STRENGTHENING PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PETER OAKLEY

SOCIETY FOR PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ASIA
42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi- 110062
PREAMBLE

During the last 7 years, PRIA has been publishing a variety of materials arising out of its work in the field. These materials have focused on issues and programmes that we have been working on through our research projects, workshops, and training programmes. Thus we have published periodicals, workshop reports, case studies and manuals for field workers.

In the course of our interaction with colleagues and partners within India and internationally, we have come across analytical and conceptual materials and papers produced by them on issues which are of interest to us and our partners in the field. So far, we have had no regular mechanism for dissemination of such materials. It is in this context that we are happy to intimate a series of Occasional Papers. These papers are intended to become a vehicle for sharing the ideas and thoughts of our colleagues and partners in the network with others. They will appear from time to time for use by those who are interested in such issues.

We invite your reactions and suggestions to this series.

New Delhi

October, 1988
INTRODUCTION

Any study of the concept of ‘participation’ can adopt a variety of different perspectives upon which to focus in examining the concept. We could examine ‘participation’ as a societal process of the gradual incorporation of peripheral areas into the central society; we could examine it in terms of broad political processes and the increasing involvement of previously disenfranchised groups in the political life of a country, or we could approach it from an essentially bureaucratic perspective in terms of the involvement of local people in formal, administrative structures.

The perspective which we have taken is that of intervention in the process of rural development. Government and non-government organizations alike currently are intervening in rural development to try to bring about participation. In other words we are examining approaches to and the means by which participation of rural people in development activities might not only be encouraged, but also actively promoted. Such interventions are commonly undertaken by the use of projects, many of which receive some form of external funding. For example 3 of the case studies we examine are externally supported rural development programmes or projects which promote a form of participation as a central objective of their activities.

A major difficulty which a paper like this has is in the use of descriptive terms. There is little standardization in the literature in the use of such terms, which range from ‘rural people’, the rural poor’, ‘the community’ to such terms as ‘local groups’ and ‘community residents’. Unless we are addressing ourselves to one particular section of rural society, e.g. women or youth, we are bound to deal in over-aggregations. For the purposes of consistency, therefore, we rely more heavily on the term ‘the rural poor’. We do this since the paper does refer to rural as opposed to urban people and, no matter what forms of economic or social differentiation might exist amongst them, the overwhelming majority of rural people in this world are poor.

Finally, in relation to the vast amount of literature and practice, the text is brief. It is written with the emphasis on analysis and the highlighting of issues, and less on description. It is to be used for discussion and critical comment, and it is not to be considered as a definitive statement on the central concept of ‘participation’.

University of Reading
UK

DECEMBER 1987
The Nature of Participation in Rural Development

Since the mid 1970s the concept of participation has become increasingly influential in the planning of rural development. In its broadest sense participation involves "... the act of taking part or having a share with others in some action". (ILO, 1984, p. 18)

In the context of rural development participation is concerned with how to bring about some meaningful involvement in development on the part of those who live in rural areas and who depend upon the rural sector for their livelihood. In such very general terms, participation is seen as

"...a means for a widening and redistribution of opportunities to take part in societal decision-making, in contributing to development and in benefiting from its fruits". (ILO, 1984, P. 18)

The purpose of this chapter is to take the concept of participation and to examine in what ways it has been interpreted in terms of rural development projects; and to review the various frameworks within which participation is operationalized. There is now, of course, a vast literature available on the concept of participation and our task is to make a brief but meaningful introduction. A more complete examination of the concept can be achieved by consulting this literature (Cohen and Uphoff, 1979; Pearse and Stiefel, 1979; Oakley and Marsden, 1984). This chapter is intended to provide a very brief but analytical introduction to the concept as the background to the more substantial examination of the practice of participation which is to follow. We can begin to capture the flavour of 'participation' by noting a number of different statements which have been made on the issue of participation in rural development. These statements emphasize the point that 'participation' as a dynamic force in rural development cannot be incorporated in any single definition:

"Participation is considered a voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticising its contents". (1)

"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". (2)

"Participation is concerned with... the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, hitherto excluded from such control". (3)

The above statements illustrate the fact that there are widely divergent views on the nature of participation in rural development. It will be important, however, to bring some structure to this range of views if we are to meaningfully examine 'participation'. We can begin to do this by identifying two broad but very different interpretations of participation which, in contrast, could be seen as either end of a continuum:

(i) Participation as a Means

In this interpretation participation is seen as the means to achieve some established objective or goal. In other words participation is a way of using the economic and social resources of rural people to achieve predetermined targets. In this form of participation, the results of the participation in terms of the predetermined targets are more important than the act of participation. The result may indeed be a welcome improvement in the physical environment of rural people and it may well coincide with local needs as perceived by those people.

Government and development agencies who are responsible for providing services and who have the power to
control resources see participation as a means to improve the efficiency of their service-delivery systems. This emphasis on improvement and efficiency categorizes participation as a managerial technique which is intended to benefit both provider and consumer. The consumers are co-opted into the delivery system and become the objects of its dictates. Essentially this is an indirect form of participation. (4)

Technically it could be argued that it is representative, since the consumer apparently has some influence on the delivery system, but the participation is limited to comment and advice and does not lead to any direct control over the delivery system. In a general sense participation in the benefits of the delivery system is the more characteristic outcome of this form of participation.

Participation as a ‘means’ is essentially a static, passive and ultimately controllable form of participation. In terms of rural development programmes and projects it is the form of participation which is more commonly found. In terms of such projects, however, it is seen as a temporary feature, an input into the project which is required in order to achieve objectives. Rarely do such projects take a longer term view. Inevitably the emphasis is upon rapid mobilization, direct involvement in the task at hand and the disbanding of the participatory effort once the task has been completed. It is right to argue that rural development projects would benefit from a more direct participation by the local people, but it is equally important to ensure that the participation is not just a facilitating technique for the project’s objectives.

(ii) Participation as an End

An alternative view is to see participation in rural development as an end in itself. In this view the emphasis is upon participation as a process in which confidence and solidarity between rural people are built up. In the context of a rural development project, participation as a process is a dynamic, unquantifiable and essentially unpredictable element. The participation is created and moulded by the participants. It is an active form of participation and its nature responds to local needs and changing circumstances.

As a process, participation is seen as a permanent feature of rural development, an intrinsic part which grows and strengthens any rural development project. As a process, it will last the life of the project and, more importantly, will extend beyond the end of a project into a permanent dynamic involvement. As a process, participation is not seen merely as a managerial technique, but more as a technique to facilitate or ‘enable’ rural people to have a more direct involvement in rural development. The critical elements in this process are those of awareness-creation and organization-building; the two fundamental bases for effective participation.

More generally, participation as a process involves the notion of ‘bottom-up’ or the generation of influence or involvement from the grass-roots level. As a result this form of participation has come to be identified with development activities outside the formal or government sector. It is seen to be concerned with building up pressures from below in order to cause change in existing institutional arrangements. It does not begin necessarily with any preconceived set of quantifiable targets or objectives: it is more concerned to develop a genuine dynamic of analysis and involvement and then allow the process to follow its natural outcome.

If we look in a bit more detail at participation as a process, we can understand this process as a series of discrete stages and we can characterize any participation process in terms of the stage it has reached. In the first instance we can identify a stage of marginal participation. At this stage the participation by the people is limited, transitory and results in little direct influence on the outcome of the development activity. In many rural development projects where plans and objectives are determined beforehand and introduced into rural areas, rural people achieve only a marginal influence on the project’s performance. At a different level there is a stage of substantial participation. At this stage rural people are actively involved in determining properties and implementing activities, even if the mechanism for these activities is externally controlled. Substantial participation is the means by which many rural development projects achieve their objectives, but there is evidence that the substance of the participation is
limited to the benefits of the project activities. Finally we can conceive of an ultimate stage of structural participation. In this form participation is an organic element of the project and the ideological basis of all project activities. In structural participation rural people actively and directly intervene in the development process and have the power to have their voice heard.

