Participation and Empowerment: Vehicles of Development

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Roadmap

- What is Participation?
- Benefits, Barriers and Dilemmas of Participation
- Defining Empowerment
- Empowerment vs. Participation
- Empowerment Framework
- Measuring Empowerment
- Role of Development Actors in Empowerment

Introduction

- Poverty as mostly related to social exclusion and vulnerability
- Poverty limits the ability of poor people to participate effectively in institutions that affect their lives
- Need to empower these marginalized groups and encourage their participation

Poverty Traps

- Insecurity
- Limited citizenship
- Spatial disadvantage
- Social discrimination
- Poor work opportunities

Contextualizing Participation and Empowerment

- Retreat of the Interventionist State
- Forces of ‘Globalization’ and Liberalization
- Democratization and Decentralization
- Enhanced Opportunities through Information Technology: Facebook groups!
- Promotion of Participatory and Community-Driven Development
- ‘The Power of People’ vs. ‘The Power of Businesses & Governments’ – Occupy Movement!

What is Participation?

“People are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives” (UNDP, 1993, 21).
Participation

- Participation as Means and End
- Participation for, by and with the People
- Giving People more Control over Institutions that affect their Lives

Inclusive Participation: include the most vulnerable social groups, such as the poorest, women, minorities, indigenous peoples, the rural poor and the disabled.

Participation as the process allowing people to “determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change” (Nelson and Wright, 1995).

Participation is not only a means of maximizing the use of human capabilities, but also as an end in itself.

Participation can take place in diverse domains: economic, political, social, cultural participation as well as participation at the household and communal levels.

Participation as a Basic ‘Right’

“This shifts the focus from invited participation in the planning and implementation of service delivery to the enhancement of people’s capabilities … to participate more actively in determining the shape of those services” (Cornwall, 2002, 67).

Benefits of Participation

- Promoting Sense of Belonging
- Enhancing Local Ownership
- Encouraging Collective Action
- Building on Existing Social Capital
- Enhancing Efficiency, Relevance and Responsiveness of Public Policies and Development projects
- Promoting Good Governance and State Reform
- Supporting Informal Local Institutions at the Grassroots

Benefits of Participation

- Enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of development projects
- Enabling greater donor and state accountability
- Ensuring the sustainability and long-lasting effects of projects
- Promoting ‘self-determination’
- Mutual Learning between Development Practitioners, Donors, Policymakers and Citizens
- Reinforcing local Culture and appreciating Local Knowledge
- Fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals and communities

Barriers to Participation

- Inadequate Legal Systems
- Bureaucratic Constraints
- Restrictive Social Norms
- Limited Access to Assets
- Unequal Power Relations within Local Communities and between citizens and politicians/bureaucrats
Dilemmas of Participation

**Avoiding the No-Participation ‘Trap’**

“A Person who is not Poor who Pronounces on what matters to those who are Poor is in a Trap”

(Chambers, 1997, 163)

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Dilemmas of Participation

**Lack of Respect for People’s Voices, esp. the Poor and Marginalized**

“Poor People are rarely met; when they are met, they often do not speak; when they do speak, they are often cautious and deferential; and what they say is often either not listened to, or brushed aside, or interpreted in a bad light”

(Chambers, 1983, 104)

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Dilemmas of Participation

**Virtual vs. Actual Participation; Rhetoric vs. Practice**

“Participation is an empowering exercise of raising individual awareness as well as fostering collective organizational behaviour”

(Cowie, 2000, 408)

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Dilemmas of Participation

**Participation without Fear**

“Being Involved in a Process is not Equivalent to having a voice: voice needs to be nurtured, people need to feel able to express themselves without fear of reprisals or the expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously”

(Cornwall, 2002, 57)

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Dilemmas of Participation

**Participation Changing existing Power Relations**

“Participation involves shifting power relations either within communities or between them and policymakers and formal institutions”

(Nelson and Wright, 1995, 1)

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**Critiques of Participation**

- Participatory methods can be ‘poorly practiced’ – low quality and fast scaling-up
- Participation is **not a benign concept** despite its “feel good” appeal. Far from it! – over-expectations, participation as a cult

⇒ Need to ‘demystify’ the notion of ‘participation’ by identifying who participates, how and why and what the impact of this participation is
Critiques of Participation

Paradox in the implementation of Participation

- On the one hand, calls for greater participation by stakeholders and attempts to articulate their local voices
- On the other hand, doubts about the authenticity of participatory assessments and refusing to account for their results (Cornwall, 2002, 12).

