



People's Participation in Development: Sikkim in Perspective

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Abstract:

The notion of participation and people's involvement in the development has been gaining momentum in the process of human empowerment and development. Contemporary development scholars have been advocating the inclusion of people's participation in development projects. Furthermore many development theorists, practitioners and international donor agencies believe that people's participation is the sine qua non for development. It is in this backdrop, this study defines and discusses the concept of participation in the context of development in general, and in terms of community development through participation specifically. The study describes the application of the concepts in development activities in the state of Sikkim.

Keywords: Participation, Development, Rural Development, Sustainable

1.Introduction

Participatory exercises in development programmes are widespread in both the affluent economies as well as in the third world economies around the globe. Many scholars (see Stirrat 1997; Kurian 1997) have described today's age as the age of participation and participatory development. Stirrat (1997) while emphasising on the importance of participation observed that such is the popularity of the concept that it is now difficult to find a rural based development project which does not claim to adopt a participatory approach involving bottom up planning, acknowledging the importance of indigenous knowledge and local people. He further sarcastically remarked that now a day one cannot find a development effort without an element of participation. John Kurian (1997) shares the similar view and opines that participation has been added as a fresh ingredient of development. Phrases such as planning from below, involving the people, incorporating people's knowledge are part of the emerging common orthodoxy of development. Burkey (1993) another eminent scholar on development remarks that participation is an essential part of human growth, development of self confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation. In this approach, people learn to take charge of their own lives and find solution to their own problems and the essence of development being built by such kind of participation will be sustainable also.

2.Concept Of Participation

The concept of participation has become one of the most important subject matters discussed in various disciplines that have and need human input in the development process. It has been used in studies on social policy (Richardson 1983; Croft and Beresford 1992), conservation (Curtis and Lockwood 2000; Townshend and Pendlebury 1999), health promotion (Goddman and Speers 1998), community planning (Berkeley et al 1995; Moser 1989; Wandersman, 1979), housing (Fahui and Van Loo 1998), tourism development (Aref 2009), community development and community work (Abbott 1995; Setterland and Abbott 1995; Lackery and Dershem 1992; Goulet 1989; Oakley and Marsden 1984; Gilbert and Ward 1984; Galjart 1981; Wandersman 1981), village regrouping (Olujimi and Egunjobi 1991) and water supply (Fitzgerald 1993; Bah 1992). The concept of participation, according to Bastian and Bastian is an elusive concept, both in the literature and field. Sometimes it is promoted as a totally new approach different from those that have dominated in developing countries and at some other times the concept is used as a method to implement projects (Wignaraja 1991; Bhatnagar and

Williams 1992). Bastian and Bastian (1997) outlines four different thematic variations in the concept of participation in his attempts to identify the principal characteristics, ideological frameworks and politics of what goes on as participation. The four thematic variations are:

Firstly, Participation is employed as a simple means to getting unpaid labour from the people. The strong argument behind this variant of participation is that it serves the purpose of creating sense of belonging among the public about the public utilities created. From the corners of policy makers and planners with strong bias towards reducing the burden of welfare expenditures, this practice has drawn strong support. In other words, it is a simple technique to get the free labour of the poor for the development projects.

Secondly, Participation is often interpreted as an attempt to promote self-reliance. Those who support this variant of participation mostly shares some common ideological strands like the poor in the third world apparently lack any initiative for their betterment and the poverty they are suffering are the direct outcome of this character, rather than that of the concrete socio economic structures they are trapped in. They also share the belief that the poor countries in the third world depend on the developed world to a large extent and 'this structural explanations of dependency at the macro level is being transformed to the situations in the micro level'.

Thirdly, Participatory approach is often resorted as a technique to create ideal villages. This approach has the vision of a harmonious village of the past, where everybody lived peacefully and solved problems together. This is the most popular version of participation and also the most criticised one.

Finally, participation is also resorted as a method of Project Management. It believed that by adopting participatory methods project can be successfully managed and completed.