The richness of the concept of participation is reflected in the whole range of analyses that we can employ in its study. We can, for example, examine a range of forms of participation in terms of how it is initiated. In this respect we can distinguish between spontaneous, induced and coerced, forms of participation. Spontaneous participation is the authentic emergence of locally based initiatives, for participation, which have little or no external support and which, from the very beginning, have the basis to be self-sustaining; induced participation which, it could be argued, is more commonly found refers to participation as a result of external initiatives in terms of seeking support or endorsement for external plans or projects; and a coerced form of participation whereby people are involuntarily mobilized or organized to undertake activities over which they have had neither any say or control.

Similarly we can distinguish forms of participation in terms of whether they see cooperation or promote co-determination. Both forms involve the interface between the decision-makers and those affected by the decision. In the former, the participation involves the rights of participants to receive information, to submit protests, to make suggestions and to be consulted before final decisions are made. In the latter and intrinsically higher form of participation, this participation confers on the participants a share in formal power, varying from the right to impose temporary or permanent vetoes to rights to joint decision-making. From this brief description, we can see the very different forms of participation which can emerge from the interface between those who decide and those who are expected to comply.

It is impossible, therefore, to state categorically the exact nature of participation in rural development. Commentators have long struggled to determine this exact nature, but a review of the literature reveals a disagreement as to whether participation is essentially a process, a programme, a technique or a methodology. We include these four terms here to indicate the different perspectives that commentators have used in their examination of the concept.

We can, however, be a bit more exact when we review the practice of participation and seek to understand its meaning on the basis of this practice. Since the importance of 'participation' in rural development became widely accepted and recognized, a whole range of different types of rural development programmes and projects have sought to achieve 'participation' and to bring it about in one form or another. A study undertaken for the UN Panel on People's Participation in 1982 reviewed the practice of participation in both the government and non-government section of rural development and suggested four different, but not mutually exclusive, forms of participation:

(i) **Participation as Collaboration:** Whereby rural people are informed of rural development programmes and projects and their collaboration is sought. Participation, therefore, is in activities and on terms over which the people themselves have no direct control.

(ii) **Participation through Organization:** Whereby organizations are set up which ostensibly have the objective of facilitating participation. The equating of a lack of participation with a lack of organization is a common argument and, therefore, organizations are introduced to provide the vehicle for this participation.

(iii) **Participation in Community Development Activities:** Whereby the direct and active involvement of local people is sought to undertake and complete a whole range of physical improvements at the community level. In these tasks local people do have a meaningful say in their planning and execution, but the dynamic of participation is limited to the task at hand and is not normally concerned with building the means to sustain the dynamics after the completion of the physical improvements.

(iv) **Participation as a Process of Empowering:** whereby a group of people who previously had no basis from
which to intervene in or influence rural development activities, achieve this basis and use it for their continued involvement in these activities. The approach of this process is educational and the building up of the basis for participation is the objective of the process. (5)

It could be argued that if we were to take any example or case study of participation in rural development, be it in the government or non-government sector, then the nature of the participation achieved would approximate one or more of the above different forms. The above are not presented as mutually exclusive but as a yardstick for judging the participation in any particular rural development project.

The purpose of this brief introductory chapter has been to stimulate thinking on exactly what is participation. This surely is the first step in any examination of the concept. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the practice of participation and suggest ways in which it could be strengthened and developed at the grass-roots level, and this can only be done on the basis of an understanding of the many dimensions of the concept. Before, however, we proceed, we will review the factors or elements which can either hinder or facilitate this practice of participation.
Facilitators and Obstacles of a Process of Participation

Participation does not occur in a vacuum; it is a process which is susceptible, in both a positive and a negative way, to a whole range of influence. Since the purpose of this paper is to examine how we might strengthen participation in rural development, then it is important that we consider those factors which can influence the success or otherwise of a process of participation. We wish, however, to avoid the production of lists of factors or to suggest that these factors are mutually exclusive. Any process of participation will be influenced by some external factors; what is important is to note the range of factors and then consider them in the context in which the participation is unfolding. We must be aware of the potential of these factors if we are to get involved in the practice of participation. Our researches have unearthed an enormous amount of literature, across the whole rural development spectrum, which identifies a wide variety of specific facilitators and obstacles to participation. We include many of these sources in this chapter's bibliography. Rather than merely reproduce verbatim these specific references here, we have tried to take an overview and identify what we consider as the core factors which are influential in most rural development situations.

2.1 Factors which can Facilitate

For the purpose of structuring the text, and in order to avoid 'listing', we shall group factors which can facilitate participation into those of a structural nature, those which are broadly social and those which we term operational. Naturally some factors will cross the boundaries of the categorization, but for analytical reasons, we shall treat them as three distinct categories:

(i) Structural Factors

In very general terms we can say that the creation, at the national level, of an environment or set of circumstances broadly democratic in nature is fundamental to the emergence of a process of participation. A democratic socio-political environment allows for rural people to participate in the formal sense in the structure of government as well as encouraging them to develop their own participatory initiatives. At the national level, it is important to recognise that the prevailing political system will have a direct bearing on the ability of rural people to participate, and hence to recognise the value of a political system which encourages a spirit of participation.

This type of socio-political environment can only be achieved by a visible commitment, at the international, national and local level, to the rural poor. In 1979 the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) recognized the need for this level of commitment when it called upon the international community to show positive discrimination towards the rural poor and to express this visibly through policies and actions. WCARRD recognised the major role that national governments have in strengthening people's desire and capability to tackle their own problems by creating the right kind of framework in which this can occur. National policies which support and encourage local level participation in a variety of sectoral and multisectoral programmes at national and local level contribute to encouraging a general desire to participate.

Governments can contribute further to creating a national framework favourable to participation by institutionalizing their commitment to this participation through the legal and judicial systems. Legislation, such as land reform, is a clear recognition that there is a need for structural change to enable the rural poor to get more involved in development. Land reform legislation offers the rural poor a stake in the development process. Furthermore governments can create the circumstances in which participation can take place by proposing legislation which
permits the establishment of organizations to represent the rural poor and giving such organizations the protection of the law against counter pressures from traditional power-holders.

Decentralization of government bureaucracy is another way in which participation at the local level can be encouraged, although we must be aware of the powerful influences that would be required in order to effectively decentralize central government bureaucracies. But a loosening of central control and the encouragement of local bureaucratic initiatives can help to facilitate local participation. More directly it is the local resource delivery system and its effectiveness which is important. Positive government discrimination to allocate resources to the local delivery system in favour of the rural poor will bring more of the rural poor into the development process and thus strengthen their participation. Government decentralization can also take the form of strengthening national institutions at the local level. Local government institutions, such as the thana level council in India, can initiate activities at the community level in which local people can be directly involved. (7)

(ii) Social Factors

In the first instance we must recognize that 'participation' is not a totally new concept to rural communities, and that rural communities, have developed over the years a complex web of supportive and reciprocal activities in which community members participate. Traditional forms of local government, cooperative work and traditional practices of community mobilization for common tasks can serve as the basis for strengthening community participation. Most traditional forms of community activity can facilitate a process of participation. They foster cooperative action and play an important role in providing mechanisms by which the rural poor can play a part within the economic system. For example the ulu-ulu system in Java and the subak system in Bali are traditional forms of community organization for irrigation which have served as the basis for more broad based irrigation organizations in which the rural poor can get involved: similarly in Peru the aymi, or communal labour tradition, formed the basis of a widespread programme of community participation in a whole range of infrastructure works. As a basis for participation, existing traditional communal practices can often constitute an important first step. Where traditional communal practices are strong and where local communities are able to effectively mobilize communal resources, then direct community participation in rural development in often more viable. Programmes and projects supported and based upon these communal traditions have often resulted in more direct involvement by local people.

Coupled with the above, participation is also greatly facilitated where there is what we can term a 'readiness for change' at the community level and where there is an awareness of the benefits of participation. Such conditions are the result of a variety of factors. Communities whose members have a network of external links might show a greater awareness of development activities; the level of penetration of different forms of mass media can similarly stimulate an interest in change; and finally the existence within an area of some kind of modernizing force e.g. a missionary station, can cultivate a keen interest to participate in development.