Articulation of Local Needs can be Distorted

- Local communities seem to identify their ‘local needs’ according to what they think would be acceptable for the donor or policymaker.
- Even when ‘actual local needs’ are articulated, they are rarely used to guide project implementation.

‘Hidden’ Motivations for Participation (!)

- Participatory methods fail to account for the various motivations of individuals to participate in these ‘exercises’ and how they participate in them.
- Need to account for ‘herd behavior’ and group think.

These Critiques call for a better understanding of the Power Dynamics:

➢ between the facilitator and the stakeholders,
➢ between civil society actors and stakeholders
➢ among the stakeholders themselves

Participation and Power Relations

- Participation should be evaluated according to the extent it succeeds to ALTER unequal power relations.

  “Space is a social product. It is not simply ‘there’ a neutral container waiting to be filled but is a dynamic humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination of power” (Lefebvre, 1991: 24)

- The ‘transformative’ power of participation should strengthen the bargaining power of the poor.

Participation as Tyranny

Participation can lead to different ‘Tyrannies’

- The ‘tyranny of decision-making and control’: participatory methods can be a domain for potential unjustified exercise of power by development practitioners
- The second type is the ‘tyranny of the group’: the group dynamics result in decisions that serve the interest of the most powerful among the participants.
- The third tyranny is related to the method itself and its limitations and disadvantages
Participation as Tyranny

- Participatory approaches as ‘depoliticised’
- Failure to understand the processes of power and to include marginalised groups
- Narrow focus on the local and the individual and ignoring wider structures of injustice and inequality
- Limited understanding of the role of agency in social change
- Insufficient evidence that participation has an empowering impact or can induce social change

Not all forms of Participation change the status quo

Different Levels of Participation

Ladders of Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

"Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo”

(Arnstein, 1969, 216)
The ‘politics of presence’ as Means to Provide Marginalised Groups with Representation in public institutions and effectively address their needs and interests?

Anne Phillips(1995)

Local Governance: Participation or Mere Presence?
The Case of Women in Indian Panchayats

- Presence and Quotas do NOT necessarily mean Representation or participation or heard Voices?
- No visible impact in participation rates or distribution of benefits?
- Participation in local governance restricted to a small number of women but not the masses.
- Ongoing discrimination in all aspects of life – would participation in local decision-making make a difference?
- Low levels of education, self-esteem and socio-economic status in a male-dominated society – constitutional rights vs. Social norms.

Participation … is more than a technical exercise.

Participation should have a transformative power

“There are good reasons for remaining optimistic concerning the potential of participatory approaches to development and governance to effect genuine transformations at a range of levels. This is not in any way to reject the criticisms made of participation over recent years, but to note that the problems of power and politics … have in some cases been addressed, most notably through an engagement with a radical political project on the basis of promoting citizenship” (Hickey and Mohan, 2004, 20).

From Participation To Empowerment
From Participation to Empowerment

- Both are related Concepts: Participation at project-level and Empowerment at conceptual-level?
- Beyond the participatory project-based approaches to a citizenship and rights-centered approaches.
- Need to go beyond the individual and the local to adopt a more multi-scaled strategy accounting for institutional and structural factors affecting participatory processes (Hickey and Mohan, 2004, 12).

Defining Empowerment

- Empowerment is related to agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilization and self-confidence.
- Review some of the common definitions of empowerment and identify their commonalities as well as areas of divergence.
- Providing a list of 29 definitions of empowerment!

Definitions of Empowerment

- “Empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14)
- Empowerment as the process of “enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making. And it means removing the barriers—political, legal and social—that work against particular groups and building the assets of poor people to enable them to engage effectively in markets” (World Bank, 2001, p. 39)
- Empowerment is ‘a group’s or individual’s capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes’ (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, 2006).

Empowerment:

“Empowerment is about the existence, use and exercise of Choice.
Empowerment is simply about a Change in Power Relations.
Empowerment as a process through which the poor overcomes their Powerlessness.”