Chambers (1994) has identifies three main ways in which participation is used in the context of development. First, it is used as cosmetic labels to make whatever is proposed appear as good. Second, it is used as a method for co-opting local labour to reduce the cost of maintenance of projects. Finally, it is way of empowering people by enabling them to take decisions on the problems they encounter and the possible ways of getting out of them.

John Kurian (1997) puts the evolution and emergence of Participatory approach differently. According to him, Participatory development, its emergence and evolution has been a movement of development debate from its focus on goods and services to

highlight the prime role that public participation plays in the process. Rafl Starkoff (1997) agrees with the contention that Participation in development is an offshoot of radical politics. Both in the affluent economies as well as in the third world economies, democratisation of development activities has been one of the long standing demands raised by the radicals. The major objective of this was to prevent the adverse impact of normal, bureaucratic and elite dominated development efforts on the disempowered

3. Defining Participation

The idea of participation is now widely recognised as a basic operational principle of development programmes and projects. Participation is a broad term used in different disciplines and applied to many fields, with many variations in meaning and interpretations. Participation as a concept is a contested subject and very often the term participation is modified with adjectives, resulting in terms such as community participation, citizen participation, people's participation, public participation and popular participation. The World Bank Participation Sourcebook (1996) defines participation as, "... a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings. For some, it is a matter or principle; for others, a practice and for still others, an end in itself." There is thus no universally accepted and one comprehensive definition that describes how participation works in development. The Oxford English Dictionary defines participation as "to have a share in" or "to take part in," thereby emphasizing the rights of individuals and the choices that they make in order to participate.

Participation has been defined both in narrow and broad terms as well. In its narrow connotations, participation is defined as the active engagement of citizens with public institutions, an activity which falls into three well-defined modes: voting, election campaigning and contacting or pressuring either individually or through group activity, including non-violent protests (Verba *et al.*, 1978; Parry *et al.*, 1992). Excluded in this definition are attitudes towards participation and participation in rural development efforts. In its broad terms, participation is a "collective sustained activity for the purpose of achieving some common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development" (UNESCO 1979). The World Bank (1996) defines participation as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them". According to UNDP (1993), Participation means that people are closely involved in economic,

social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. 'With regard to rural development . . . participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes' (Cohen and Uphoff 1977).

Participation according to United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1979) is a means of particularly those currently without power, to redistribute both the control of resources and power, in favour of those live by their own productive labour. Participation is viewed, by Paul (1993) as an active process by which beneficiaries influence the directions and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well being in terms of income, personal growth, self reliance or other values as they cherish.

Participation is also defined as sharing of the benefit of projects, as development economist view it, and also as communities contribution to decision making as social planners view it (Fenster 1993).

Oakley and Marsden (1984) in their attempt to define this concept have outlined a continuum of definition based on different interpretations ranging from defining participation merely as a means at one end of the continuum, towards describing it as a process with some element of peoples' control at the other end. As a means, participation is considered as; "... a voluntary contribution by the people to one or another of the public programs supposed to contribute to national development but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the program or criticizing its content" (Oakley and Marsden 1984). On the other hand participation can be defined as a process in itself where people have some control over the whole development process (ibid 1984).

4.Varieties Of Participation

There exist a different varieties and forms of participation in the literature of development. Arnstein (1969) has given eight influential and comprehensive levels of participation. These levels are manipulative, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Joan Nelson (1979) has identified three varieties of participation. They are:

- Horizontal variety of participation, involves partisan or political behaviour – voting, campaigning, interest group activity and lobbying. In other words, the

horizontal type of participation relates to activities to get people involved collectively in efforts to influence policy decisions.

- Vertical variety of participation includes any occasions when members of the public develop particular relations with elites or officials, relations that are mutually beneficial. Examples include patron-client networks and political machines. In both these cases the public is not as concerned with influencing the government as it is with developing the particular relationship and receiving benefits from it.
- Participation in administrative processes (which may overlap with either horizontal or vertical participation) takes the form of interest group activity to shape administrative decisions or of a particular exchange between patron and client; but usually it is more inclusive than either of the other two varieties. It includes decisions by farmers whether to adopt a new technology, rural dwellers meeting together to plan communal efforts to put up a market or taking part in civic education programmes.

