, for example, drew attention to people's dependence on fuel-wood and other tree products, and increasing soil degradation in Asia underlined the deforestation and the degradation of tree cover. Since the early 1980s three main arguments have emerged in a re-appraisal of forestry development strategy. First, the causes and consequences of deforestation are well understood as is the fact that the lack of political institutional support is a major barrier to action. Second, local **communities** must have a **central role** in developing and managing forestry resources. Third, forestry is an integral part of rural development because of its role as a provider of food and income and in sustaining the natural resources base. In the 1980s, the term '**community forestry**' was coined to reflect a major shift in strategy, and it soon became an umbrella term denoting a wide range of activities which link rural people with forests and trees. Community forestry suggested not only a difference in the objectives and content of forestry projects, but equally important, a different style of project design, management and evaluation.

In countries with important forestry resources, like India, Thailand, Indonesia, Ethiopia and Brazil, substantial community forestry programmes have been initiated in which people's participation is a vital element. These programmes have been supported by detailed studies of all aspects of participatory forestry development, such as FAO's community forestry series. These studies stress the critical importance of (i) the **macro policies** which provide the framework for forestry development to take place; (ii) **community participation**; (iii) the issue of **equity**; (iv) the need to widen access to forestry resources, and (v) the need for an effective **educational** component in forestry development programmes. In his ten year review of Community Forestry, Arnold (1990) concluded that the original assessment of the early 1980s of the dependence of people on forests and trees and the need to assist and to strengthen these links is still valid today; what has changed considerably has been how this understanding is translated into action.

Despite the considerable advances, many forestry conservation and development programmes are still largely technological in approach. In these programmes, people's participation means collaboration with externally designed programmes via inputs and other benefits in which there is a strong emphasis upon control, management and gross forestry production. A 'revolution' has taken place in the approach to the conservation and development of forestry resources around the concept of community participation but it needs further consolidation. In the light of this, much effort is now directed to developing methods of problem identification and project design that are both participatory, and also implementable within the time and resource frame usually available.

Experience in the past decade has also suggested a number of key issues which will be critical in strengthening community forestry in the 1990s: (i) further progress in directly involving local people in the **control** and the **management** of forestry schemes in order both to improve their chances of sustainability and to make them more relevant to local people's needs; (ii) continuing experimentation with various ways in which to **manage local forestry resources**, ranging from state control to forms of common property resources management; (iii) the development of **extension** systems and methods appropriate to community forestry; and (iv) greater understanding of the **incentives** which encourage local people to plant and manage trees, the importance of trees and their products in domestic economies and indigenous practices of conflict resolution in resource access and management.

A World Bank review (1994) of the current state of 'Participatory Forestry' in different parts of the world confirmed the importance of this approach for two reasons: (a) the need to prevent excessive deforestation and thus prevent land degradation and (b) the solid evidence that active people's participation can have a positive impact upon the local management of the natural resource base. Furthermore, in promoting participatory forestry, it stressed the critical importance of an 'enabling policy environment' which would create the conditions under which this approach could flourish. Finally it concluded that the **technical basis** of the forestry management approach - which combined traditional and modern knowledge bases - and the issue of **protection** were areas in which local participation could be most effective.

2.4 Irrigation

In the past few years people's participation has also become as a critical element in irrigation schemes. Here, however, the distinction must be drawn between Large Irrigation Schemes (LIS) and Small Irrigation Schemes (SIS): Experience suggests that in a LIS, effective people's participation is more difficult to promote. Such schemes are generally centrally managed, highly technical and institutionalised and often involve 'settler' communities which have a low level of social cohesion. In a LIS the approach to participation is essentially managerial via user's committees, since many larger schemes break down into small units, and it is often at the tertiary level that farmer management becomes important. While in the Philippines, for example, a degree of effective user participation in irrigation schemes has been achieved, in other examples such as the Mahaweli and Gal Oya irrigation schemes in Sri Lanka, people's participation was more difficult to implement. In contrast an SIS is more effective at promoting people's participation. Small irrigation schemes can develop a greater sense of ownership, can be more responsive to the wishes of farmers and are usually less complex technologically. Studies have shown that by far the greater number of irrigation schemes, particularly in Africa and Asia, are small scale, and that in general they are able to achieve more effective and active local participation.