Participation is also stimulated when the needs as felt by the local people coincide with those as perceived by the external development agency. If local people can see that these needs can be more effectively met by participating in the development activity than by staying outside of it, then their involvement will be more direct. It follows that it is important that the objectives of any rural development project should coincide with these locally felt needs if the project is to receive the support of the local people. But it must be recognised that the rural poor operate on a finely calculated basis of resource use and allocation and will only participate if they perceive the venture to be of no additional risk to their livelihood.

In terms of the organization of local participation, this is more easily managed if effective local leadership is available. The existence of traditional leadership structures is widely recognized and should form the basis for organizing local participation, local leaders, who are respected for their status and knowledge, should be brought into the development project and given a sense of responsibility for and identification with the project's activities. The use of local leaders or other people to lead projects will encourage local people to identify more closely with
such projects. Health projects, for example, have shown how the use of traditional birth attendants has greatly encouraged the participation of local people (8).

Finally the economic and social composition of the community or group has a direct bearing upon local participation. It is argued that participation is fostered where there is a strong element of social and economic homogeneity within the community or group. Indeed it is further argued that we can no longer talk of community participation; more accurately we should talk of group participation. The Sarvodaya Sharamadana movement in Sri Lanka, for example, effectively illustrates the direct participation of groups in development (9) Any group of rural people who display an even distribution of wealth offer a sounder basis for participation than a village or community which may contain within it a number of conflicting interests.

(iii) Operational Factors

By operational factors we refer to those mechanisms at the project level which can influence the success or otherwise of a project’s efforts to bring about participation. Clearly this is a very broad area and there is no list of mechanisms which would be relevant to all project circumstances. We will limit ourselves here, therefore, to what we feel are the more critical mechanisms in terms of a process of participation.

In the first instance the every nature of the project intervention can have an immediate impact upon the project’s ability to encourage local participation. Projects which by their very nature seek to work with the rural poor and not for them, establish from the very beginning an approach more conducive to participation. Projects which are sensitive to local institutions and abilities and which seek to involve and build on local abilities and resources can create an atmosphere of community involvement in the project. In this respect the selection of project personnel will be crucial; it is the staff who must create this atmosphere and if, for whatever reason, they are unable to do so, then an important dimension will be missing.

In the more formal sense, there appears to be a direct relationship between community participation and the availability of a local level resources-provision and delivery system (10) The argument in many rural development projects is that the rural poor need to make contact with existing line agency services and to negotiate and bargain for their involvement in these services. The SFDP in Nepal and the FAO’s People’s Participation Projects are illustrative of this argument. Clearly, therefore, if there is no effective resource-provision and delivery system available locally, then the whole purpose of the project is frustrated. Coupled with the availability of such a system, is the general issue of access to the inputs and services which the rural poor need in order to undertake certain activities. Access to such things as credit and technical advice and knowledge are important if the rural poor are to participate in development projects. Often contact with such services is governed by accessibility; the availability of local level communications networks, including roads, are vital factors which bring the rural poor into contact with development projects and help begin the process of participation.

Finally, we can consider the issue of local contributions to development initiatives. Rural communities have a variety of human and material resources which can be available as contributions or direct inputs into development projects. It can be argued that there will be a great commitment in a project if the local people contribute some of their own resources directly to it. In many infrastructure or production projects, local people contribute their labour, whilst in health projects participants may pay a small fee towards the cost of the service. Both are examples of efforts to identify the participants closely with the project’s activities in order to strengthen their involvement in the project’s implementation.

2.2. Factors which can be Obstacles

When we consider the obstacle to a process of participation, clearly in the first instance, we could argue that the antithesis of the factors which facilitate this process constitute fundamental obstacles to the same process. In terms of obstacles, as with facilitative factors, we have found a whole range of studies which methodically list or detail such
obstacles. We will not, however, produce such detail here, but limit ourselves to examining what we consider are core areas of obstacles to participation.

(i) Structural Obstacles

Just as the political environment within a particular country can be supportive of a process of participation, so equally in different circumstances it can constitute a fundamental obstacle. At the international level, the structure of finance and trade which benefit the elite, effectively marginalize the rural poor and make it difficult for them to mobilize themselves for development. Similarly a centralized political system, which lays less emphasis upon local mechanisms for administration and decision-making can greatly reduce the potential for authentic participation. Structural obstacles also include the tensions which can arise between the mechanisms promoted locally by the State in order to achieve centrally planned objectives and the spontaneous, informal development efforts from below of groups who are excluded from these mechanisms. Similar tensions can arise between the policy of the State and local level movements which seek to organize the rural poor in order to influence this policy in terms of a redistribution of political and economic power. In all, the nature of the political environment within a particular state will indicate the potential for meaningful local level participation. In environments hostile to authentic, grass-roots participation, any participation will have to be won, since it will not be conceded. (11)

More specifically the existing legal system within a country can prove an almost insurmountable obstacle for the rural poor. (12) This obstacle can function in two ways. On the one hand the legal system often has an inherent bias both in the way it is conducted and the way in which it maintains the status quo. On the other hand the rural poor are generally unaware of their legal rights and of the services legally available to them. Few legal systems overtly seek to impart this information to the rural poor, who thus remain largely ignorant and excluded from the effects of laws which are supposed to benefit them. In other instances the legal system acts as a direct constraint on the rural poor’s involvement in development activities. This is particularly the case in terms of legislation which governs the right of legal associations of different categories of rural workers. Studies undertaken by the ILO has highlighted how this right of association has been legally withdrawn from different groups of rural workers and thus frustrated their efforts to build organizations to represent their interests. Similarly, legislation which gives sweeping powers to government to disperse ‘unlawful’ assemblies can act as a powerful deterrent to the formation of organizations by the rural poor.

(ii) Administrative Obstacles

Centralized governments encourage centralized administrative structures which, by their very nature, are major obstacles to local level participation. (13) Such administrative structures seek to retain control over decision-making, resource allocation and the information and knowledge which the rural poor will require if they are to play an effective part in the development process. Administrators in such structures tend to have a negative attitude to the whole notion of people’s participation, which is often manifested as arrogance and a disbelief that rural poor can ever assume responsibility for administrative matters. The result is that administrative procedures become a minefield and an effective deterrent to the rural poor seeking direct involvement in or assistance from local administration. For people whose struggle for livelihood demands most of their time, such procedures cannot be afforded. (14)

Planning, similarly, is invariably centralized and planning procedures often discourage local involvement. Government planners are a professional group who do not willingly concede their practice to the local level. Most rural development planning takes place in Ministries in urban areas and there is rarely a genuine desire to devolve this responsibility effectively to the local level. Planning information and data are often complex in nature and are rarely presented or interpreted in a way intelligible to the rural poor. The costs, both in terms of finance and time, of encouraging effective local participation in planning are substantial and few governments are prepared to undertake such a commitment.

A major administrative obstacle to participation is the lack of organizations at the local level to represent the
interests of the rural poor and to facilitate their involvement. The rural poor are almost universally unorganized in the formal sense and thus lack a basic means to begin to negotiate with the system which governs their livelihood. However the issue is not merely the provision of an organization to represent the interests of the rural poor; there are no shortage of examples e.g. cooperatives/farmers’ associations, of formally constituted organization which are supposed to serve as ‘vehicles of participation’. The issue is more to do with the nature of the organization, how it evolves and in what way it is an authentic means for local level participation.

(iii) Social Obstacles

Probably the most powerful social obstacle to the participation of the rural poor is a mentality of dependence which is deeply and historically ingrained into their lives. The rural poor constitute the ‘culture of silence’ and generations have been dominated by and depended upon local elite groups. In practice this has meant that then rural poor have become accustomed to leaving decisions and initiatives to their ‘leaders’. This has lead to an almost total marginalization from the activities of rural development, which in turn leads to a lack of confidence and ultimately a psychology of despair. This dependent mentality is further reinforced by the fact that mere ‘survival’ is the poor’s greatest challenge and consumes much of their energies, thus leaving precious little time to ‘participate’. The rural poor, therefore, tend to accept the status quo and their position in a framework in which social arrangements maintain the control of the few and the exclusion of the majority. (15)

Socially, also, the rural poor do not necessarily constitute a homogeneous unit. Efforts to encourage participation which are directed at the ‘rural poor’ as if they constituted a distinct category of rural people, fail to recognize the class, caste, religious and geographical differences that exist among them. The rural poor may share their poverty, but there may be many other factors which divide them and breed mutual distrust e.g. competition for resources. Aggregating the ‘rural poor’ as an enormous mass of people is a positive obstacle to effective participation. A more effective approach is to recognize the existence of competing groups, to develop participation on a group basis and to extend the participation by building links between groups that have a common poverty in their lives. Participation is a sensitive process, and an insensitive analysis of the dynamics of rural differentiation can frustrate the process even as it begins.