The United Nations Capital Development Fund (1996) has also suggested eight levels of participation: manipulation, information, consultation, consensus building, decision making, risk-sharing, partnership and self-management. Pretty (1995) has given seven different and more detailed forms of participation. These are, passive participation, participation for information, consultative participation, participation for material benefits, functional participation, interactive participation, self-mobilisation (cite from Meldon, Kenny and Walsh 2004) (see Table below).

Types	Attributes
Passive participation	People willingly or unwillingly listen to what is being informed by the extension workers/outsideers without any reaction or interaction. It is unilateral. People are told what is going to happen or has already happened. Top down, information shared belongs only to external professionals.
Participation for information provider	People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researches using questionnaire surveys. People do not have opportunity to influence the proceeding as the findings are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.

Types	Attributes
Participation for material benefits	People participate by providing resources e.g. labour in return for food, cash or other material incentives Much on-farm researches also fall in this category as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in experimentation or in the process of learning
Functional Participation	People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement does not tend to be at early stages of project cycle or planning but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators but may become self-dependent.
Interactive Participation	Joint analysis to joint actions. People participate in joint analysis which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve inter-disciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning process. These groups take control over local decisions and so people have a stake in maintaining structure or practices.
Self Mobilisation	People already empowered, take decisions independently of external institutions. They develop contact with external institutions for resources and technical advice but retain control over how resources are to be used. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective advice may or may not challenge the existing inequitable distribution of wealth and power

*Table 1**(Source: Pretty1995)*

5. People's Participation: Advantages And Disadvantages

There are many factors that have played a significant role in encouraging people's participation in development activities particularly in the last four decades. Many countries around the globe and the major donors have embraced the model of participatory development due to its perceived advantages. There are arguments for and

against the promotion of greater people's participation. These arguments are less concerned with societal level participation in democratic and representative institutions, but more with people's participation in development activities. Literature on participation written at different times by different scholars has talked about various merits and advantage of the concept. However, at the same time the concept is not free from different demerits and disadvantages. Some of the merits and demerits of people's participation are discussed below:

5.1. Advantages

- People's participation in development projects bring effective social change rather than impose an external culture on a society (Stone 1989).
- Community participation in the design and management of a project greatly enhances the likelihood of project success due to improved goodness of fit and increased sustainability (Shrimpton 1989).
- Participation in planning and implementation of programmes can develop the self-reliance necessary among rural people for accelerated development (Lele 1975).
- People's participation can increase the efficiency of development activities in that, by involving local resources and skills, it can make better use of expensive external costs;
- It can also increase the effectiveness of such activities by ensuring that, with people's involvement, they are based upon local knowledge and understanding of problems and will therefore be more relevant to local needs;
- Participation helps to build local capacities and develop the abilities of local people to manage and to negotiate development activities;
- Participation can increase coverage when local people are able to assume some of the burden of responsibility and thus help to extend the range of activities of a development activity;
- Participation can lead to better targeting of benefits to the poorest via the identification of key stakeholders who will be most affected by the activities;
- Participation can often help to improve the status of women by providing the opportunity for them to play a part in development work (UNDP 1997).

