Participation: ongoing reflections

The ubiquitous nature of terms such as 'participation', 'participatory' or 'participatory development', has been a constant dilemma for development agencies working on these issues. Through the years, their staff have been called upon to answer questions over why local participation is important, whether enhanced participation of local communities is always beneficial or how 'genuine' the participation in their projects or programmes is.

Understandably, there have never been hard and fast answers to any of the above questions. Perceptions of participation will keep changing to match the dynamic quality of the processes involved in enabling local communities to participate in the actions and decisions which affect their lives. One perceptible advance in this ongoing debate however, is that many of the references to participation in the generic sense are being replaced by more context-specific and agency-specific viewpoints. There is a growing cadre of development professionals for whom participation is no longer a 'new thing' but an area of work where they have a considerable amount of experience - both positive and negative. These experiences are now being applied to reflect upon, analyse and re-formulate existing policies, frameworks and methodological approaches. In our opinion, it is this process of repeated reflection in the light of new experiences, that maintains the value, vitality and relevance of participation - both in theory and practice.

This edition of Participation and Governance puts on exhibit, a series of such ongoing reflections. Each individual article speaks, from a different vantage of course, for a closer inspection and definition of participation informed by local realities.

In 'learning from the field', Shagun Mehta examines the issue of women's reservation at the panchayat level and whether it actually paves way for enhanced women's participation in the political process. Her conclusion that "reservation alone...will not guarantee participation of women, unless accompanied by conscious attempts to build supportive frameworks at local and national levels", is timely in the light of the recent, macro-level deliberations over reservation for women at the parliamentary level.

The theme article on "Participation in District Primary Education Programme", goes on to provide an illustration of one such framework for community participation: the Village Education Committee or VEC. DPEP, a recent Government of India undertaking is attempting to improve access to primary education by increasing the involvement of local level institutions like
the VECs in designing and managing educational services. The article, based on a more extensive study currently underway in PRIA, notes that although DPEP has revitalised the VEC structure, not enough attention has been devoted towards building awareness and capacities of potential ‘participants’.

The ‘theme’ section also includes an abridged version of a paper circulated by Save the Children Fund (UK) India on the issue of child participation in development activities. This illustrates neatly, the manner in which an agency has sought to clarify the meaning of participation in the light of its own mandate and the scope of its operations. The article may also be considered as expression of the fact that ‘the participants’ cannot be considered as a single, homogenous category. In other words, “advocates of ... participation (must) take into account age, class, gender, culture and other factors which may shape the ability of an individual... to participate.”

In ‘global voices’ we shift gear slightly and head towards the continent of Latin America. As those familiar with the historical antecedents of development discourse would recognise, it was the work of several Latin American authors, notably Paulo Friere and Ivan Illich, which nourished some of the earliest debates on a participatory approach to development. During a presentation by Mr. Manuel Chiriboga from ALOP, the staff at PRIA updated their knowledge of some the ideas which are currently shaping the nature of voluntary action in the region.

In PRIA we are conscious that there cannot be one perfect approach to participation - not today, not ever. A constant dialogue between individuals and organisations with diverse perspectives however can be a source of inspiration for all those concerned. We hope this edition of Participation and Governance will guide our readers in this direction.

Maya Pinto
Redressing reservation
Shagun Mehrotra

Context

The 73rd constitutional amendment better known as the New Panchayati Raj Act, was effectively enacted on 23rd April 1993 and has been viewed as a revolutionary measure to ensure representation of women in the political process. The constitutional amendment prescribes a structured form of decentralised governance and decision making by providing 33% reservation for women chairpersons at all three tiers of panchayats namely the gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parishads.

Debates on the issue of reservation for women in this country have been with us since the nationalist movement. In the post-independence era, women's groups while demanding for adult franchise argued that there should be no reservation of seats for women, no appointment by nomination and no co-option. In 1974, the 'Towards Equality' Report of the Committee on the Status of Women recommended however, that reservation be made for women at the panchayat level. This was also proposed by the National Perspective Plan for women in 1988 with women's groups simultaneously demanding for the emergence of a new kind of leadership. Academicians like Veena Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar went one step ahead and suggested that reservation for women should be extended to all levels of legislature both at the state as well as the centre (N. Shah and N. Gandhi, 1991).

The crucial question before us is whether reservation is to be viewed merely as a provision ensuring representation of women in greater numbers or does it entail a change in the direction of more equitable social roles, formations of women's collectives, and a redefining of development and governance from the perspective of the oppressed?

Redressing reservation: village-level experiences

If reservation will enhance participation of women in the political process, we need to understand and define participation in this context. Participation, if conceived of as a process for empowerment, should address the issues of access to and control over resources, reconstruction of unequal social constructs to more equitable ones, redistribution of power and self governance. Reservation though an enabling measure to enhance political representation will not automatically or alone ensure the above until it is viewed as an empowering strategy and backed up with the required support.