(iv) Project Design as an Obstacle

The project is a basic instrument of intervention in rural development and is the means by which external agencies seek to develop a process of participation, usually supported by external funding or other resources. The very nature of the project, therefore, will have a powerful impact upon the participation achieved. In the first instance, if the project is unrealistic or poorly planned and managed, then it can never serve to develop the resource provision and delivery system in which the rural poor are expected to benefit.

Essentially, participation in a project has to be developed, it cannot merely be proclaimed. Too often project documents talk of participation in project planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation without providing a realistic or legitimate framework within which these participatory activities can take place. Frequently intended beneficiaries fail to identify with a project and, therefore, decide not to participate. The pressures of time and cost often thwart a genuine process of project participation. By nature participation should develop at its own pace, and agencies and project staff are often obliged to seek quick results at the expense of consolidating the participation. The process of participation demands a very different form of project intervention if it is to be successful. (16)

The above, therefore, are what we consider to be the core factors which can either facilitate or hinder a process of participation. In the context of the above, the participation of the rural poor is currently being encouraged across a whole range of rural development projects. We can now turn to examine this practice and understand both how participation is achieved and equally how it might be promoted and strengthened.
The Promotion and Strengthening of Participation in Rural Development Projects

Since the mid 1970’s there has grown an ever increasing range of rural development projects which seem in one form or another to bring about local people’s participation in project activities. It is important, therefore, that we examine examples of such projects and find out what we can learn. Our concern in this paper is to see how we might strengthen people’s participation. By examining the practice of rural development projects, we can achieve this in two ways:

(i) we can learn from experience to date and take note of the issues which can arise when we seek to strengthen participation.

and

(ii) based on this experience, we can begin to push things forward and suggest what positive things we can do in order to strengthen participation.

In this chapter we shall be concerned with (i) above; we shall turn to the question of (ii) in chapter 4.

3.1 The Case Studies

In order to understand how the concept of participation has been operationalized and the lessons to be learnt from the practice to date, we have reviewed a wide range of literature. This has been wholly a literary study and we have not undertaken any direct field research. In our researches we have examined the work in ‘participation’ or, for example, the FAO, ILO, WHO and UNRISD, general texts on approaches to and strategies of participation in rural development, projects and other documentation of a number of NGO’s, and a selection of specific case studies.

In all we have researched material on over 30 case examples of participation in rural development. Of these we looked in more depth at some 14, and of these we have chosen to include brief analyses of 4 in this text. The presentation of case studies is always a notoriously difficult task when one is relying almost exclusively on secondary material. None of the literature on these projects was originally written with this paper in mind and, therefore, we have had to try and ‘mould’ the material to our requirements. In fact an exhaustive review of the literature reveals that there are not many comprehensively written-up case studies of participatory rural development projects, and particularly not from the perspective of operationalization and the methodology of the practice. (17)

For the reader to see the range of our source material we include here a list of the 14 projects which were more systematically examined.

A. FASE-Brazil
B. People’s Participation Project (PPP)-Ghana and Sierra Leone
C. OXWORP-India
D. Proshika- Bangladesh
E. Programa de Inversiones para el Desarrollo Rural (PIDER)-Mexico
F. Small Farmers Development Programme-Nepal
G. Bhoomi Sena - India
H. Manded Community Education Project - India
I. Women's Resettlement Project - Philippines
J. Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) - Zimbabwe
K. Savings Development Movement - Zimbabwe
L. Cereal Bank - Niger
M. Comite Evangelico Pro Ayuda al Desarrollo (CEPAD) - Nicaragua
N. Social Development Group Project - India

Given the constraints of time and access to documentation we feel that the above present a reasonable cross section of participation projects, which takes into account not only geographical distribution but also such factors as operating agency, magnitude of project and, from our own interpretation, the nature of the participation being implemented. There was also the added advantage that at least one of us had had some kind of contact with 8 of the above 14 in the past five years.

We have subjected each of the 4 selected case studies to a similar analysis. This analysis has four points:

1. Introductory Information
2. Nature of Participation
3. Methodology of Participation
4. Outcome.

Originally we considered putting the case studies in lengthier form in an Appendix. We have decided, however, to include brief analyses of 4 in the body of the text. We feel that by doing this, the reader will begin to become familiar with the issues relating to the operationalization of participation, which will be useful preparation for the more critical examination later. Finally we should add that we present the case studies dispassionately. This paper is not a critique of these case studies; it is merely using them to illustrate a number of issues.

CASE STUDY A

F.A.S.E. (Federacao de Orgaos para Assistancia Social e Educacional) - Brazil

1. Introduction

F.A.S.E. is concerned to involve local people in the development of the north-east region of Brazil. It emerged in 1967 after earlier attempts to achieve similar objectives had been made by the Catholic Church and the Movimento de Educacao de Base (Community Level Education Movement). In its broadest context FASE attempts to organize and develop structures to serve as a basis for local people's involvement in existing development activities. FASE sees its own key role as that of providing rigorous methodological support for the many local associations, community and parish groups working in the north-east, which seek to engage in their own development. FASE is an indigenous Brazilian voluntary agency which operates through small teams, composed of educationalists, social scientists and agricultural technicians who work with local groups. It has been responsible since 1967 for training many non-government community level workers in Brazil's north-east.

2. Nature of Participation

Participation is seen essentially as a process by which local group increasingly build up their contacts and begin to actively get involved in development activities. FASE training represents the first efforts to bring some cohesion to a previously disparate grass-root movement in the north-east and to provide a common methodological approach
to the process of involving the peasant in development. The emphasis is on “participation” as an end in itself. The FASE teams work with local groups, and the ultimate objective is that the groups should become autonomous and not dependent upon FASE support.

3. Methodology of Participation

FASE’s main aim in the past 15 years has been to better understand and to develop a methodology of participation. In this respect it has been keen to experiment with different methodological approaches and to spread the knowledge of participatory methodology widely among community base groups in the north-east. Since the early 1970’s there have been two main methodological directions to FASE’s understanding of the participatory process:

(a) The Community Creativity Approach:

The community or social system is divided into 15 component sub-systems: law, public safety, property, production, education, transport, administration, religion, family, health, food, clothing, communication, entertainment, association. These component sub-systems form the basis of group discussion which ‘Analyse’ the particular sub-system and prepare a course of action to tackle the problems related to that sub-system. The process is essentially an experience in group dynamics.

This approach dominated much of FASE’s work in the early 1970’s. It was, however, open to criticism on a number of offfronts:

a) Theoretical simplicity.

b) Rigid and compartmentalized understanding of sub-systems.

c) Led to a proliferation of many ad hoc community projects of a physical nature, but was unable to tackle structural causes of community problems.

d) Questioned the geographically-determined community as an adequate social-unit for development.

However, Community Creativity and its criticisms were crucial to furthering development of an appropriate methodology of participation, and were responsible for the emergence of the concept of participative education.

(b) Participative Education

This is a process of non-formal education aimed essentially at stimulating peasant consciousness. In the FASE literature the process was defined as follows: “The creation of groups or communities able to diagnose and analyze their own problems, to decide upon collective action and to carry out such action to deal with these problems, independent of outside influence.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Facult</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Solidarity</th>
<th>Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Problems</td>
<td>Initial m'ship of group</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Initial sense of group cooperation</td>
<td>Initiate (inter-group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realization of action</td>
<td>Active pn in terms of decision making, control of leadership etc.</td>
<td>Independent in terms of action</td>
<td>External solidarity in terms of other group within the economic system</td>
<td>Substantiate diffusion (area-region)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability of group to diagnose own problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>Independent in terms of decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15
The methodology of participative education has two main elements:

(i) The formation of common interest groups

(ii) The Educational process of consciousness raising.