- The decision-making without people's participation is ineffective and no development project can do without it (White 1994; King, Felty and Susel 1998)

5.2. Disadvantages

- Participation costs time and money; it is essentially a process with no guaranteed impact upon the end product. Participation can greatly add to the costs of a development activity and therefore its benefits have to be carefully calculated;
- Processes of participation are irrelevant and a luxury in situations of poverty and it will be hard to justify expenditure on such a process where people need to be fed and their livelihoods secured;
- Participation can be a destabilising force in that it can unbalance existing socio-political relationships and threaten the continuity of development work;
- Participation is driven by 'ideological fervour' and is less concerned with seeking to secure direct benefits for people from development activities than with promoting an ideological perspective into development; and
- Participation can result in the shifting of the burden onto the poor and the relinquishing by national governments of their responsibilities to promote development with equity (UNDP 1997).
- Participation has failed to properly address the issues of power and power sharing (Biggs 1999 in Cleaver 1999).
- It produces homogeneous local viewpoints where none previously excluded; they privilege certain voices whilst suppressing others; and they are insufficiently sensitive to the form of knowledge they produce (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

6. People's Participation And Rural Development

People's participation as a concept was formulated in the 1970s, in response to the growing awareness that the various approaches then employed for rural development such as community development, integrated rural development or basic needs did not lead to significant rural development as there was little involvement in development

projects of those undergoing 'development' and particularly the poor. An important milestone in people's participation in rural development was the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) at Rome in 1979 which declared participation by rural people in the institutions that govern their lives 'a basic human right'. If rural development was to realize its potential, the Conference said, disadvantaged rural people had to be organised and actively involved in designing policies and programmes and in controlling social and economic institutions. The World Conference of 1979 saw a close link between participation and voluntary, autonomous and democratic organizations representing the poor. It called on development agencies to work in close cooperation with organizations of intended beneficiaries, and proposed that assistance be channelled through small farmer and peasant groups (FAO nd).

After World Conference of 1979 and throughout the 1980s and 90s, participation in rural development as well as in development at large gradually became more established among governments, donors and international organizations to such an extent indeed that, as Stirrat (1997) put it, 'it is now difficult to find a rurally based development project which does not in one way or another claim to adopt a participatory approach involving bottom-up planning, acknowledging the importance of indigenous knowledge, and claiming to empower local people'.

Participation is an indispensable ingredient of development process. Advocacy of people's participation in rural development has been growing in stridence in recent years in development countries (Lalitha 2004). The success of any rural development scheme cannot be envisioned without the active participation of people. Hence the people's participation and involvement in planning is need of the hour to make efficient and optimum utilisation of scarce public funds and to make equitable distribution of benefits that accrue from these funds. People's participation is the core factor in the Approach Paper of the Tenth Plan of India where much importance is given to it in the promotion of agriculture, food and nutritional security, providing safe drinking water, primary health care, universal primary education, housing and connectivity to all, promoting participatory institutions like panchayats, cooperatives and self-help groups. Indeed, participation has become an essential ingredient and a prerequisite of good governance. The UNESCO has recommended that governments should adopt popular participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategy and should encourage widest possible active participation of all individuals such as women and youth organisation, in the development process in setting goals, formulating policies and implementing plans

(Commission for Social Development 1975). The UNDP (1993) in its Human Development Report commented, "People's participation is becoming central issue of our times". Thus now a days, the thinking of policy-makers, plan-maker, politician, administrators and international donor agencies like World Bank, IMF etc., moves around people's participation as a central component in any rural development programmes.

7.Rationale Of People's Participation In Development

The rationale for people participation is that the goals of our socio-economic development are not achievable unless the citizens actively involve themselves in the preparation, implementation and follow up of the developmental plans and programmes.

Other rationale for people participation is given below:

- Failure of the top-down approach has given way to bottom-up approach. Therefore apoplexy at the top and anemia at the bottom would be balanced.
- It would provide an open forum to the people to discuss their problems and find indigenous solutions which may prove efficient and economical.
- It would facilitate proper and effective mobilisation of local resources needed for rural development programmes.
- Direct people's participation encourages faster action, reduces delays and shortens the red tape. As a result of which administrative and implementation cost is reduced (Dhaka and Dhaka 2005).
- People involvement in planning for rural development helps to raise the level of their consciousness of their rights and responsibilities which in turn tend to facilitate social change (Prasad 1990).
- Democratic government is inconceivable without effective people's participation. People's participation and coordination are essential for effective delivery of service and proper implementation of RDPs (Mishra 1989).
- People's active participation makes officials aware of the problems of the community and ensures efficient and smooth implementation of various development schemes in the locality.
- The direct participation of people in project implementation ensures transparency and accountability and reduces corruption.