It is against this backdrop that the following write-up attempts to capture the extent to which reservation at the panchayat level has had an impact on the overall status of the women panchayat members. The write-up is based on PRIA’s experiences in Haryana while training and doing research with these women.
To start with some scenarios illustrating a marginal impact:

**Leela Devi** is the sarpanch of Badraula panchayat in Bahadurgarh block, district Faridabad. She is 50 years old, illiterate and has no previous political experience. She told us that she had not attended any training programmes after being elected and has no knowledge of the Act other than what her husband tells her. She was not aware of any gram sabha meeting in her panchayat but has attended gram panchayat meetings a few times. However, the meetings are conducted by her husband who takes the required decisions.

**Mishri Devi** is the sarpanch of Azadnagar panchayat, block Mathenel, district Rohtak. She is 55 years old, illiterate and has no political experience. She too has not attended any training on panchayati raj nor has any knowledge of the Act. She is aware of a gram sabha meeting having taken place in her area but she did not attend. She does not go for gram panchayat meetings as they are conducted by her husband.

On asking these women how they felt in this position of power, both of them expressed their sense of helplessness: “hum issue ache pehele thei, jannio ko kuch bolna mana hai, agale baar hum nahi khare honge” (we were better of earlier as women are not allowed to speak, we shall not stand for election again”). In both cases even the community had lost faith in this provision and expressed that:

“jannio tho kuch nahi kar sakni ish arakshan ka kya faida” (women can’t do anything, so what is the use of this reservation?)

The above scenarios clearly illustrate, that although reservation creates a ‘space’ for women in the political process, it does not automatically lead to their active participation in the area of decision making. If it is our intention to make the transition from nominal representation to participation, systematic strategies need to be evolved accordingly. This might include for example, the training of women representatives regarding the provisions of the 73rd amendment, or for purposes of capacity building and leadership development. A twin strategy might also be evolved involving the mobilisation of all women representatives on the one hand and all women in the community on the other to form collectives deriving strength from one another. Consider the following illustrations:

The contrast between these two ‘snapshots’ of the participation of women elected representatives, clearly demonstrates that part of the problem is the environment within the village as a whole. What is required therefore, is for development agencies, particularly those working with women

**Nachatar Kaur** is a upper caste woman sarpanch of Mastpur panchayat, district Ambala. She is 35 years old, illiterate and was a panchayat member for three years prior to the new Act. Her knowledge of the Act is good and she makes rounds in her panchayat settling small disputes. However, on interviewing one Sheila Devi, a scheduled caste woman who is an elected representative of the panchayat, we were told that Nachatar Kaur never calls her for any meetings to discuss panchayat matters. All development work has been directed towards the affluent families and nothing has been done for the lower castes. Ironically, even the panchayat samiti chairperson of that block is a woman, yet neither Nachatar Kaur, nor Sheila Devi have had any interaction with her.

**In Khetavas village**, district Rohtak, the scenario was quite different. The two women panchs of the village garnered the support of the mahila mandal as well as the community to actively participate and assert their presence in a gram sabha meeting held on 20th June at their panchayat. Initially, they sat very inconspicuously amongst the crowd in their ghungat while their husbands occupied their seats with the rest of the male panchayat members. No one noticed their absence till the mahila mandal raised a lot of hue and cry, pulled these women up and seated them on the seats previously occupied by their husbands. These two women members were initially very shy but soon developed some confidence and lifting their ghungats spoke briefly to the crowd. All the women cheered at this attempt.
elected representatives, to be sensitive to intra-village dynamics and plan their interventions (be it information dissemination, training or mobilisation of women), accordingly. Potential exists in terms of existing mahila mandals or women with leadership qualities which, if correctly tapped into, can speed up the process of sensitisation both of the women and the village as a whole. At a later stage (although not discussed in this write-up), development agencies will also have to consider the broader linkages between the panchayats and the other state and civil society actors.

**Recent developments....**

Today the National Commission for Women and other women’s groups are demanding for an 81st amendment and have recently presented a bill in parliament asking for 33% reservation for women in the parliament. Their argument is that reservation is not merely a women’s issue but a political issue and therefore affirmative action must be taken to ensure true democratic functioning. The government has responded by setting up a select committee (comprising of 18 male MPs and only 13 women!) to look into the matter. Women activists and MPs are proving that they are not willing to be pushed around on this and our demanding their legitimate pound of flesh (The Times of India, November 21st, 1996). A march to Parliament House was staged on November 20th, 1996 to demand passage of the legislation for one-third reservation without dilution or delay (The Hindustan Times, November 21st, 1996).