This process was seen as containing 5 basic elements each of which had to be developed as an integral part of the process. The whole process occurs over time and the FASE methodology was to develop their elements until the project group achieved its own autonomy and continued the dynamic itself. The following diagrammatic representation shows the 5 basic elements and the stages which occur as each of the elements is developed during the course of the educational process: the participative education methodology is implemented by the project groups and FASE field staff who work in teams. These FASE teams consist of educationalists and social scientists, with an agricultural technician to give practical advice. In the early 80’s there were 3 FASE teams in North—each team took the core of the FASE methodology and adapted it to the particular context in which it worked. One of these 3 teams for example, took the above central diagrammatic representation of the participative education process and, as a result of their direct experience, represented in the following form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Solidarity</th>
<th>Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dependent on FASE</td>
<td>Immediate personal</td>
<td>Meetings, Paternal leadership</td>
<td>Solidarity expressed individually</td>
<td>Articulation between individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Group interest</td>
<td>Systematic meetings, Planning of action, Questioning of old leadership structure</td>
<td>Economic base for solidarity at local level</td>
<td>Inter-group articulation at local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>enlarging to-community interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Intercommunal regional</td>
<td>Organization structure, New leadership, Power</td>
<td>Economic base for solidarity at regional level</td>
<td>Articulation between different areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Class interest</td>
<td>Participation in class organization</td>
<td>Mobilization on political economic &amp; social lines</td>
<td>Articulation between class organization 7 between other orgs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Independent of FASE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CRITICAL FACULTY
Participative education became a very dynamic concept which was variously interpreted in different contexts. All FASE teams, however, confronted a number of critical issues in terms of the implementation of the process:

i) The formation and composition of the project groups. In the context of each project area, the FASE team has to determine the criteria for group membership, with the emphasis upon socio-economic homogeneity.

ii) The role of the FASE team. FASE field staff were seen as agents to accompany the process and not to assume its direction.

iii) The pace of the process, and in what way this pace was to be determined.

iv) The State of autonomy and the decision as to when the project groups could function without the direct support of the FASE team.

4. Outcome

The impact or effect of the participative education process are ultimately measured by the changes which the groups can bring about in order to better their livelihoods. To understand the detail of this, however, we would need to examine the files of each of the Project teams. In general terms FASE has achieved considerable impact in terms of regionalizing the participative education process and extending its influence. In the 1970’s a considerable number of grass-roots workers were trained in the participative education technique and then applied these techniques in their own project activities.

The effect was widespread. By the late 70’s hundreds of community based groups were engaged in a whole range of development activities. Many groups linked up with the existing rural trade union structure, others with the fishing colony network. Other groups developed into diocesan based associations whilst, in the urban area residents associations emerged. Whatever the individual impact of each project based educational process, collectively the groups were part of a loosely co-ordinated movement of local people seeking to build up their own structures and to negotiate for some involvement in development activities.

CASE STUDY B

People Participation Project (P.P.P.) - Ghana and Sierra Leone

1. Introduction

In 1979 the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) concluded that the participation of the rural poor in development was an urgent priority. The Conference’s conclusions argued the importance of this participation and called upon member governments to take steps to ensure the rural poor’s direct involvement in development activities. As a result of the WCARRD’s declaration, the Food and Agricultural organization of the United Nations (FAO) initiated a programme in Africa directed towards involving rural people in development projects. The FAO/PPP programme was launched in 1982, initially in Ghana and Sierra Leone, and by 1985 PPs had been establish in 5 other African countries. The basic structure and approach of the PPP programme was intially modelled on the small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP) in Nepal although now, as PPP experience develops, the programme is adapting more closely to the circumstances of rural Africa.

2. Nature of Participation

Following the example of the SFDP/Nepal, the PPP sees participation very much in terms of previously excluded groups making contact with, and ultimately having some influence on, existing delivery services. In order to achieve this the PPP seeks to build up the economic base of local groups by means of inputs. It is argued that the rural poor lack economic strength and, therefore, the first priority must be to build up this economic strength as a basis for a more positive involvement the local groups in the development process. The local groups, therefore, come
together around a common activity and in doing so build up this basis for a more positive involvement.

3. Methodology of Participation

The original PPP methodology similarly was greatly influenced by that of the SFDP/Nepal. It is only recently that local studies have begun to show how the PPP works in reality and are beginning to suggest necessary modification. In practice, there are 3 main elements in the PPP methodology:

i) The Formation and Use of Local Groups

The PPP method is based upon the formation of local groups which serve as the basis for input distribution and the undertaking of group income generating activities. Clearly therefore, the issues which arise are the approach to group formation and the criteria employed in determining membership. The PPP stresses the importance of the homogeneity of group composition.

ii) Local Level Group Promoters (GP)

The GP is key element in the whole PPP methodology. Each GP is given a basic training and then assumes responsibility for helping set up and working with up to 15 groups. The GP advises the groups, arranges for the input provision and generally supports the group development activities.

iii) The Provision of Inputs

The inputs are the lubricant of the whole process and are provided in order that the groups might undertake income-generating activities. These activities set the dynamic in motion and the means by which the groups build up their organizational base and also the skills of management and implementation.

Essentially the GPs have had to take a pragmatic approach to PPP methodology and have developed it themselves as they have put the PPP approach into practice. Already the GPs are beginning to note the critical elements in the PPP methodology. These include the content of GP training the pace of the group formation process, the relationship which develops between the GP and the local group, the critical importance of the inputs and the means to set the group process in motion and the managerial and organization problems which arise with a PPP which seeks to work with over 100 local groups.

1. Outcome

Although it is, of course, far too early to make any definitive judgements on the PPP approach, we can examine the practice to date and at least note the issues which seem to arise in implementing participation. In this respect the PPP programme is invaluable as a learning exercise and affords us the opportunity to see these critical issues vividly and in different contexts:

i) The central importance of the nature of the participatory approach and how this can influence the whole unfolding of a participatory project. A participatory approach works with local people and not for them. The very essence of the participatory approach to a large extent dictates the eventual outcome.

ii) The need for an educational element, in the sense of awareness creation in a participatory project. Such a project is not to do with teaching people things, but in developing their capacities to analyze, determine and plan a course of action.

iii) The role of inputs in a participatory project is also critical. The dilemma is to ensure that such inputs do not lead to dependence but are the means of generating a self-sustaining development.

iv) The question of time and the problems associated with trying to confine a participatory
process within the confines of an externally funded project with an original life-span of 3 years.

v) The critical role of the group promoter and the need, therefore, to give considerable thought to how the GP functions, the training and qualities required and the support a GP will need in this critical work.

As the PPP programme expands into other African countries, it should provide us with further insights into the dynamics of a process of participation. To date in both Ghana and Sierra Leone, a very noticeable dynamic has been generated by groups of rural people who previously had been largely excluded from involvement in development projects. The PPPs have certainly generated participation in a particular form; only further practice will reveal the true nature of this participation.

CASE STUDY C

Oxfam West Orissa Programme (OXWORP) - India

1. Introduction

OXWORP was set up in 1976 as a major non-government rural development project in one of the poorest states in India. From the beginning, however, OXWORP received both the blessing of and direct support, in terms of policy implementation and materials, from the State government. OXWORP spread to work in 8 blocks in West Orissa and became actively involved in some 250 villages. OXWORP was born in the aftermath of a severe drought in Orissa State and was seen as an experimental programme which would try and forge links between non-government and government development activities, at the same time as reaching the rural poor and beginning a process of breaking their exclusion by bringing them into development activities.

2. Nature of Participation

The OXWORP analysis saw the rural poor in West Orissa as almost totally outside any kind of formal development activity. The purpose of OXWORP became therefore, the promotion of an organizational infrastructure and village level resource base so that the rural poor would be able to mobilize themselves for 'self-reliant' development. OXWORP also emphasized its experimental nature by committing itself to a 5 year period of intensive activity, after which it would withdraw and 'transfer' development activities to the community based organization.