The World Bank's reasons for community participation are:

- Local people have a great amount of experience and insight into what works, what does not work and why.
- Involving local people in planning projects can increase their commitment to the project.
- Involving local people can help them to develop technical and managerial skills and thereby increase their opportunities for employment.
- Involving local people helps to increase the resources available for the programme.
- Involving local people is a way to bring about 'social learning' for both planners and beneficiaries. 'Social learning' means the development of partnerships between professionals and local people, in which, each group learns from the other (World Bank 1996).

Thus the main objective of people's participation are (i) better planning and implementations of rural development programmes; (ii) mobilisation of additional resources required for rural development programmes and (iii) empowering the people, particularly the poor people to play an effective role in rural development (Dhillion and Hansra 1995).

It becomes clear from the above mentioned rationale and objectives that peoples participation is a prerequisite for the success of any programme and it is more so in case of rural development programmes. Peoples participation in the rural development can be analyzed through four different kinds of participation which are discuss briefly in the following paragraph.

8.Participation In Planning And Decision-Making

The rural development is mainly concern with the rural people hence their participation in the process of planning and decision making is *sine quo non* for development. No developmental projects would be successful unless the participation of people is ensured. And rural development can be successful only when the rural poor majority understand its problems, realises its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers and maintains a constant vigilance on local administration (Deb 1986). People's participation in planning

and decision making helps in selecting the types of projects which are of direct benefit to them and will generate more gainful employment.

The participation in decision-making centres on identification of problems, generation of ideas, formulation of alternatives and assessment of options and putting selected options into effect (Cohen and Uphoff 1980 cited in Lalitha 2004). To involve the people in the planning and decision-making, the state government has decentralised the planning process thereby providing the ample opportunity to the people in the formulation of programmes according to their needs. The officials like District Development Officer (DDO) and District Planning Officer (DPO) at the district level and Block Development Officer (BDO) at the block level have been appointed to assist the local people in formulating the programme at the local level. The past experience however shows that people participation in the planning and decision making is very low as most of the programmes for rural development are actually prepared by the central government. The programmes like Community Development Project (1952), Drought Prone Area Programme (1970), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1989), Employment Assurance Scheme (1993), SGRY (2001), NREGS (2006) etc. are all centrally sponsored programmes. Thus it can be said that there is hardly any scope for the majority of people to participate in planning and decision making in the formulation of the programme for the development of rural areas.

9.Participation In Implementation

People's participation in the implementation of programmes and projects is another important criterion for rural development. According to Cerna (1992), historically the issue of participation is intrinsic to public programmes. He believes that in many developing countries the need for popular participation in the implementation of plan projects arose because of the following circumstances: (i) the enormously expanding role of public sector in launching development projects without a commensurate improvement of the mechanisms for the public involvement; (ii) the growth of international aid which amplifies financial resources, scope and number of government programmes while increasing the distance between the programme's "centre" and "periphery" and (iii) the traceability of recurrent failure in public programmes to alienation from their own intended beneficiaries. Hence, the need for popular participation has become an essential precondition for the successful implementation of a plan project. In the words of Uphoff (1992), Oakley et al (1999) and Ahmad (1998)

participation can be regarded both as a means and as an end. As an end, participation lifts the marginalized people from being excluded to being in partnership with public institution. As a means, it enables them to contribute to the development in a meaningful manner for their own, as well as for society's benefits. People taking responsibility for their own development is a better way to achieve improvement in economic and social conditions; it is more likely to be successful, more cost effective and more sustainable. The Government of Sikkim has taken effective measures to ensure people participation in rural development programmes through people's representative like panchayat. The institution like Gram Sabha has been strengthened by giving more powers and functions. This body is the only forum that provides direct participation of people in the formulation and implementation of need based programmes. The various rural development programmes like SGRY, RHS, NREGS etc. are now implemented by involving panchayats. The schemes that are of urgently required in the area is selected in the Gram Sabha and implemented through local population. The beneficiary groups of the area are also involved in the implementation of projects. The basic information regarding the schemes, availability of funds etc. are made public by displaying signboards for each scheme.