In Asia, irrigation in agriculture is widespread and experience of schemes in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Philippines and South Korea has thrown up a number of crucial issues related to farmers' participation. Uphoff's (1990) review of farmer participation in irrigation schemes in Asia highlighted two main issues: (i) the crucial importance of scheme **management** and (ii) community heterogeneity and the differentiation in terms of participation between 'upstream' and 'downstream' water users. In response to the first issue, **Water Users Associations (WUAs)** have become common features of many participatory irrigation schemes. The general experience would seem to be that WUAs are vital in facilitating farmer participation, yet they demand particular

attention to such details as membership, leadership and ownership. Korten and Siy's (1988) study of the National Irrigation Administration in the Philippines argued that while important, WUAs were not enough to guarantee effective farmer participation; there was need also to increase the involvement of NIA personnel and the refinement of methods and procedures of scheme management. Wade's (1982) studies in South Korea similarly underlined the crucial role of management in irrigation schemes and argued the importance of considering the viability of organisations for irrigation management in terms of the wider political context. In another dimension, Siriwardena's (1989) study of the Mahaweli irrigation scheme in Sri Lanka pointed to the potential conflict between the professionals' view of farmer participation - controlled, predetermined and limited - and the farmers' own view of what their participation might entail. The crucial issue was the nature of the interaction between the 'separate worlds' of the irrigation engineer and the farmer in determining the quality of farmer participation.

2.6 *Comment*

The evidence suggests that the concept of people's participation has had a widespread influence on the major sectors in development. But despite the use in places of a more radical language, the weight of development practice sees people's participation in terms of **collaboration** or the **targeting of specific benefits**. Even this statement must be read with some caution, however, in order to avoid the impression that there has been a no shift in development practice. In the absence of empirical evidence, it is impossible to gauge the magnitude of the shift which has taken place; the World Bank concluded in 1988 that there was little effective people's participation in the rural development projects it supported. What is certain, however, is that while the language of the original WCARRD statement has entered the vocabulary of development policy, the concept of participation as a transference of power to and active involvement of local people has yet to influence the bulk of development practice. Essentially, such interpretations demand a radically different style of development intervention, whereas current practice is claiming to promote them within the context of existing forms of intervention.

A number of studies in the early 1990s (Oakley, 1991; World Bank, 1992; Rhaman, 1993; Burkey, 1993) which looked across the board at the current state of practice of participatory development, all largely underlined the gulf between rhetoric and practice. There would appear to be little to argue about (with one or two exceptions!) in terms of gaining widespread support for the idea of 'participation'. Inevitably, though, decades of established practice, the professional domination of development agencies and the formidable influence of the 'project' as the basic instrument of development, have all conspired to hold back its widespread adoption. With little detailed evidence for us to plot the global trend, it could be argued that to date 'participation' has profoundly affected the thinking behind development projects but without, as yet, making any massive break-through in the practice. But then it all depends upon what you understand by the practice of participation!

3. IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED IN PROMOTING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

A recent World Bank (1994) review of development programmes which it supports concluded that promoting people's participation continues to be both **complex** and **difficult**. It is more than simply beneficiary participation in economically successful development projects. This is important but it is only one aspect. Participation is not a one-off activity or input into projects; it is a **process** which evolves over time and whose direction and outcome are not always predictable or manageable. Participation is a broad, multi-dimensional phenomenon with political, economic and social characteristics, and its promotion in development projects demands careful thought and specific actions. Furthermore a survey of a number of development agencies' projects identified a range of obstacles and bottlenecks which can frustrate efforts to promote participation. These include the lack of political support or a national development policy conducive to participation, the non-availability of resources specifically for promoting participation, the lack of operational guidelines or procedures at the project level, and existing social or cultural values which discourage active people's participation.