3. Methodology of Participation

A vast amount has been written on the OXWORP approach and methodology which it is not possible to reproduce in any great length here. Suffice it must, therefore, to review the main elements in the OXWORP methodology:

i) In the first instance, OXWORP established a set of guiding principles, upon which its methodology would be based:

   a) The initiative for OXWORP involvement in any village must come from the village people themselves.

   b) OXWORP help must be directed at the poorer sections of rural society and must not be the basis for a further widening of economic and social disparities.

   c) OXWORP's work must not bring about a state of dependence.

   d) Any work which OXWORP is supported must be technically correctly designed and implemented, however simple the technology.

ii) Essentially the OXWORP was seen as a process consisting of a series of distinct stages. The process is too
lengthy to explain in detail here, but its principal stages were as follows:

Introduction of OXWROP to local bureaucracy
Contact with villages

**Implementation of projects by village groups**

Transference of responsibility to local leaders
Devolution of activities

Block level surveys and research
Identification of project needs
Training and preparation of local leaders
OXWROP withdraw.

iii) In terms of implementation, the OXWROP methodology had a number of clearly distinguishable elements:

a) A series of *three meetings* which was the first step in the methodology and which basically communicated the OXWROP ‘message’, identified local problems and explored areas for OXWROP assistances.

b) The use of *village committees*, whose membership was drawn primarily from group members, to manage the village level projects supported by OXWROP.

c) The *mobilization of local resources*. OXWROP initially provided a whole range of support services to the local groups (e.g. credit, inputs) but, as the programme developed, the emphasis switched to helping local groups to avail themselves of existing sources of credit and inputs.

d) The deliberate encouragement of *horizontal integration* between village level groups, with the purpose of provoking a multiplier effect of local level group formation and action.

e) The use of a *Community Field Officer* (CFO) as the direct *link* between OXWROP and the village base groups. The CFO’s was the crucial element in the whole OXWROP methodology and responsible for working with and developing the ‘dynamic’ of village level development initiatives.

4. **Outcome**

Since 1976 the work of OXWROP has been closely monitored and detailed progress reports have been presented. Also in 1982 a major evaluation of the programme took place to coincide with its original 5 year life-span. Without wishing to make any kind of judgement on the OXWROP effect after 5 years, we can nonetheless highlight the issues which the OXWROP approach to participation has revealed.

i) The need to monitor carefully the development of the village based groups to observe how the groups which benefit relate to the more static poorer sections in the village. Similarly the importance of the *multiplier effect* was noted, as was the need to consider the eventual institutionalization or legalization of the groups.

ii) The central importance of *integration* in the OXWROP approach. This refers not only to horizontal integration between groups, but also to the vertical integration of the groups into the existing administrative structure.

iii) The critical role in a process of participation of a local level fieldwork (e.g. the CFO), to develop the *educational* work with the groups and to give support to group development activities.

OXWROP was a very substantial initiative in terms of trying to bring about local level participation. It was based upon the existing administrative structure and it sought to develop the means by which excluded groups could play a part in that structure. As such it is an excellent example of the joint efforts of both government and non-government
sources to radically break the exclusion of the rural poor.

CASE STUDY D

Consentization for Group Action: Proshika —Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Proshika is an indigenous voluntary organization which was set up in 1976, with the help of external funds, to work directly with the rural poor in Bangladesh. Given the realities of rural society in Bangladesh, Proshika's work has been largely with the marginal and landless peasants who together constitute the majority of the rural population. Proshika is one of many NGOs working in rural Bangladesh who are pioneering more radical alternatives to tackling the fundamental problems of the rural poor.

2. Nature of Participation

Proshika’s main objective is to create a process of development though which the rural ‘disadvantaged’ and marginalized peasants participate more effectively in rural development. In Proshika’s terms ‘participation’ equals organization’ and it is by building up organizations of the marginalized peasants that participation becomes possible. Participation is also linked to the provision of human and practical skills, so that local groups improve their ability to determine and manage their own development initiatives.

3. Methodology of Participation

Experience has shown that Proshika’s approach to its work with the marginalized rural poor has 5 main elements:

```
IDENTIFICATION of marginalized groups

ESTABLISH RAPPORT with these groups at a
Proshika training centre

TRAINING in leadership and organizational skills

FORMATION OF village based groups

Proshika ANIMATOR supports the group development process
```

The above is the overall process of Proshika’s work with the rural poor. In this process we can note a number of critical elements:

(i) The *Animator* (Kormy) is a key element in the whole process. Proshika is structured on the basis of a local coordination office from where a team of village level *kormys* operate within a given area.
ii) The provision of credit to help finance group determined agricultural production plans.

iii) A *managerial* system which develops responsibility to the local Proshika offices and which actively promotes *joint decision making* between Proshika and the local groups.

iv) Encouraging *inter-group* contacts as a means of building up a broader representative base for the rural poor.

4. **Outcome**

The work of Proshika continues and the work with local level groups, in combination with the activities of other NGOs in Bangladesh has generated a widespread movement directed towards organizing the rural poor. In particular the Proshika experience to date with ‘participation’ has given rise to a number of important issues.

i) The *limited potential* of marginal economic projects e.g. fattening of cattle, in terms of providing the rural poor with a substantial net increase in their resources.

ii) The next step, therefore, should concentrate upon the rural poor’s *access* to existing productive assets, as the basic means of radically improving the poor’s livelihood.

iii) The relationship between the kind of work Proshika does and *political activities*, and whether a political focus is a prerequisite to achieving meaningful influence.

Proshika’s work highlights the importance of the *nature of the intervention* and whatever small, income generating activities can have any substantial impact upon the rural poor’s lack of direct participation in rural development.

3.2 **Strengthening the Participation**

We want not to look more generally at the case studies (and other documentation) as a whole in terms of trying to understand how participation functions and what are the more important elements in its operationalization. Given the wide range of case material examined, this is, of course a rather ambitious task, and we would not want to suggest that such an analysis can produce a *model* of the operationalization of participation. In the next chapter we want to take a step forward and suggest the kinds of changes and initiatives which will be required in order to actively promote participation. In this section we are more concerned to learn from experience to date and to identify the critical elements in the process. It is in fact, only as a result of this analysis of the case material, that we can begin to see the steps the need to be taken, which we can develop in the next chapter.

Our overview of the case study material has highlighted a number of issues which, although they might be differently interpreted as important in each project, nonetheless have an *effect* on the project’s performance in terms of participation. We will structure this section by dealing with each issue in turn.

i) **The project’s view of the participation it is seeking to implement**

The assertion that ‘participation’ cannot be encapsulated within a single definition is clearly borne out by the case study practice. The range of views of participation is noticeable but, for analytical purposes, we have reduced them to four:

(a) Participation as *METHODOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE* (e.g. PIDER)

(b) Participation as a *MEANS* for *PROMOTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT* (e.g. PPP, Cereal Banks)

(c) Participation as *POLITICAL EMPOWERING* (e.g. BASE)

(d) Participation as a *STRATEGY* for *GROWTH with EQUITY* (e.g. SFDP, OXWORP)

We should stress that the above are our interpretations and our use of the terms employed. We can, in fact, reduce
the analysis one stage further and suggest that, in terms of the case material reviewed, there are two broad but very different views on participation at the rural project level:

(a) Participation which is derived from a broadly ECONOMIC BASE
(b) Participation which is derived from a broadly EDUCATIONAL BASE

The conclusion we reach is that both bases are critical to a process of participation. Where only one is to be found, the lack of the other dimension is clearly felt. Most of the projects we have reviewed have tended to be based more firmly on one or other of these two elements. Perhaps this is inevitable. If that is so, then it is cause for concern, for the rural poor, are to ‘participate’, they need both to prepare themselves ‘educationally’ to do so, as well as developing the resources they will need to do so. The evidence for this is quite apparent since, in terms of evaluating the effect of our case material, invariably the least effect of the project was in that dimension which the project had not consciously developed. Participation, therefore, is a two-legged animal, and both legs need to be working.

(ii) The characteristics of the project.

