
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1960s the term 'citizen participation' has been acquiring growing popularity, although it has yet to achieve a fuller meaning and depth. It represents a revived interest in the philosophy of participatory democracy promoted by the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville who propounded that individual citizen participation is essential to the survival of a democracy, and that democracy is undermined when citizens are incapable of influencing government decisions. A state that ignores the needs and interests of large sections of the population in setting and implementing policies is not an 'effective state'. Popular participation in government and development is emphasised in the ideals of the United Nations. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.

The development process in a developing economy will acquire a fuller meaning if the citizens not only associate themselves with planning development programmes but also participate fully in their implementation. The Eighth Five Year Plan document asserts: ". . . it is necessary to make development a people's movement. People's initiative and participation must become the key element in the whole process of

development."¹ Citizen participation, therefore, seems to be of much significance for proper development administration, particularly in relation to measures which require structural changes. It tends to bring the government closer to the people.

MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS

Citizens participation has come to mean the direct involvement of citizens in the process of administrative decision-making, policy formulation, and policy implementation. In relation to development, it embraces all forms of action by which they participate in the operation of development administration. It refers to the role of citizens as distinguished from that of public servants (in their official capacity) in exerting influence on the developmental activities of government.

"People's Participation", says the Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service, "is not merely their providing a certain proportion of the cost of a particular work in cash, kind or manual labour. It is their full realisation that all aspects of community development are their concern and that the Government's participation is only to assist them where such assistance is necessary. It is the gradual development of their faith in the efficacy of their own co-operative action in solving their local problems."²

The UNRISD promotes the concept of people's participation as "... the organised efforts to increase control over the resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control."³ Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in its Resolution 1929 (LVIII) defines it in terms of "involvement of people in contributing to the development effort, sharing equitably in the benefits derived therefrom and in decision-making in respect of setting goals, formulating policies and planning and implementing economic and social development programmes."

1. Planning Commission, *Eighth Five Year Plan 1992-97* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1992), Vol. I, p. 17.
2. *Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service*, Vol. I, November 1957, p. 3.
3. B. Dillon and M. Stiefel, "Making the Concept Concrete: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Participation Programme", in *Reading Rural Development Communications*, Bulletin 21 (University of Reading) 1987.

In practice, different countries attribute different meaning to people or popular participation depending upon their socio-political system and policy choices concerning the importance of economic growth, use of scarce resources and the role of planning and market. These range from popular participation as a strategy to mobilise national human resources for development to genuine transfer of power to people and their involvement in decision-making on matters affecting their welfare.

Citizen participation is often used in conjunction with the term 'participatory democracy'. It may range from the village level (construction of rural roads) to the national level (defence). It may involve only decision-making or extend to actual execution. Again, the participation may be direct (as in community projects) or indirect (through electoral representatives). Direct citizen participation is distinguished from indirect citizen participation, such as voting, in that most citizen participation is at the regional or local level. When participation is willed from top it becomes mobilisation, a means of getting things done. On the other hand, when it arises from bottom it generally focuses on distribution, becoming also a means, from the point of view of the groups able to participate, of obtaining a larger immediate share of the fruits of development.

Thus participation covers every kind of action by which citizens take part in development administration. In a real sense, participation can only be explained when the citizens who take part in the development effort are fully conscious of owning responsibility. In a narrow sense, participation consists in a convergent action by which the citizens take part in the accomplishment of administrative services without, however, belonging to the governing or managing organs.⁴ However, in a broader sense, participation comprises all forms of action in the form of decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. In the right setting, it implies greater decentralisation of government power and resources.

WHY PARTICIPATION

Citizen's association with or intervention in the development effort of a democratic country like India has several advantages. First, it kindles the interest of local people in imparting a new thrust to programmes of which they are the beneficiaries. In other words, participation is a means

of showing, by their behaviour and action, that they are capable of assuming responsibility. Secondly, it is a means of ventilating their feelings and thoughts. Third, it offers them an opportunity to demonstrate their willingness to do constructive work and show that they are good citizens. Fourth, it is a cure for the unresponsiveness and repressiveness of traditional decision-making mechanisms. It enables the citizens, especially the poor, to gain control over decisions affecting their lives through direct participation in programme operations. It is a remedy to check corrupt practices. Another advantage of community-based programmes is that they may be less of a financial burden on governments since they can be managed by volunteers or community-based workers. Moreover, citizen participation ensures that the accruing benefits of education, health and family planning programmes, for example, reach the residents of remote and rural areas.⁵

Participation of citizens in development efforts is gaining ground both through voluntary agencies and through non-governmental organisations. Perhaps this is an indication of the importance that issues of development have drawn attention to the perception of the citizens. Citizen participation differs from country to country depending upon their political, social and economic systems. In developed countries, participation is due to the citizens' having become conscious of their responsibility and wanting to be associated in some way or other with the process of governmental decision-making and action. In developing countries, however, participation has not gained much momentum. The governments of these countries feel the need to prompt people's participation because it helps them achieve their objectives. They initiate measures in this direction. Participation in both developed and developing countries has grown for three reasons.