A key lesson to emerge from experience to date is the need to ask "Why should people participate in development initiatives?" It is too simplistic to believe that it is mainly a matter of teaching people what their common interests are or of seeking to promote values which are more communal and collective. For example, Wade's (1987) studies in India have drawn a distinction between **collective** action and '**self-interested response**' in terms of the potential for community participation in resource management. The studies suggested that the possibilities for successful **collective action** depend more directly on group characteristics, group-state relations and the nature of the resources available than on the efforts or persuasion of external agencies. People's participation is not merely the short term enjoyment of tangible economic benefits from a development programme or project. It is a much more deep-rooted process within the political, social and economic framework of their environment. While people can be coerced or persuaded to 'participate', voluntary participation will be a function of people's own rationalisation of the opportunities or extra benefits such participation might bring. An OECD (1994) review of practice to date concluded that four key words summarised the lessons to date for promoting participatory development; **understanding, humility, flexibility and patience**.

The recent World Bank (1994) review of participatory development and bank project operations further concluded that "...participation is easier to achieve where the delivery of project **benefits** brings people together..." This is not a surprising conclusion and is probably a true reflection of the current state of play. More generally a review of the practice has identified other lessons which have emerged to date:

- (i) While there are a series of factors which can impede a process of people's participation, there are also factors which can facilitate the process. These include: **structural** factors such as political support and bureaucratic decentralisation; **social** factors such as traditions of community organisation and mobilisation; **organisational** factors such as the appropriateness of the objectives of those organisations involved, and the availability of competent managers and leaders; and **operational** factors such as the existence project procedures to promote participation and local institutional co-operation. Recognition of and attention to these factors in participatory project design and implementation can greatly facilitate people's participation. Much of this could be established should come out in initial diagnosis. Indeed there is growing evidence of the need for a detailed, qualitative

`**situation analysis**` to examine the above issues, as an important information base upon which to construct the project.

- (ii) Both Government and NGOs have important, complementary but at times conflicting **roles** in promoting people's participation. Whereas Governments are expected to provide the overall framework within which participation is encouraged, it is more often the case that NGOs are more actively involved in implementation. Both Government and NGOs can help provide the vital, external support for people's participation, and this support must be provided in a way that does not create dependency but allows people's participation to develop and become institutionalised within the existing national political framework. Oakley (1991) reviewed the issue of the comparative performance to date of both Government and NGOs in promoting participation, and suggested that the evidence was still inconclusive. Governments did promote participation, but usually of a narrowly defined type. On the other hand NGOs, by their very nature, more easily espoused the concept of participation in its fullest sense and have had a major influence on both its thinking and practice. More recently the World Bank (1994) has been more emphatic in suggesting that NGOs are 'better' at participation, but with the major limitation that their relative smallness rarely allows them to go to scale.
- (iii) While a commitment to participation would appear to be quite **widespread**, this is no substitute for an **operational understanding** of the concept and an **ability** to put it into practice. The evidence suggests that there is still need for a more concerted effort to change awareness of the issue particularly among Government officials and development project staff. A FAO study (1987), for instance, suggested the need for **specialised policy advice** to Governments on the issue of participation, and the preparation of specialised training and detailed project guidelines. More recently the World Bank review (1994) of the practice of participation confirmed that the rhetoric still outstrips the actual implementation of a participatory approach at the project level.
- (iv) Although **projects** continue to be the basic instrument of development implementation, they are not necessarily the most conducive vehicle to promote participation. A World Bank-supported Workshop in 1988 concluded that the project approach, with its emphasis upon time, objectives and budgets, severely limits the scope for people's participation in design and implementation. Similarly, most project staff have a technical, economic or financial background and are less concerned with issues like participation. To be an effective component in a development project, participation demands both its own approach and staff able to promote it. Can a process which seeks to tackle basic psychological, cultural and political aspects of people's exclusion and to build an authentic basis for their participation really be encapsulated within the framework of a development project? With an understanding of the objectives of a process of participation, the answer is probably no, and we continue to agonise about what to do. Where the understanding of participation is more mechanistic, the agonies are less, and many people are literally rolling up their sleeves to see how they can make projects more participatory.
- (v) A series of **operational lessons** have emerged from experience so far. These include (a) where possible, work with existing community organisations. (b) try to achieve some short term impact in order to motivate people's participation. (c) project staff should take the initiative less often seeking instead to respond to local initiatives. (d) local people must be

directly involved in identifying problems and solutions, and not merely implementing agency projects. **(e)** participatory projects should preferably be small enough to be well-understood by local people. The recent OECD (1994) examination of the current practice stressed what it called the vital role of **'preparatory work'** in the launching of any such project. Establishing the basis of the project, in such critical areas as situation analysis, explanations, approaches to be used and the assigning of responsibilities **before** a formal launch has been found to be crucial first step.