Reflections of Powerlessness

- Exploitation and limited Access to Markets
- Limited Bargaining Power
- Inability to stand up to Corrupt Government Officials
- Denied access to basic Social Services
- Vicious circles of Indebtedness
- Limited participation in Household Decision-making
Empowerment as Increase in Power

1. **Power over** *(Control)*: ability to resist manipulation
2. **Power to** *(Choice)*: creating new possibilities and causing radical change
3. **Power from within** *(Change)*: enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance
4. **Power with** *(Community)*: acting in a group

Empowerment as Contextual

- **Culture** as Central to Empowerment
- Understanding the **Socio-cultural Environment**
- Bourdieu’s Concept of ‘Doxa’, i.e. ‘the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they have become internalized’

⇒ **Context-dependent Measures** of Empowerment

Empowerment as Integral to Human Development: Remember?

Human development has three components:

- **Well-being**: expanding people’s real freedoms—so that people can flourish.
- **Empowerment and agency**: enabling people and groups to act—to drive valuable outcomes.
- **Justice**: expanding equity, sustaining outcomes over time and respecting human rights and other goals of society.

*(HDR, 2010, 22)*

Why is Empowerment Important?

- Promoting Human Development
- Improving Project Effectiveness
- Enhancing Good Governance, esp. at local level
- Overcoming Vulnerability and Powerlessness
- Enhancing Equitable Income Distribution
- Enlarging the Poor’s assets
- Enhancing Accountability, esp. of government
- Promoting Pro-poor Growth?

Empowerment as a Zero- or Variable sum Game?

- Can the powerless be empowered without altering the nature and levels of power already held by existing powerful groups?
  
  Or

- Does the gain in power by one group inevitably result in a reduction of the power exercised by others?

⇒ Empowerment as a Bottom-up Ongoing Process
Four Domains of Empowerment

- Political Empowerment:
  - Democratization and effective Justice Systems
  - Political Participation
  - Civil society and Grass-roots Organizations
  - Participation of Marginalized Social Groups

- Economic Empowerment:
  - Access to Economic Resources
  - Improved Opportunities for Better Income

- Social Empowerment:
  - Challenge unequal Power Relations
  - Confidence to undertake Transformative Actions
  - New Relations between People and Institutions

- Psychological Empowerment

Empowerment can also be Psychological

To overcome problems of marginalization in society, poor people critically depend on their collective capability to organize and mobilize so as to be recognized on their own terms, to be represented, and to make their voices heard. These aspects of voice, representation, collective identity, solidarity, and terms of recognition help overcome the deep external social and psychological barriers that are usually internalized by poor people. (Narayan 2005, 11)

Empowerment as a Process

- Empowerment has two main components:
  - Expansion of Agency, i.e. acting on behalf what one values and has reason to value
  - Institutional environment or Opportunity structure that provides the preconditions for effective agency

- Empowerment therefore requires:
  - Individuals willing to act on behalf of their values
  - Institutional changes that encourage these individuals to participate/that empowers them.

Empowerment Framework

- Expansion of Agency
- Change in Opportunity Structure (formal and informal/institutional context in which one lives)
- Factors affecting the Empowerment Process:
  - Individual factors: material, human, social, psychological
  - Collective factors: voice, organization, representation, identity, permeability of the state, the extent of elite fragmentation, and the state’s implementation capacity.
Role of Civil Society Actors in Participation & Empowerment

- Supporting Grassroots Organizations
- Helping the Poor Accumulate Assets
- Securing Better Job and Income Opportunities through training
- Supporting Advocacy & Allowing easier Access to Justice
- Improving Governance Systems through adequate Accountability Mechanisms
- Widening Access to Quality Social Services
- Expanding Opportunities to Access Credit Markets and Start new Businesses
- Above all: Listening to those at the Grassroots-level

Participation is not a Panacea but needs to have a Transformative Effect by altering unequal Power Relations and dealing with the 'political'

- Participation and Empowerment as Means and Ends
- Need to overcome various social, legal, political, cultural and economic Barriers to participation and empowerment
- Empowerment as Bottom-Up Approach
- Empowerment requires enhancing human agency and creating the institutional structure for its exercise

After all…

It is not enough to promote participation, more importantly is that this participation has a real impact on Policymaking.

Only then, can Empowerment make a difference!