The first is the expansion of government responsibilities. Governments have assumed increasing responsibilities in regulating the economies, planning for financial resources for accelerating development and exploitation of natural resources. In the social sphere they have the responsibility of improving the well-being of the people and decreasing the level of unemployment and poverty and disease. Political development relating to the building of the nation state, modernisation of law, strengthening of the judiciary, the legislature and the executive and other democratic institutions as well as many other broad aspects of

5. Geoffrey McNicoll, "Community-Level Population Policy: An Exploration", *Populations and Development Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1975, pp. 1-21.

development are among their other responsibilities. The government is today directly and indirectly a trader, industrialist, financier, and entrepreneur. To gain acceptance for its objectives and policies, particularly in the economic and social spheres, it has to rely on the citizens' willingness and understanding. As a result of the increasing functions of the state and government's desire to seek the cooperation of the people for its new policies and decisions, opportunities for contact between government and the people have multiplied. Citizens have become very much active and asserted their right of being heard and of voicing their opinions at various levels of administrative action.

The second reason which has led to the growth of citizen participation is the explosion of knowledge and communication. More new knowledge in science and technology and education has been developed in the last thirty years than in the previous history of mankind. Today people have received an education which has made them better able to understand the problems of life in society and a training which has made them responsible to carry out constructive public work. With the explosion of communications, the means of information have become diversified. These help the citizens of a modern state to exercise critical control over its activities. They feel that if they wish to exert pressure on governmental authorities, they can be better heard through collective action. The pressure will be all the more effective if the group which exerts it represents a large number of citizens.

The third contributing factor in the citizen participation is the perceived failure of the bureaucracy to meet the growing demands of the citizens at the local level. A continuing struggle is called for against the biases of bureaucracy and technocracy which are among the most widespread and persistent impediments to effective state support of participation. Against these tendencies, it is desirable that the people, through their own participatory organisations, acquire the capacity to control public officials and themselves undertake many of the present responsibilities of the state.

These three factors—expansion in the functions of the state, explosion of knowledge and communication, and the failure of the bureaucracy to meet the growing demands of the citizens—coupled with higher standards of living have made the growth of citizen participation in the development effort all the more effective and challenging. In most societies, democratic or otherwise, citizens seek representation of their interests beyond electoral participation: as tax payers, as users of public services, and increasingly as consumers or members of NGOs and voluntary organisations. Against a backdrop of competing social demands,

rising expectations, and variable government performance, these expressions of voice and participation are mounting.

INSTITUTIONAL BASIS OF PARTICIPATION

The intensity of people participation is attributed to differing endowments of social capital, the informal rules, and effective partnerships.

(i) Social Mechanisms

The social mechanisms that constitute social capital (defined in terms of the degree of participation in village-level social organisations) and myriad forms of more formal non-governmental activity directly reflect the heterogeneity of demands and preferences in society. However, these non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may fail to adequately address citizens' interests. Most NGOs provide services of high quality, but some suffer from serious inadequacies including poor community participation, weak accountability and paucity of funds. In several developing countries including India, NGOs engaged in service delivery are small in scale working in communities where the reach of public or private sector is weak or non-existent. In the West Bank and Gaza, for example, an estimated twelve hundred NGOs provide sixty per cent of primary health care services, and most agricultural services, low-cost housing schemes, and micro-credit. Similarly, in Cambodia some fifty NGOs provide micro-credit to rural and urban entrepreneurs in the absence of alternative government programmes for poverty alleviation.

Some NGOs are created opportunistically to advance the interests of narrow and privileged constituencies. Many others are civic education groups, advocacy organisations (Chipko Movement), and professional and business associations (FICCI) that represent particular interests or seek to educate the public about issues in their collective interest. Similarly, locally based organisations, such as rotating credit associations, farmers' associations, worker cooperatives, parent-teacher associations, and even religious congregations, are valuable not only for their ability to meet basic needs, but also for the role they play in building public trust. Associations and organisations that seek to work in public interest or promote the cause of their own members are:

- (a) Employer organisations, trade unions, professional associations, etc.;
- (b) Non-governmental organisations, cooperatives; and
- (c) Private voluntary organisations.