A major and overriding lesson which emerges is the overwhelming **difficulty**, if not **impossibility**, of putting it into practice at any kind of general **organisational or institutional** level. Since the mid-1980s a whole range of major development agencies like FAO, UNICEF and the World Bank have committed themselves to the notion of participatory development and have talked of mainstreaming it within their respective organisations. There have been discussions, consultations and documents, but the obstacles remain formidable. A whole generation (and more) of vertical, unilinear bureaucratic behaviour cannot be changed overnight because of a whim or an emotional commitment. Within these organisations this failure has been translated into the projects which they support, and which rarely go beyond the stage of seeking local people's collaboration in project activities. With NGOs the picture is somewhat different. The commitment at institutional level has usually been more forthcoming and their relative smallness and flexibility has allowed them to be more successful in translating this commitment into practice.

Experience also indicates that the introduction of a more participatory approach into existing or future **large** development projects constitutes a major, if not impossible, challenge to multilateral development agencies. Where participation has been more successful it has been in projects specifically designed to promote it: e.g., Bay of Bengal PPP, Grameen Bank and NGO-supported grassroots projects particularly in Asia and Latin America. An ERDEA (1990) evaluation in Africa concluded that many rural development projects were schemes initiated by Governments for the rural people but not involving them, and suggested that it might be time to abandon rural development as it is currently conceived and practised. In the more conventional, professionally-led and technologically-based rural development projects, the promotion of active people's participation has been ignored. A World Bank survey of Bank-financed projects found only a few projects in which local people had played a significant role in designing and implementing the project. The experience of these specially designed participatory projects suggests that there are a number of key elements which need to be incorporated into larger-scale projects if they are to become more participatory. These include **(a)** a commitment to staff **training** in participatory methods. **(b)** targeting within the project towards small homogeneous groups of intended beneficiaries. **(c)** the **strengthening** of effective people's **organisations** as vehicles of participation. **(d)** an **educational component** which develops the skills and knowledge base of project beneficiaries. These key elements must be built into development projects at the design stage if they are to become more participatory. These suggestions are limited to large development projects and not to transforming development co-operation in general. The **large** development project is the dinosaur of development practice but, alas, it is a long way from becoming extinct.

Experiences in promoting people's participation over the past decade strongly underlines its critical importance to development and its significance in the formulation and execution of development strategies. But participation is not a science. It cannot be considered as another development input, and it is not simple or easy to implement. It demands careful thought and

imaginative and flexible approaches to its implementation. Although its contribution is not yet proven, there appears to be a widespread belief that effective people's participation can bring economic, social and political benefits to the many thousands of regions in the world which have yet to benefit from extensive efforts to promote development.

4. *FUTURE AGENDA*

Undoubtedly considerable advances were made in the 1980s, not only in the opening up of political systems to provide a freer and more pluralistic political debate as a prerequisite to genuine people's participation, but also in the promotion of people's participation as a key element in strategies of development. Nevertheless, two important observations need to be made:

1) these advances have been somewhat uneven and, both geographically and among Government, International Development Agencies and NGOs, there have been varying degrees of commitment to and support for greater people's participation. Advances have been more substantial in Asia and in Latin America than in other parts of the developing world. Furthermore, International Development Agencies and NGOs, in contrast to Governments, have been relatively more active in calling for and promoting participation.

2) these substantial advances have been more in terms of public commitment and thinking on participation and less in its practice. While many hundreds of development programmes and projects actively promote people's participation, the majority still lack a participatory dimension and thus fail to improve their chances of sustainability. Furthermore, we still lack convincing evidence of any major shift in legal and bureaucratic structures to provide a more supportive framework for popular participation. Participatory development is a radical departure from conventional development practice and it implies a correspondingly radical re-appraisal and re-orientation of development strategies, objectives and bureaucracies.