Reservation for women at higher echelons of the political machinery could well pave way for more gender-based equity in the processes of leadership and governance in India. However, in the light of some of the experiences shared in this write-up, we must caution ourselves against repeating past mistakes. Reservation although necessary, will not guarantee genuine participation of women, unless ac-

accompanied by conscious attempts to build supportive frameworks at local and national levels.

A final illustration: in one of our training sessions in Rohtak district, one of the women panchayat members informed us that: “mere ko jaldi ghar jane hoga, mera bachha ghar pe akela hai” (I will have to leave early as my child is alone at home). However as she got involved in the proceedings, on her own initiative she stayed on for the entire session. For the training team, this was a simple illustration of how any development process, requires constant reflection and re-formulation in the context of these reflections. At their own pace, women are beginning to reflect, analyse and act upon their situations. Development agencies need to build on these actions. It is only then, that reservation will pave way for a pattern of leadership, governance and development from the perspective of the oppressed.

**References:**


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Non-governmental organisations in Latin America

In recent years, discussions over the growth and nature of voluntary action in Latin America have been eclipsed by developments elsewhere such as the magnitude of the problems faced by NGOs in Africa; the diversity of contexts under which Asian NGOs operate; or the emergence of Eastern Europe as a new NGO destination. Notwithstanding these trends, the region continues to be home to a vibrant NGO community, many of whom have histories which antedate ‘discovery’ by official agencies.

In a presentation held at the PRIA office last month, Mr. Manuel Chiriboga who is currently the head of ALOP, a network of 33 NGOs spread over 18 Latin American countries, shed light on the present context for NGO action in his region. This article is based on some of his deliberations.

Emergence and growth of NGOs in Latin America

The emergence of NGOs in Latin America may be related to certain key processes. In the first place, most of the countries in this region boast of a rich history of community organisations and social movements. A plethora of civil-society institutions such as church-based groups, neighbourhood organisations and labour unions, existed well before the term ‘NGO’ came into existence!

This basis for voluntary action was strengthened due to changes which took place within the state and its relationship with non-state actors, starting from the 1970s and continuing till today. Historically, Latin American countries have operated on centralised models of development inherited from colonial rule. The first generation of NGOs were perceived of as an ‘alternative’ to the authoritarian rule enforced in many Latin American countries. Their impact on mainstream national development however, was marginal - limited to areas of research and popular education. It was only during the 1980s, when with structural adjustment reforms and eco-

nomic liberalisation a gradual dissection of state powers occurred and the political space for NGOs was created.

Present context for NGO action

While all Latin American countries have a distinctive developmental history, one common trend which links them together, is the magnitude of socio-economic and political change that has been occurring over the past two decades. Since 1980, over 18 countries have switched over from military to democratic regimes. Sadly, the social dimensions of this transformation have, in most cases, been neglected. Where per capita gross national product for developing countries as a whole increased by 3 percent from 1980 to 1990, in Latin America it decreased by 0.3 percent. From 1985 to 1990, the number of people below the poverty line increased by 25 percent (Fernandes, 1995). These statistics clearly validate the need for concerted efforts towards human development in the countries of the region.
NGO priorities

In response to the above and in keeping with global trends, there has been a steady increase in number of NGOs over the past decade. There are currently estimated to be over 11,000 NGOs operating in Latin America.

According to a recent study, the major thrust of NGO activity in Latin America is “education for development with emphasis on social justice”. Related priorities for NGO action include ‘rural development’, ‘development education’ and ‘relief’. Health issues also receive a considerable amount of attention with nearly one-fifth of all the NGO in the region undertaking some form of health service. Surprisingly, issues such as crime, violence and drugs which most outsiders would associate with Latin American countries, do not receive that much of attention (Fernandes, 1995).

NGOs and official agencies

Official agencies (donors and governments) have responded to the phenomenon of NGO growth in various ways. Donor agencies first supported NGOs in the expectation that they would exert a positive influence on the official aid practices of governments. The close links that NGOs were reputed to have with grassroots organisation was another reason for donor support.

The response of national governments is slightly harder to generalise about, with reactions ranging from rejection to acceptance and finally collaboration (Tandon, 1989). One example of the tension which exist between national governments and NGOs can be seen in Mexico where PRONASOL an agency of the government has functioned in the past to control the inflow of foreign capital to NGOs.

Concluding remarks

Today, as expectations of NGOs in Latin America grow, the community is target for more critical observation. Issues of NGO effectiveness, impact and sustainability are hotly debated in Latin America as elsewhere in the world. The latter half of this decade will be the real ‘test-period’ for NGOs to revalidate their worth.