Yet despite the fact that these associations suffer from serious problems in articulating and pressing their members' interests or peoples' demands, these play a vital role in channelising their voice and in creating capacity for participation in public service.⁶

Ingredients of Effective Institutions: Various models of people's institutions have been functioning in India. Experiences show that effective institutions have the following ingredients:

- (a) "They are owned and managed by the users/stake holders, producers or beneficiaries themselves;
- (b) They are accountable to the community;
- (c) They have the capacity to become self-reliant over a period of time;
- (d) They have the capacity to diagnose the needs of the areas, interact with governmental agencies in order to draw need-based local level plans and to implement them in close cooperation with the administration; and
- (e) They tend to bring about integration of various segments of the society for the achievement of common goals of development."⁷

(ii) Informal Rules and Norms

The presence of rules conducive to social organisations can improve people participation, but the absence of such rules does not necessarily mean a permanent condition. These can be generated by participation itself, and here public authorities and other formal organisations such as professional associations can play a contributory role.

(iii) Effective Partnerships

Encouraging wider participation in the design and delivery of public goods and services through partnerships among government, business, and social organisations can enhance their supply. For example, public officials in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu achieved a substantial improvement in

6. Some examples of forms of institutionalised action in India are the Jamkhed Project in child and health care in Maharashtra, Bharat Agro Industries Foundation Programme in animal husbandary and social forestry, and Self-employed Women's Association of Ahmedabad.

7. Planning Commission, op. cit., p. 17.

management of irrigation systems through co-management of water resources by farmers. In several social programmes, many governments are searching for new institutional arrangements for public goods which involve both the private sector and voluntary organisations.

However, it is observed that effective citizen participation does not come easily. It requires enlightened government intervention, including improving the institutional environment where in social and human capital is created and strengthened.

PARTICIPATORY MECHANISMS

It is useful to discuss here a wide range of mechanisms involved in the participation. Involvement of citizens in developmental tasks can be achieved by persuasion, cooperation, mass education, consultation, demonstration and by assisting citizens' own associations.

(i) Mechanisms for Informing and Consulting

Informing and consulting mechanisms are widely used in areas of public decision-making. Public-private deliberation is not just desirable in such areas as health and agricultural production, but in fact critical to success. In many developing countries, such as India, Botswana, Mexico, and Uganda, by institutionalising public-private deliberation councils (e.g., Standing Labour Committee of the Indian Labour Conference) comprising representatives of labour unions, industry and government, policy-makers were able to get broad agreement on economic policy issues. Yet these mechanisms may not enable the government to be effective in the long run if its policies appear unresponsive to crucial societal demands. There is, however, a possibility that adoption of a specific mechanism or technique can help improve the quality of specific public services. For example, in Bangalore "report cards" administered by the Public Affairs Centre can provide valuable information about a public agency's quality of services reaching citizens. Besides providing valuable information to public officials, mechanisms for citizen and consumer consultation can introduce more transparency into the system.

(ii) Mechanisms for Design and Implementation

There is considerable scope for involving people in the design and implementation of public services and programmes. In education sector, for example, inadequate monitoring and supervision of local schools

lead to poor rate of return. There is compelling evidence to suggest that by increasing the involvement of parents and communities in school management it can improve its functioning. With the enactment of a statute in 1993 school development boards have been established in Sri Lanka to promote community participation in school management. However, effective involvement of parents in school management does not come easily. In Uganda, community training for parent-teacher association is being provided in several districts to ensure proper school management.

In the management of common property and natural resources, such as forests and wildlife, water sources and other environmental resources, citizen participation is of critical importance. Evidence also suggests that bureaucratic control over such resources has not only proved to be inadequate in many different institutional settings, but also in some cases led to confrontation between the users of these resources and the public officials entrusted with the job of managing them. Recognising the importance of sustainable development, NGOs and local communities are being extensively involved. The National Forest Policy (1988) in India embraces increased participation of local people in managing forests.

Similarly, to promote scientific use of land and water resources, farmers and labour are being associated in each command, watershed and catchment area in the development and management of soil, recovery of wastelands, minor irrigation and water resources in India. Government efforts are also directed towards securing people participation in the family planning, health, nutrition, education and community-based health programmes. Government also seeks the cooperation of the people in rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. For weaker sections and the rural poor, development of women and children, social defence and welfare of the aged, etc., help of voluntary organisations and communities must be sought.

And across Africa, Asia and Latin America, high levels of beneficiary participation in the design and management of rural water supply projects have been found to be highly correlated with project success.