This radical re-appraisal will only be possible in political systems which are open, encourage debate, and provide the conditions in which genuine popular participation can emerge. It is not enough for Government and Development Agencies to believe that they can simply **reform** existing development bureaucracies and project practice and make them more participatory. A completely different style and approach to development intervention is required. The emergence in the 1990s of the importance of 'good government' and of the notion of 'conditionality' might well influence the eventual outcome and help create a more favourable outcome 'Democracy', 'open political system', 'a vigorous civil society' and 'investing in people' are all elements in this relatively new debate, and it will be instructive to see how far all of this actually begins to filter down, and what conditions it might create for a more authentic participation at the project level (Clayton, 1994).

The Africa ERDEA workshop concluded that the time had now come to take participatory development from its present stage of advocacy to one of practical **action**. Similarly, another conclusion points to the need for a greater emphasis upon participatory strategies which lead to popular pressure and **adversarial** tactics and not merely a continuation of the current situation of largely benign collaboration. Undoubtedly, the overwhelming practice of participation to date has been conducted on the basis of a policy of **containment**. Participation has come to mean **collaboration** and **enjoying benefits** within the context of existing structures. While this may be politically more acceptable, it is not really within the spirit of an authentic participation which seeks to break with generations of exclusion, and to help build new structures and capacities among local people to give them a greater opportunity to share in the benefits. Authentic participation and political power are inseparable, and until development projects can be fashioned to tackle the inequalities and imbalances in resource access and distribution, people's participation will be limited and essentially controlled. On the assumption that such a major shift in practice is not going to be on the agenda in the short or medium term, there would appear to be four major issues which, if

tackled, might help strengthen the basis for a more authentic but longer-term participatory approach to development:

- (i) The strengthening of **political, bureaucratic and administrative support** for people's participation in development. This would include Government endorsement of international conventions designed to support rural people's organisations, the acceptance of participation as a core element of development policy, and the re-orientation of existing bureaucratic and administrative practices to make them more conducive to participation. Similarly major international development agencies like FAO, ILO and the World Bank could examine their procedures and tackle the issue of making their bureaucracies both more sympathetic and more able to implement effectively participatory development. If these "big players" in the development scene could get their act together, it could have unforeseen ripple-effect consequences. There is already substantial lip-service to these changes, but now is the time to begin to make judgements as to whether they are being implemented, or indeed consciously avoided. In the early 1990s this notion of the need to examine the internal bureaucratic structures of development agencies in order to determine their 'appropriateness' to promote and practice the 'participatory principles' they preach, has become quite common currency. Major agencies like UNICEF (1991) and the World Bank (1992-1994) have opened up the issue internally and at least generated a lot of energy and debate. Is it important? Is there a natural, symbiotic relationship between participatory organisation and participatory practice? Whatever the answers, the issue appears to have crept onto the agenda of development agencies across the board.
- (ii) There is need for a **radical re-appraisal** of the concept of large, non-participatory development projects in terms of their design, methodology and overall effectiveness in promoting self-sustaining people's participation. Unless such a reappraisal takes place and development agencies are prepared to redesign them, most large development projects will fail singularly to see participation other than as the receiving by project participants of 'tangible benefits'. The evidence suggests that few, if any, International Development Agencies have undertaken such a fundamental re-appraisal with the result that serious efforts to promote participatory development are still largely confined to special programmes (e.g. the FAO's People's Participation Project), or to development projects supported by NGOs.

Without being able to cite a lot of evidence, the NGOs would appear to be somewhat further down the track. NGOs tend not to have these big albatrosses around their necks and generally have been more successful in terms of promoting the practice of participatory development. And yet there is often the sensation of "two worlds". The major resources of development finance continue to go into monolithic projects in which, for a variety of reasons, it is a mammoth task to build a participatory approach. Meanwhile thousands of NGOs more effectively promote the approach through a myriad of smaller, more people-orientated projects. How to bridge this gulf and 'open-up' participation to the massive resources available will be a challenge in the next decade.