For further reading:


Third International Workshop on the evaluation of social Development

Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands
November 4-8, 1996

The main theme of this workshop is to determine the principles and set action plans on measuring outcomes and impact of social development programme. The theme of the first workshop, (Swansea 1989), was largely conceptual and exploratory in nature. The workshop structured its enquiries around four themes: appropriate qualitative indicators-methologies-partnership and role of evaluator. The second workshop, (Amersfoort 1992) focused on the practice of the evaluation of social development. It was built on methodologies used in preparation, execution, reporting and reflection exercise. A major task of the workshop was also to prepare a set of guidelines for planning and implementation of social development evaluation.

This third workshop was organised by the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC). Seventy five representatives from about 20 international donor agencies, UN and Govermental aid agen-
cies, 16 voluntary agencies (NGOs), few academicians and independent development consultants participated in this workshop. Dr. Dharam Ghai, Director of United Nations Institute for Social Development delivered the inaugural address. He tried to define development in the present day context. He stated that it is difficult to agree on a single definition of development. However social development focuses on improvement in living conditions, provision of social security to the vulnerable, human development (provision of literacy, education, health, housing), human rights, participation and empowerment. Dr. Ghai stressed that development projects should aim to realise the human capabilities as conceptualized by Amartya Sen. He also added that an effort should be made to capture social development process in a more descriptive way.

Referring to the UNDP Human Development Report he says “how can you say that Canada is the number one state in social development?”

Following this, three speakers Mr. Max Van Den Berg (NOVIB) and Ms. Frances O’ Gorman (Independent consultant from Brazil) elaborated the concept of social development. Max highlighted that since governments have made commitment at the Copenhagen Conference, we need to monitor the development process. Ms. Harper stressed the present need to bring inspirations into the social development. Even though it was difficult to arrive at a common definition of social development, it set a tone of recent trends of social development process.

Prof. Peter Oakley who was the chief facilitator of the workshop, set the tone of the workshop, by reviewing the present state of the evaluation practices. In the last five years there has been increasing demands for a better understanding of the impacts of development interventions. There are three basic reasons to create a pressure to evaluate impact. They are (i) concerns about cost effectiveness, (ii) concern about institutional learning = to know what works and what does not, (iii) concern to ensure sustainability. Reviewing various stages of evaluation, Oakley states “the evidence suggests that development agencies in general are stronger on issues such as outputs, effort and activities, but less strong when it comes to determining what has been the result of all the endeavour”.

The first stage of measurement of social development projects is the outcome or the effect. Oakley stresses the distinction between ‘effect’ and ‘effectiveness’. A project may be effectively implemented but one needs to see what has been the effect of all the activities.

Impact is the last stage of measurement and it is rarely reached. There is a chance of getting confused between effect and impact. Effect refers to more immediate outcomes and impact refers to longer term change. There are few examples of the evaluation of impact of social development programmes that evaluators have found difficulty in assessing.

A lot has been discussed and debated about monitoring and evaluation but very little has been utilized in practices. Oakley says “the revolution has taken place on paper but not yet in practice”. Stakeholders involvement, baseline survey, quantitative and qualitative information are some of the issues in practicing M & E. The other set of issues are appropriate timing of the evaluation, particularly information and building cause and effect relationship. How to collect minimum and effective data to measure the qualitative change has been a constant struggle by the evaluators.

Through this workshop Oakley aims to achieve not an universal definition of M & E, but a broad framework which could able to deliver a minimum but relevant understanding of outcomes and impact of social development.

The participants in five different groups looked at the M & E experiences under five broad heads

1. Wider socio-political-cultural context that influenced the evaluation of the project.
2. Problems and issues in setting up M & E systems.
4. How the M & E information is stored and used.
5. Innovative examples of M & E.

The M & E experiences of Actionaid, PROSHIKA and ODA were shared in the plenary. Five small seminar groups discussed about 30 experiences and tried to answer the above five points.

Looking into the M & E case analysis, the participants articulated few principles and action plans to strengthen M & E. It was broadly felt that any M & E should in principle involve local people, it would be treated as a learning process and in the project level a clear policy needs to be developed to implement it. A series of difficulties in handling M & E were also articulated.

This brief report was prepared by Binoy Acharaya, UNNATI, India.
Participation in District Primary Education Programme: an exploration

Background

Since independence, numerous national level resolutions have been passed to increase literacy rates and expand educational opportunities in India. This is particularly true of the domain of primary education. Starting with the Constitution of India, the government pledged to universalize primary education in the country. Another authoritative pronouncement was made in the Draft Fifth Five Year Plan (1978 - 1983) which envisaged that all children between the age of 6 and 14 years should be in the school by the end of the decade.

Sadly, many of these pledges remain unfulfilled. Far from ensuring universal enrolment and retention for the eight years of full-time elementary schooling, the schools have found it impossible to retain the majority of our children for even a few years so as to make them functionally literate. One of the major causes for this failure is that common people do not have a say in designing and running the education system. The State has concentrated on 'delivering' educational services without attempting to remove the bottlenecks: bureaucratic, social, economic or cultural, which prevent communities from availing of these.