(iii) Nature of Administrative Action

From the point of view of contacts between the citizen and the administrators, P. R. Dubhashi classifies administrative activities as:

- (i) "Citizen contacting administration in order to pay dues to Government.

- (ii) Citizen contacting administration to obtain dues or money from Government.
- (iii) Citizen contacting administration for obtaining licences and permits or getting legal sanction to his activity where required.
- (iv) Citizen contacting administration in order to get property rights registered.
- (v) Citizen contacting governmental agencies for obtaining specific services.
- (vi) Citizen contacting administration for obtaining general services.
- (vii) Citizen contacting administration for obtaining specific individual assistance.
- (viii) Citizen contacting administration for getting general support and guidance.⁸

Thus, the nature of administrative action itself is of great importance to the relationship between the citizen and the administrator.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT*

“Women’s participation in economic, political and public life was given special attention. Reflecting the different experiences and realities of countries, the issue of participation of women and the best methods to promote it range widely. In practice, approaches and solutions to problems must be sensitive to local cultural traditions and patterns. Among the important issues with regard to participation of women are the following:

Women are increasingly becoming more economically active in many parts of the world and they contribute significantly to the family, community and nation in this way. In many parts of the world, there remain patterns of discrimination against women. Their exclusion from decision-making and many aspects of life is an issue which must be addressed. A number of circumstances contribute to this problem. They were primarily caused by the under-estimation of the value of labour, particularly women’s labour, in the traditional economies. The traditional division of labour, including that based on sex, created quite

8. P.R. Dubhashi, “Administrator and the Citizen: Some General Reflections and their Relevance to the Field of Cooperation”, *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, July 1975, p. 329.

*United Nations, *Popular Participation in Economic and Social Development* (New York: UN DTCD, 1986), pp. 32-35.

unfavourable conditions for the treatment of women as a worker and as a human and social subject. The exploitative economic structures and systems have consistently benefitted from the abuse of women's labour being manifested particularly in such aspects as unequal pay, unacceptable work conditions, oppressive hours of labour and job insecurity. These activities resisted change even under the conditions of economic life and division of labour in modern societies.

The effect of such relationships manifests itself in several prejudices. Social traditions and customs in some areas have relegated women to an inferior position legally, socially and economically. A stereotype has arisen that women's biological role is a personal function rather than a social function. In economic relations, there has been a pattern of economic dependence of women on men. The exploitative economic policies and practices of multinational corporations in many cases have had a special effect on women. Women have also suffered from lack of education and skills for functioning in a larger society and economy than the home. In some instances, there is unwillingness to recognize the rights and freedoms of people to participate in public life, including women, as equal and significant subjects in that life. Some women also prefer to be passive object of a man's care rather than a responsible and self-reliant member of society.

The majority of countries nowadays have full guarantees of the equality and protection of men and women before the law. Many have constitutional guarantees of equality in their basic national documents. However, in many countries there is a gap between the provisions of these legal structures and the experience of women in daily life.

The process of eliminating material obstacles and of learning to practice equality can be slow and difficult and needs attention from men and women, from governments and communities. Action programmes, especially those adopted by the two world conferences of the United Nations Decade for Women,[†] should be more rapidly implemented through legal codes and national policy reviews intensification of education of men and women; and enforcement of relevant laws. However, the legal protection of women's position and equality in society is to a large extent conditioned by the recognition of women's rights as workers, producers and social subjects. This relates particularly to women in agriculture who

may not have such recognition in many countries. This may require changes in existing forms of social and economic organization.

Frequently, and particularly in developing countries, women are active in such informal sectors as self-employment, small industry, small-scale marketing, casual employment. However, they are often persistently excluded from equal participation in, and access to, the management of the formal economic structures, managing duties, public offices and politics. These practices are wasteful and work to the disadvantage of not only women but society as a whole.

Economic participation of women in national life is being repeatedly stressed as an important factor for overall social development. It should be consciously planned and included in systems of planning of national economies, as well as in long-term programmes of economic and social development. Action must be also taken in the educational field, information activities and cultural life to facilitate a broad women's participation in socio-economic activities.

Action is also needed with regard to economic institutions, government policies and legal codes. Government and international agencies, as employers, must set the example of equal and appropriate policy and practice with regard to employment and career advancement of men and women. The special and important role of trade unions should be fostered for achieving the necessary results.

Of critical importance to the whole issue of economic activity of women is the question of child care. As a general rule, child care must be recognized as a community responsibility, as well as a shared responsibility of both parents and institutions, and facilities provided accordingly. Child care institutions and their large-scale operation, in developing countries in particular, are a necessary precondition for bettering the position of women, parents and families as subjects of social and community life. The promotion of a broad, efficient, socialized and participative system of child care is therefore an essential factor of development.