- (iii) In the immediate future, if participatory development is to begin influence practice more substantially, the issue of **training** will loom large on development agencies' agendas. Leaving aside the notion of participation at a more structural level, and assuming that development programmes and projects will continue to be the main instruments for

`bringing' development to the people, then there is still the need for a quantum leap in staff `training' in most development agencies. Chambers (1983) in his seminal work `Putting the Last First' opened our eyes to the grip that `professionals' have on development activities and what would be required to re-orientate this situation. Generally there has been no recognition that a thorough knowledge of `participation' should form an integral part of staff training. While many development professionals are familiar with `participation' in general terms and may be committed to its implementation, it could be argued that the vast majority have little direct experience of how to put it into practice.

Given the fact that there are few, if any, formal courses on participatory development, this situation is not surprising. While little systematic research has been done on the subject, it would appear that southern NGOs put more emphasis upon **selection**, and also see training in participatory techniques as an internal, on-the-job, on-going exercise. The northern NGOs face the dilemma of the lack of day-to-day contact with the practice. In the absence of authoritative information, it would appear that many northern NGOs have made conscious efforts to go beyond the mere espousal of the participation rhetoric, and have engaged in systematically trying to prepare their staff to be able to support this kind of approach.

The mammoth task lie currently with the multilateral agencies where for years professionalism has been the code and the `harder' areas of knowledge - economics, engineering, agricultural sciences - have dominated. UNICEF (1991) was the first to raise formally the issue of how such large agencies could `turn their staff around'. Currently the World Bank (1994) appears to be actively pondering the enormous complexities of trying to instil a `participatory perspective' into its thousands of staff who have eschewed traditionally such `soft' approaches. In this context, Dichter (1992) sees the fostering of people's participation as an **art** and not a science, and questions whether this art can be learned and whether it can be taught. He asks: `Is it realistic that the World Bank, which is a Bank after all, can learn to think in this way: or is it simply too much to ask the donor community to take on these notions of artistry? Development is concerned with the `high ground' and the `swamp'. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique and professionals feel at home. The swampy lower ground is home to the structural problems which defy technical solution, and it is at this level that development becomes an art."

It will be interesting to note how far `art' is able to overcome "science" in the years ahead.

- (iv) For a concept which has come to so dominate development thinking and, to a lesser extent, practice, it is quite remarkable that over a decade later we still understand little of how the process of participation might be **monitored** and **evaluated**. Clearly this omission must now be tackled with some priority. Technically such evaluation would have both a quantitative and a qualitative dimension; to date much of the work in this area has been reduced to the former. We appear to have some crude ideas on who benefits from (participates in) from a project, the numbers involved, areas of responsibilities assumed and so on. We know less of how participation emerges and develops, how it is consolidated. What does it lead to outside of the immediate project environment? What impacts does it have in terms of `participants' greater involvement in development activities? And so on. Curiously, many are committed to something which they would have difficulty trying to

explain. We still await one or two substantial exercises in mapping the whole process in order to test and to question the many assumptions being made about its all-embracing effects.

In the light of wider political movements for democratic reforms and the experience of development practice of the past decade, it would appear that for the rest of the 1990s people's participation will continue to be a key element in strategies to promote development. If the project is to continue to be the basic instrument of intervention, as surely it will, then the need will be for a **new genre of projects**, which both seek a realignment of power via changes in institutionalised arrangements for resource allocation, and which also promote and build upon people's skills and abilities and then integrate them into development practice. To seek merely to make existing practice more participatory would avoid facing the fundamental constraints on effective participation. 'Participation in development' still lies at the core of the debate, whereas 'participatory development' is essentially only a technique which will not fundamentally alter the scenario. On reflection, it is quite incredible how the notion of 'participation' has invaded so many development niches; and yet for many it remains a frustratingly elusive concept. Perhaps the solution is to keep it 'simple'; avoid the mega-gesture and see whether one can promote a movement step by step as the NGOs have been doing for some years over time but with a clear view of where all sides want it to go.

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