In recent years however, one notes a perceptible shift in government thinking in favour of more innovative and participatory education programmes. DPEP or the District Primary Education Programme is one such example.

About DPEP

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is based on varied country experiences and supplemented by those of various international agencies directly involved in the funding of primary education projects in developing countries. The programme has four main objectives:

- to provide all children access to primary education through formal primary schools or its equivalent through alternatives
- to reduce overall drop out rate at the primary level to less than 10 percent
- to increase achievement levels by 25 percentage points over and above the measured baseline levels
- to reduce disparities of all types to less than 5 percent

In practical terms, this involves the provision of grant financing for integrated sub-projects developed at district and state levels aimed at improving the basic education services. The emphasis is on expanded non-salary inputs for primary educational materials; improved class room teaching facilities; strengthened community/school organisation; and expanded technical and managerial support (The World Bank, 1994)
Participation in DPEP: structure and process

The distinctive feature of DPEP as suggested earlier, is the emphasis placed on community participation.

In conceptual terms, DPEP envisages the ownership of the programme to vest with the community. The intention is for these communities to be involved in evolving area-specific strategies to achieve the objectives of the programme. At the same time, the local communities can enforce public accountability of educational facilities at the local level. The ultimate goal of the programme is to create community-managed schools.

In order to fully comprehend community participation in the case of DPEP, a brief reflection on the structural arrangements for implementing the programme and the planning process involved, is required.

DPEP implementation involves the constitution of structural arrangements at four different levels (see Fig. 1). The apex body, i.e. the District Education Committee (DEC), is a representational body comprised of the members of the Zilla Parishad and headed by the President of the Zilla Parishad. The Block Education Committee (BEC) at the taluka level, is chaired by the Chairperson of Panchayat Samiti. Both the DEC and BEC along with the Cluster Advisory Committee do not have any 'real' power. The real power is invested with the lowest level representational body: the Village Education Committee (VEC).

The above becomes clearer when one considers the planning process envisaged through DPEP. The conventional planning process in the country moves from 'macro' to 'micro'. That means the state plans are prepared first and these guide the district plans. DPEP however proposes a reversal in the process. Under DPEP, the district plans are prepared first and the state plans are drawn out only after the district plans are complete. In fact, the state plans are nothing more than the intervention strategies to facilitate implementation of district plans. The district plans are prepared on the basis of the micro plans formulated at the VEC level. These encompass not only the infrastructural component, but also socio-cultural aspects and involve the community in the process in order to assess the functioning of the participatory structures initiated.

VEC experiences in Aurangabad

In order to examine DPEP from the eyes of the participants, a field level study was conducted in three talukas of Aurangabad district in Maharashtra state, covering a total of 14 villages and schools.

The State as well as the district was selected on the
basis of the progress of the project with respect to community participation.

The study brought to light that although VECs had been in existence in several of the villages prior to DPEP implementation, as institutions they had remained inactive - almost in a state of oblivion. Under DPEP, in the year 1994-95 numerous VECs were constituted and old ones re-activated. As the data in Table-1 shows, in about 89 percent of the sample villages VECs were created afresh. DPEP has thus played a major role in revitalising VECs.

On the negative side however, it was observed that although VECs are expected to play a major role in the day to day functioning of the schools (suggesting changes in school timing, vacation and holidays as per local needs etc.). the final decision-making authority continues to be exercised by the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad.

The method of constitution of the VECs also provided insights into the extent to which this institution has begun to take control of the education system in the village. As the data reveals, in 10 out of the total sample of villages, VECs have been formed by the teacher of the primary school through nomination.

Finally, in most cases the level of awareness about the existence of the VEC and its role is limited. Discussion with the VEC members revealed that their knowledge was limited to the financial component of their work. It was further found that the resource contribution of Rupees 500 expected from each village has been provided in most cases by the VEC members themselves or the teachers.

**Some recommendations**

The following recommendations have emerged from our learning in the field

- Attempts should be made for proper and wider sharing of information.
- Panchayats should be mobilised along with the gram sabhas to play an active role in the programme
- Formation of VECs should be done in a more democratic way and panchayats and gram sabhas must play an active role in constituting these

- Capacity of VEC members with special emphasis on women and members from lower socio-economic strata should be strengthened.
- Capacity of the implementing staff of various levels of practice of participatory stance needs to be strengthened

**References:**


The above article has been extracted from "Participation in District Primary Education Programme: An Exploration", which provides a more detailed account of DPEP, particularly with respect to the nature of IDA credit provided for the initial phase of implementation.
Save the Children Fund on: “child participation in development”

The Save the Children Fund (SCF) currently operates in 13 states in India. Its programmes aim to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable children by recognising and addressing (where appropriate) the causes preventing disadvantaged communities from improving their lives, and by strengthening the capacities of children, young people, their families and communities (SCF, 1995).