Attention is also called to the phenomenon which has been observed in more than one country. At the time of the struggle for independence and nationhood, women are often actively involved and gain for themselves expanded roles and wider experience and recognition than previously. With the passage of time, however, there is often a tendency to "return women to the home." This tendency should be guarded against by continuing campaigns to institutionalize and facilitate the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of life. The same is true of recessions and economic crises that deteriorate the position of, and lead to unemployment, among women.

Education and training have a major role to play in facilitating the participation of women. Three kinds of education are needed education for all boys and girls up to a level of basic literacy which will enable them to be active and informed citizens, parents, husbands and wives, on-going education and motivation for both men and women with regard to the importance of full participation for both in social, economic and political life, and specific training for skills appropriate to women.

As to women's organizations, historically, these have been of two kinds: those where the membership was made up of women, but the issues of concern were general policy matters, independence or national development, including the effort for equality of women; and those where focus of concern was "women's issues", for example, marriage law, legal protection of women, and the right to political participation. One view holds that if the equality of women is guaranteed in law, it is inappropriate to have separate organizations for men and women. The other view is that women's organizations or women's sections within mass organizations can serve some important purposes—mobilization of women on issues of importance, education of women in their roles and responsibilities to society, advocacy for women on issues already formally resolved, but not yet effectively practised—such issues also can provide women important opportunities to participate in societies in which women traditionally have had little exposure.

Caution is needed in connection with this issue since diversity of interests and need among women can often be at least as wide-ranging as between men and women. The existence of women's organizations, therefore, should not be seen as a substitute to fuller participation in society. Although the conditions for the creation and activities of women's organizations differ from country to country, it is essential that these organizations enable and promote women's direct involvement in economic, social and political life, and that they organize and facilitate their broad engagement in self-management and other forms of popular participation."

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Effective citizen participation in development administration does not come easily. Several conditions have been laid down with a view to making citizen participation more effective. Below are some of them:

First, and foremost, participation requires that citizens who take part in the development process must be knowledgeable and competent. They

should be able to express their opinions freely and frankly. Second, care should be taken to keep the citizens adequately informed of the matters in which they will participate, the nature of their action, the level on which it will occur, and so on. The information required for taking decisions has to be clear and precise and adjusted to suit the citizens for whom it is intended. Third, participation requires a well-organised communication network which is adjusted to the questions involved. Fourth, both sides, namely, the authority and the citizens, must demonstrate willingness to take on responsibility. Working closely with people often requires redefining tasks and responsibilities, reallocating staff resources and developing new mechanisms for learning. Fifth, the state has an important role to play in enhancing the people participation. The World Development Report (1977) maintains: "Capable states are therefore likely to be those that strengthen and increase their efficiency of local organizations and associations rather than replace them. . . . To get users or clients to become partners, public agencies often must invest considerable time and energy in building ties with communities, in building commitment among their own staff, and in ensuring that minimum standards of quality and equity are maintained."

The role of government should be to facilitate the process of people's participation in development programmes and projects by creating the right type of institutional infrastructure—Panchayati Raj Institutions—particularly in rural areas.⁹ Government can also support participation by safeguarding the right of people to organise, to gain access to information, to engage in contracts, and to own and manage assets.

Finally, for participation to be effective, an important prerequisite is to make a practical survey of the environment for which it is intended to specify its proposed objective carefully, and to ensure that representatives of the administrative authorities who come into contact with the citizens have received a training which enables them to discuss matters with the latter. Striking the right balance between participatory mechanisms and enlightened government control is of critical success.

ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION

Analysis of citizen participation indicates that there is a big gap between theory and practice. The notion of involvement of the people in the development process has by and large remained a myth. This is so in

9. Planning Commission, op. cit., p. 17.

spite of the several pronouncements made in the successive plan documents as well as in the policies and programmes put forth by the central and state governments from time to time with regard to involving people in developmental activities. Speaking of his experience, C. Ashokvardhan writes in an article: "While the bureaucracy, barring exceptions, tends to be autocratic, swayed by fond notions of intellectual excellence and a certain broadness of vision, the political element castigates it as being too 'wooden', mechanical and stereotyped to respond to the needs and aspirations of the common man, much less to the 'vote bank' which demands special cares and cajolery".¹⁰

On the contrary, in many developed and few developing countries, the benefits of citizen participation show up in improvements in the process of public policy-making, in the delivery of qualitative services, and, in some instances, in improved rates of return. On the whole, one lesson of many such experiences is that effective citizen participation requires enlightened government intervention, including improving the institutional environment in which social and human capital is created.