There is no one type of participatory rural development project, and each of our case studies had its own particular set of characteristics. These particular characteristics, however, do influence the promoting of participation and we should note them here. From such a range of case studies, we have identified what we feel are the three core characteristics of projects which influence the promotion of participation, each of which can be identified from either end of a continuum.

(a) Projects which are GOVERNMENT or INSTITUTIONALLY SPONSORED as opposed to projects which are NON-GOVERNMENT SPONSORED.

There is, of course, much debate upon the above and there are no clear cut answers. This debate argues that government participation projects are ‘bigger’, have the potential to receive external aid and can have a direct link with existing services. On the other hand, non-government projects are less bureaucratic, more flexible and more able to develop the participatory basis of the project. (SFDP/Manded)

(b) Projects with a LIMITED LIFE SPAN as opposed to projects with an OPEN ENDED LIFE SPAN.

Although our sample of case studies might reflect the above dichotomy, there is in fact quite general agreement that a process of participation cannot be confined within an excessive limitation of time. Projects with a limited life-span find in practice that the wish to encourage participation to develop is often overtaken by the need to projects which are less confined have a more reasonable chance of building a solid and self-sustaining base. (OXWORP/FASE)

(C) Projects which are AUTHENTIC MANIFESTATIONS OF A WISH TO PARTICIPATE AS opposed to projects which are REPLICATION OF ACTIVITIES elsewhere. (CEPAD/PIDER)

The issue here is how far the project has emerged as a reflection of the genuine aspirations of the local people as their means to better participate, or how far is the project merely the replication in one context of an initiative which has been tried in another. The authenticity of a project is important if it is to encourage participation.

Whilst the debate on issue (a) is inconclusive and, the evidence would suggest, there is a role for both Government and Non-Government sponsored projects to promote participation, there is more common ground on issues (b) and (c) Time and authenticity are critical characteristics of projects to promote participation and should be determined in the manner most conducive to achieving it.

(iii) The varied nature of the techniques of a process of participation

Participation cannot be proclaimed; it must be developed. As such, therefore, a project to promote participation must employ a range of techniques in order to develop this process. The case material was rich in the variety of
techniques employed. Ours is not the task to argue which technique is more appropriate; it is more to emphasize that projects should be aware of these techniques and equipped, both in human and material terms, to employ them. A review of the techniques used by our case studies produces the following comprehensive list:

(a) The formation of community based groups and the use of these groups as the basic dynamic of the process of participation.

(b) The development of such groups into more formal structures or organizations as a means of institutionalizing the participation.

(c) The use of drama and other visual representations of problems as the basis for awareness-creation activities.

(d) Mass campaigns as a means of provoking action.

(e) Seminars, training sessions or gatherings as a way of bringing people together and creating an interest in participation.

The use of the above techniques raises the central issue of a local level field worker or agent who will have responsibility for guiding the process. This is not the place to explore this issue in detail, but more to emphasize the direct relationship between the 'success' of a process of participation and the availability of an agent who is skilled in the above techniques and is professionally equipped to work with local groups in order to promote participation.

(iv) The need for mechanisms to encourage participation and to help reduce risk.

Field experience shows that a process of participation has a 'better chance' of success if it is supported, in one form or another, by a mechanism which is designed to bolster the resources of the rural poor and reduce the risk to them of getting involved in project activities. Most of the case studies we reviewed contain in their operations some such mechanism. These mechanisms can be based on financial incentives, input supply or labour sharing schemes. Although they might differ in nature, they all essentially, perform the two functions set out above. The case studies we have examined, for example, have used the following types of mechanism:

(a) **Revolving loan** or other credit schemes whereby capital is made available to groups of the rural poor to help finance some form of joint income generating activity.

(b) **Savings** schemes as a means for project groups to accumulate their capital, both as collateral for future credit and also more generally to build up the capital base of the group available to support group activities.

(c) **Labour sharing** schemes in group based activities (e.g. communal plot for agricultural production) as a means of aggregating group labour resources in order to undertake additional production work.

(d) **Commodity banks** at the village level and based on, for example, the cooperative structure and which allow the rural poor access to these commodities at times of local scarcity, for repayment after harvest. Such schemes bring structure and serve as an encouragement to their greater involvement.

We shall return to the issue of mechanisms in the next chapter where we hope to examine such mechanisms as incentives and see in what way they could be promoted. The point we wish to make in this section is to underline the critical role of such mechanisms, in a form appropriate to the project requirements, in promoting participation. However, in order to be effective, there are a number of important requirements:

— the **availability** of such mechanisms must be dependable and not subject to erratic fluctuations

— the **timing** of this availability must be appropriate to local needs.

— the inevitable **bureaucratic or other administrative** procedures for handling the mechanisms must be kept to a **minimum** in order not to deter direct participation by local people.
— project staff must be available who understand the mechanisms and who can explain them to the local people.

It is not, therefore, simply a question of having the resources and establishing such mechanisms. More positively attention must be paid to the conditions under which the mechanisms are employed.

(v) The importance of a methodological approach to promoting participation

We have already seen in section 4.1 the methodology of participation in the case studies we examined. It is not our intention to review the matter in detail again here. The point which has to be made, however, is that there are a range of methodologies of participation which projects can draw upon and use and that projects which seek to promote participation should take a methodological approach to their work and not merely implement activities and hope that participation will be achieved.

In other words, we now know enough about how participation can be achieved for projects to be able to deliberately and methodically seek to promote it. The critical point, however, is that projects should be committed to following a methodology of participation from the beginning and not merely adjust or change their approach at a later stage in implementation. Just as an agronomist, in conducting a series of crop trials, will plan out and methodically arrange his or her work over a period of time, so project staff responsible for promoting participation should similarly plan out and methodically structure their work. Participation is not an objective which is achieved by the ad hoc manoeuvring of project staff and resources; it must, in conjunction with local people, be carefully thought out and its development carefully nurtured.
AVENUES TO PURSUE

In our review of the case studies in the last chapter, we examined the results of different attempts to promote and strengthen participation in terms of lessons to be learnt. The purpose of this chapter is to see if we can now 'push' the matter one stage further. We need to confront directly the issue of how we might actively promote participation. In order to do this we have tried to 'read between the lines' of our case study material and we have also examined proposals and suggestions put forward by a number of commentators. There is in fact a whole range of material which deals with different aspects of this central issue, but we do not want to merely list it here. We intend, therefore, to take an overview and to suggest 5 principal avenues to pursue in order to help promote local level participation in rural development.

(i) Institutionalizing the Commitment to participation

We have already seen in Chapter 2 the positive effect that a favourable 'political environment' can have on a process of participation. To take this statement one stage further, we need to examine the particular steps that could be taken in order to actively promote this participation. It must be recognised that it is governments, and the bureaucratic structures they establish, which can have the most powerful effect upon the potential for participation. When, therefore, we talk of 'institutionalizing the commitment', we are referring to those decisions or actions which must be taken by governments if they are to actively promote local level participation. Clearly each of these areas of decisions or actions are substantial matters in their own right, and further detail can be found in the case material or other literature. The areas are as follows:

a) The DECENTRALIZATION to the local level of effective authority to take decisions and allocate resources. The evidence is overwhelming that this form of decentralization is a *sine qua non* of authentic participation. Equally the practice to date is as overwhelming that this decentralization is rarely implemented. The rhetoric of decentralization abounds in policy statements and project literature, the reality is that little genuine commitment to decentralization has materialized to date. (18)

b) The promotion and implementation of LEGISLATION which facilitate the emergence of institutions and organizations that represent the interest of the rural poor. The establishing of a firm *legal* basis for such organizations is important since it places them within the protection of the law. For the rural poor to participate meaningfully, representative organizations are a pre-requisite, and these organizations must have the protection of the law and not be intimidated by local hostile pressures.

c) The introduction of a POSITIVE BIAS in favour of programmes and projects directed at the rural poor in order that they may gain access to the resources necessary to develop their livelihoods. In other words we need programmes and projects specifically designed to reach the rural poor and be instrumental in bringing them into rural development activities. Resource allocation must DISCRIMINATE in favour of the rural poor and the inevitable weight of bureaucratic procedures needs to be lightened if this positive discrimination is to have any effect. (19)