Central to SCF’s work is the issue of ‘child rights’ as enshrined in the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child. Rather than acting as a ‘children’s rights’ agency in the narrow sense, SCF seeks to promote child rights in broader terms as part of raising the ‘children’s agenda’ in development. In this context, SCF India lays emphasis on the participation of children in development activities. The agency recently circulated a paper which attempts to clarify the meaning of child participation. An abridged version of the text follows.

Why (child) participation?

Participation of people in development activities is usually advocated on grounds of efficiency, enrichment or empowerment. These arguments may also be employed to justify child participation in development. In addition, it is possible to suggest that:

1. Participation by children in development activities can contribute to their learning or more specifically: ‘learning by doing’. It can provide a basis for the development of skills, knowledge and experience and it can assist in the transfer of these from one generation to another.

2. In most households (especially in poorer countries), children often contribute to the well-being of other household members. However, these contributions are grossly undervalued. Moreover, families generally do not recognise the capacities of children as decision-makers even when, as workers, they are critical to economy of the family. An emphasis on child participation can be used to combat these trends.

3. Participation by children in matters that affect their lives is, in fact, not such a novel concept as might first appear. There have been instances of children’s participation in various cultures and in different periods of history. It is only in recent times, that ‘young people’ have been judged incapable of participating in public policy decisions.

4. Finally, if adult participation in politics aims to promote democracy and enable responsible citizenship, participation by children in decisions that affect their lives, can lay the foundation for this process. There is an inherent contradiction in excluding children from participating in decisions that affect their lives and yet expecting adults (at the age of 18) to actively and responsibly participate in decision making.

Child participation: some guiding principles

1. Children do participate to a lesser or greater extent in decisions that affect their lives. This needs to be recognised.

2. If we aim to understand children, we must involve children in this process rather than interpreting their lives through adult perceptions.

3. Children’s participation can be viewed as part of a ‘political’ process if it seeks to develop their capacities, capabilities and learning, and enables them to gain more control over decisions that affect their lives.

4. Children are not a homogenous group. They have different aspirations, needs and agendas.

5. The ability of children to participate depends on a variety of factors including competence to understand the perspective of other persons. It is important that advocates of child participation take into account age, class, gender, culture and other factors which may shape the ability of an individual child to participate in a development project.

Limits and possibilities

Through the years SCF has encountered numer-
ous barriers in attempting to create opportunities for children to participate in development activities. Some of the most prominent barriers are that:

- Development agencies lack experience on communicating with children
- Lack of understanding especially amongst adults about children’s rights
- Failure to collect child specific information
- Prejudices among adults about children’s ability to participate
- Paternalistic attitudes on the part of adults who feel that they know about children’s lives rather than children themselves
- Cultural attitudes may discourage children’s participation

At the same time, however, encouraging learning points are beginning to emerge from the thought and practice of agencies concentrating on supporting activities for children. There are several cases around the country where ‘adults’ have taken the initiative to introduce the concept of solidarity and support to groups of children and children have responded actively through campaigns and slogans. State institutions like panchayats while adult concepts also offer possibilities when related to the processes of children’s education, empowerment and institutionalisation towards achieving child rights and promoting the children’s agenda. The promotion of a children’s agenda can form an important component of a sustainable approach to development. It offers markers for social development and environmental projects and establishes links between present concerns and future aspirations.

SCF is conscious that there cannot be one perfect approach which will build on the abovementioned possibilities. An important starting point however, is to create space for children to be involved in development activities and also to make adults more sensitive to children’s views and needs.

Adapted from:
“Approaches to Child Participation - a discussion paper” by N. Singh and R. Trivedi, SCF (UK) India, 1996.
Panchayati Raj Initiatives

- Annual Review Meeting (27th - 30th August, 1996), PRIA, New Delhi

PRIA and the Network of Regional Collaborating Support Organisation (NCRSOS) are jointly involved in an initiative to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The intervention commenced in August 1995. In the month of August earlier this year, a need was felt to review the activities undertaken by the NCRSOS and PRIA in this regard and for teams from different regions to share their experiences. An “Annual Review Meeting” was held accordingly, at the PRIA office, which was attended by all those working in the PRI programme.

The meeting aimed:

a) to reflect on what the joint initiative had achieved so far and the impact of the interventions on PRIs.

b) to analyse the future role and actions the NCRSOSs would embark on to further strengthen PRIs.

The structure of the meeting was as follows:

Day One was devoted to organisation specific presentations on work completed to date.

Day Two and Day Three were devoted to activity specific group discussions and presentations.

Day Four to organisation-specific future plans.