10.Participation In Monitoring And Evaluation

Monitoring is the process of observing the progress and resource utilization and anticipating deviations from planned performance while evaluation is concerned with the progress of the projects in meeting its objectives (Lalitha 2004). Both these corrective measures help in identifying the problems and other obstacles in the implementation of programmes. Besides, the people can obtain the information relating to the progress of the programme by participating in the monitoring and evaluation. The completion certificate to be obtained compulsorily after the completion of work from the villagers is a very important mechanism adopted in the state which made both officials and people representative accountable to the people. Through this people can evaluate the performance of government officials in projects being executed in their area.

12.Participation In Benefit Sharing

The people can show their interest in the participation only when the benefits of development are shared equally among all the categories of people. If people will not see any direct benefit from such participation they lose interest in the programmes and

projects launched in their areas although they share the ultimate benefit. The material, social and personal is the three kind of benefit that people can get from any projects. The programme therefore has to formulate and implemented keeping in mind that how much benefit a poor people can get out of it. In most of the cases it has been observed that elite and rich and not the poor masses are benefited from the development programmes. And the majority of the populace who are poor, marginalized is always deprived from such benefits. The reason is that rural people are ignorance of their rights; they are illiterate and thus cannot speak out of their rights and privileges. As a result the benefit of the projects meant for the poor cannot reach to them. To ensure the equitable sharing of benefits of development, the state government formulates a strict rule under which benefit are distributed only to the poor people. Further to encourage them to participate in the rural development programmes, all the benefits are distributed by convening the meeting of the Gram Sabha in their respective panchayats.

13. Concluding Observations

The success of any development programme is depended on active participation of the people. Participation of citizens in the development process is the heartbeat and pulse rate of development administration (Bava 1997). People's participation in decision-making, planning and evaluating policies plays a key and supportive role in local governance leading to sustainable rural development. The participatory approach helps to reduce development cost, increase perceived and actual benefits and increase awareness among the people and help in the mobilization of local resources, facilitates smooth and easy project implementation. It further enables people to have access and control over the resources and ensures that the benefits reach to genuine persons who are in need of such help. Hence, without people's participation, rural development initiatives are unlikely to be sustainable in the long run and rural inequities are unlikely to be redressed. The achievement of sustainable rural development therefore warranted active participation of people.

So far as the state of Sikkim is concern, the government has taken some measures to ensure people participation in rural development programmes through people's representative like panchayat. The institution like Gram Sabha has been strengthens by giving more powers and functions. This body is the only forum that provides direct participation of people in the formulation and implementation of need based programmes. To ensure the equitable sharing of benefits of development, the state

government formulates a strict rule under which benefit are distributed only to the poor people. Further, to encourage them to participate in the rural development programmes, all the benefits are distributed by convening the meeting of the Gram Sabha in their respective panchayats. However, in spite of these measures taken by the government, the prevailing social factors (like educational status, income level, ownership of social organisation etc.), politico-cultural factors (political interference and unwillingness of socially enlightened/ conscious class) and institutional and regulatory framework (structure, rules and regulations) greatly influence the thinking and the attitudes of the people towards effective participation. All these variables and indicators have been emerged not only as dominant factors in shaping or impeding the participatory practices at grass-root development projects but have been found to be significantly correlated. The backgrounds of people significantly determine participation. To overcome the various hindrances and ensure genuine participation, more measures should be adopted as the present initiatives of the government are very few and do not have significant impact on the overall development process. One can conclude therefore from above mentioned fact that participatory practices are still in nascent stage in the state and needs to be institutionalised.

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