- PRI Workshop on Research and Documentation (12th - 14th November, 1996), PRIA

15 participants from 8 NCRSOSs and the PRIA team were involved in a three day workshop in order to:

- discuss and analyse the past research work undertaken
- develop and finalise some common research studies to be undertaken by the NCRSOSs
- prepare detailed organisation specific study plans

Through a series of lectures, presentations and group discussion, some common framework for future research studies were developed. The programme also included a session by Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Executive Director of PRIA, on participatory research.

A report of this workshop will be finalised shortly.

- Three day workshop with voluntary agencies of Haryana

As part of the Panchayati Raj Initiative, PRIA has developed a collaboration with 12 grassroots organisations from 6 districts in the state of Haryana. In order to examine the past years efforts, a meeting was convened at PRIA from the 14th to the 16th of October. The objectives of the workshop were:

(a) discussion and exchange of views on the work done
(b) developing a common understanding of work related objectives
(c) determining the future strategies and plan of action

Through a series of large and small group discussions, presentations and some lectures, this meeting brought into perspective our joint efforts in Haryana and helped prepare an in-depth joint strategy of future interventions. Focus areas include: gram sabha meetings, training and skill development of women leaders, bottom-up planning processes, research and documentation and preparation of educational material.
The meeting was attended by representatives of 10 voluntary organisations.

♦ Participatory Development

♦ Training Session on Participatory Development at Apni Yojna (18th-19th September, 1996), Churu, Rajasthan

Apni Yojna is an integrated water supply, sanitation and health education project. Spread over 3 districts, the project envisages to cover 956 villages and 11 towns. An autonomous unit called the CPU (Community Participation Unit) has been established for the implementation of complementary measures viz. the involvement of community in planning, decision making, construction and management of facilities provided within the village. The unit is being run by a consortium of five NGOs.

A one and a half day training session on Participatory Development was facilitated by two members from PRIA for the staff of CPU which consisted of 15 community facilitators and 6 community organisers. The objective was to enhance the conceptual understanding of participatory development, primarily on aspects such as: the meaning of participatory development, its necessity and the processes involved in its practice.

The overall evaluation of the programme was positive with 91 percent of the participants finding it beneficial and nearly all appreciating the use of simple language, flexibility in approach, effective sharing of experience etc.

♦ Fourth Training Workshop on Participatory Development (November 4th-8th, 1996), PRIA,

With the two main objectives of:

(a) creating and strengthening conceptual understanding of participatory development and

(b) understanding different methods and processes to translate participatory development in practice, the above mentioned workshop was organised by PRIA. Sixteen participants representing XISS, Ranchi; UNDP

Delhi: NDDB, Anand; Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, Delhi; State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development, Kalyani; SSK, Lucknow; NIRD, Hyderabad; Chief Executive Officers from Maharashtra (sponsored by UNICEF Bombay) and ISPWD-K attended this workshop.

The training focussed on providing a historical overview of participatory development, gender perspective in development, experiences from the field and methods/techniques involved such participatory training, participatory planning, participatory monitoring. The participants were also given an opportunity to work on an assignment concerning strategies to promote participation in their projects and programmes.

♦ Other training programme and workshops

♦ PRA Workshop (29th October to 3rd November, 1996), Chitrakoot, U.P.

A PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) workshop was organised by Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, Lucknow which drew together several participants from different states to learn about, discuss and reflect upon the usage of PRA techniques. The workshop included a mix of lectures and actual PRA exercises. Five members from the PRIA team attended the programme.

Resource Mapping Exercise

- Reportage compiled by Yogesh Bhatt, Archina Dhar, Namrata Jaitli and Shaugun Mehrotra
Books


The last decade of the twentieth century is witnessing continuous shifts in the development paradigm in favour of participatory approaches. Greater emphasis is being laid on involving people in order that they may develop a sense of belonging and ownership of the programmes, leading towards sustainability.

This book attempts to juxtapose some of the national and international experiences in participatory development with experiences gained at the grass-roots. The book contains separate sections on appropriate technology, community based institution and gender equity. The papers included in the book have been contributed by eminent development professionals and scientists. Recommended for policy makers, field practitioners, academicians, students and others involved in fostering participatory and sustainable development.

Available from Indian Potash Limited, Pragati Tower, 26 Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110 008.

✧ Voices of Resistance, Silences of Pain.


A resource guide on violence against women, organised into two parts, it consists of an annotated bibliography containing about 800 references on various manifestations of violence against women in the Indian context. Part Two contains relevant information relating to organisations, audio-visual materials, legislations, conferences and public hearings relating to violence against women.

A handy source of reference for scholars, researchers, activists and all those interested in the issue of violence against women.

Available from Anju Vyas, Centre for Women’s Development Studies, 25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg, New Delhi-110001.

✧ Panchayati Raj Aur Jan Sahbhagita: Karyakarta Prashikshan


A training manual for those working on the issue of Panchayati Raj and people’s participation, which stresses upon the need for critical understanding of issue and clarity in planning interventions keeping the learning/training needs of the elected representatives in mind.

This manual is based on a ‘Read and Do’ approach. It consists of fourteen exercises and each exercise in accompanied with a facilitators note, which must be read by the facilitator before beginning the exercise. This note contains highlights of the topic, processes and methods to be followed during the exercise. It also contains additional learning materials with exercises which require deep logical thinking. A very handy and effective manual for Panchayati Raj workers.

Available from PEACE, D-7/7070, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

✧ Beyond Rio: The Environmental Crisis and Sustainable Livelihoods in the Third World.


Despite the prolific international debate on sustainable livelihoods there does not seem to be any clear understanding of the operational significance of this concept. This book attempts to raise more questions rather than to offer answers on this vital issue.

Since the issue of sustainable livelihoods basi-
cally relates to the survival of the rural poor, the bulk of the case studies in this volume deal with the issues related to natural resource management. It sheds more light on the causes for the destruction of sustainable livelihoods, particularly of indigenous people, than on their creation.

The book is essentially designed to stimulate discussion by posing provocative questions on whether environmental sustainability depends on socio-economic sustainability, and shows that there is no straightforward answer to the question of how environment, development and employment are inter-related. The book concludes with a discussion on the appropriate promotion of sustainable development, and recommends a need for a pragmatic approach if the twin objectives of sustainable development and job creation are to be pursued simultaneously.

Overall, it makes for interesting reading, and forces the readers to reflect on the issue of sustainable livelihood once again.

✦ Joint Forest Management: The Haryana Experience.


This book is a discussion of JFM concept in the context of a change from the state-centred top-down forest management system to one which is decentralised and local need based. It is based on the experience of the author in the Joint Forest Management initiative in Sukhomajri, a village in Haryana.

Chapter 1 describes the concept of 'social fencing' and how the new participatory approach to local natural resource management was worked out. Chapter 2 describes the Haryana Forest Department's early efforts to extend the Sukhomajri model to other villages. Chapter 3 deals with the complexity of people forest relationships that were established in the process. Chapter 4 examines the complex problem of managing the gram reserves by the newly Reserve Management Society. Chapter 5 focuses on women's issues. Chapter 6 examines the crucial issues of the acquisition & functioning of the Hill Resource Management Societies (HRMS). Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the prices charged to the HRMS by the forest department of fodder and bhabbar grass leases. Chapter 8 gives a detailed account of the meetings of the state working group (set up to guide the introduction of JFM in Haryana). Chapter 9 examines the compatibility between the existing structures and decentralised mechanisms. Chapter 10 takes a look at the present situation in Sukhomajri.

In sum, the book is a good examination of JFM, the rise of village institution during the process and the current situation in light of early gains.

Available from Edutech, Centre for Environment Education Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad 380 054.


With the introduction of planned development since the early 1950s, several mega-projects for irrigation, mining, power and industries have been started, resulting in mass displacement of local communities.

This study provides an overview of the displacement which has taken place in the state of Orissa over four decades with a view to shedding light on the nature and magnitude of the problem. It also suggests the kind of measures that are necessary, both in respect to policy and action, to make rehabilitation programmes effective.

There are also chapters on the impact of displacement on women and children, the compensation components of rehabilitation schemes and rehabilitation, resettlement and new environment. The study ends with a comparative analysis of the quality of life of displaced communities.
Working Paper

Participatory Development and Gender: articulating concepts and cases.


This paper emphasises the need for a gender perspective in the participatory development field. It examines some of the obstacles present in contemporary social systems and also suggests ways of surmounting these. It presents various debatable positions with regards to the project paradigm. An effort has been made to spell out the implications of gender differentiation with numerous examples from the literature and interviews.

Available from Head of Publications Service, OECD, 2, rue Andre-Pascal, 75775 PARIS CEDEX 16, France. Also from sales outlet of OECD publications in India at Oxford Book & Stationary Co., Scindia House, New Delhi-110 001.

Video Film

Panchayati Raj

Goan Nahi Kinhi Panch ka. 58 minutes. Gujarati & Hindi (dubbed version), Rs. 300.

In Goan Nahi Kinhi Panch ka, health worker Mohan bhai says that "to weekly accept injustice is surely a crime..... real Swaraj will not come by the acquisition of authority by a few but by all to resist authority when it is abused." But who will bring about this Swaraj?

In context of the New Panchayati Raj Act, this film attempts to explore some basic questions:

- Will women be able to attain true Swaraj? How?
- Can government officials be made accountable to the Panchayats, and Panchayats to the people (Gram Sabha)? How?