It is, of course, far easier to spell out the above courses of action; more realistically we must recognise that such measures will not easily be implemented. There is general agreement that the above are what is needed; there is less agreement, however, on how they might be achieved. Some argue that with time, and as the resources available increase, so the commitment will emerge and the above kinds of changes will be conceded. Others argue that the above changes will have to be won. Undoubtedly those who control the political and bureaucratic structures within a country have the power to positively promote participation. If they choose not to do so, this participation will have to be demanded.
ii) Creating Awareness of Participation

Although there is widespread recognition at all levels of the critical importance of the rural poor’s participation in the rural development process (even if the objectives of this participation might be different), there is a need for a *broad based educational campaign* to create a more institutionalized awareness of this importance. The commitment to participation at the local level is invariably not supported by an equal commitment to both publicising its importance and providing the support information and knowledge necessary to put it into practice. This creating of an awareness can operate at different levels:

a) Among POLICY MAKERS in order to bring about the positive discrimination which will be required if the rural poor are really to be brought effectively into rural development activities.

b) Among PROJECT STAFF and CHANGE AGENTS who will have direct responsibility for promoting and guiding the participation. Most project staff have been trained in an essentially non-participatory approach to their work, and tend to work for the rural poor and not with them. It will be a major task to re-orientate project staff and get them to function in a ‘participatory’ manner. (See under (iv) later for further discussion on this issue).

c) Among the RURAL POOR in order both that they might realize their own potential to participate and also to build up their confidence to do so. This level of awareness creation will be demanding and time consuming, but it is vital if the process is not to be one-dimensional.

The awareness creation, therefore, must take place at both ends of the spectrum. It is not merely an exercise in briefing or training government officials and project staff; it involves also *educational work* at the local level to develop the rural poor’s confidence and ability to participate. The critical issue that now arises is the *interpretation of participation* that this educational work would promote. We have already seen in Chapter 1 a wide range of interpretations of participation. Clearly a campaign to create awareness of participation must be based upon a *common interpretation*, otherwise it will be divisive and inevitably fail in its purpose.

In view of the fact that more probably participation will have to be *won*, as opposed to conceded by policy makers, the emphasis in awareness creation will be in (b) and (c) above. Already there is a growing literature both in terms of the training of project staff to work in a *participatory* manner and also the grassroots level educational work that is the basis of awareness creation. We shall return to the content of this training in a later section.

(iii) Creating and Improving the Mechanisms for Participation

We have emphasized in section 3.2 the importance of local level *mechanisms* as a means to facilitate the rural poor’s participation and we have noted the different organizational forms that these mechanisms can adopt. The issue of local level mechanisms (or means of facilitating) participation is not, however, restricted to the simple establishing of such organizations. The setting up of credit or savings schemes, supported by external funding, will not by themselves necessarily encourage local level participation. The ‘role’ of mechanisms in the participation process is a broader issue, and covers a wide range of positive actions which we can take in order to encourage participation.

We can distinguish between *three* areas of incentives to which attention will need to be given if a genuine and strengthened basis for participation is to be established. Our ideas and the practice in these three areas are still very much developing and we present them here in terms of avenues to pursue rather than as a definitive indication of action to be taken. (20)

(a) Commitment-Building Mechanisms

Participation cannot be proclaimed; it must be encouraged. In order for this to occur we will need to develop at the local level a ‘climate of commitment’ to participation on the part of the rural poor. In order to achieve this, the following kinds of commitment building mechanisms will need to be active in order to ensure the continuity and cohesion of the process of participation.
— RENUNCIATION mechanism whereby an individual is helped and encouraged to break his commitment to others to whom he or she is subordinate (e.g. a patron-client relationship) in order to participate in an activity for his or her own benefit.

— COMMUNION mechanisms whereby local level associations or groups of people are encouraged and developed in order to promote cohesion and solidarity which jointly will be the basis of any effective participation.

— INVESTMENT mechanism whereby local people are able to contribute what financial, labour or other material resources they can to a project as their direct contribution and as an indication of their commitment to the project’s success. Investment mechanisms will be supported by what we can call sacrifice mechanisms which will be the means by which individuals calculate, for example, the opportunity costs of participating in a particular project, as opposed to undertaking activities elsewhere. Projects will need to explain the benefits of participation, if local people are to switch their resources and time into project activities.

b) Mechanisms to Improve Resource-Provision Systems

Many rural development projects rightly see a resource provision system at the local level, in whatever form it might take, as the fundamental mechanism to encourage participation. The case studies we reviewed contained examples of such systems and we detailed a number of these examples in section 3.2. It would appear, however, that there are two critical issues in terms of the setting-up of a resource provision system which must be taken into consideration, if such systems are to be effective vehicles of participation:

— The development of LOCAL ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES in order that people are enabled to have direct involvement in and control over the resource-provision system which is supposed to improve their livelihoods. The setting-up of such systems should include an element of direct TRAINING at the local level in order that local people might assume this role.

— The radical REORIENTATION of the resource-provision system so that it becomes responsive and supportive to the users’ needs. Inevitably such systems are provider-controlled. A reorientation will transform them into a genuine partnership.

The above two issues constitute the basis nature of the resource-provision system. Participation will not be achieved if a system is set up which is essentially provider controlled and merely functions to work for people as opposed to working with them. It is not enough simply to provide the system: it is more important that the system be set up in such a way that it is user orientated and responsive to the needs of local people as opposed to the demands of government policy.

c) Operational Mechanisms

As we reviewed the case study material and other literature we began to identify what we term ‘operational mechanisms’ we began to identify what we term ‘operational mechanisms’ in terms of a process of participation. Such mechanisms do not necessarily fit together into a coherent, discrete part of the above process. They are more a set of mechanisms which, in a variety of different ways, influence the operationalization of participation and, as such, will need to be considered. These mechanisms include the following:

— SELECTIVE INCENTIVES on a group basis which will help build up the group base for participation.
Resources can be offered collectively which, when applied, will result in both collective and individual benefit. The action is collective, but the benefits are individual and both serve as incentives for involvement in a project.

- **Mechanisms to REDUCE the distortions of POWER and to INCREASE the SOCIAL CONTROLS** which local people will have over a project or local level organizations. Too often new elites can emerge to monopolize resources and institutions and thus perpetuate the exclusion of the majority. As a safeguard the number of functional roles can be increased and internal accountability developed in order to prevent the monopoly of the few and the continued exclusion of the many.

- **The SYSTEMATIZATION of PROJECT PROCEDURES** in a manner and form which the local people can manage will greatly help to sustain the participation. The use of simple records, saving cards and financial statements which are intelligible to local people will reduce the distance between the providers and the users. The more the administrative procedures of a project can be conducted in a manner which local people can follow, the greater will be the active participation.

The above three mechanisms simply **no radical change in the nature of a rural development project.** They are more to do with style and level of operation. Encouragingly, in the case studies reviewed we found evidence that the above mechanisms are recognized as important and project operations seek to incorporate them. There is still much to be done, however, on the later mechanism in terms of internal project procedures to ensure that they do not become a bureaucratic deterrent but act as a positive incentive to local people to ‘want-to-know’ and to get involved.

**(iv) Developing the Methodology of Participation**

In our analysis of the case studies in Chapter 3, we both paid particular attention to the methodology of participation of the projects reviewed and we also examined the kinds of techniques that projects can employ to implement participation. In this section we wish to re-emphasize the importance of methodology in developing participation and to suggest that we now have sufficient field experience of participation to begin to say what has to be done in order to methodologically promote it. As well as a wide range of case study material, we have a number of studies which have tried to pull this experience together and suggest how we might go about positively developing participation.

It is not our intention to produce here a methodological blue-print on how to develop participation. As our case studies have demonstrated, there is no one blue-print of action. Any particular project in a specific context will have to structure and develop its methodology as the project’s context and circumstances demand. There are, however, a number of common areas of the methodology of participation which appear fundamental to the process and which all projects will have to confront and make decisions. We have brought these common areas into three broad aspects of the methodology of participation:

**(a) Participatory Action-Research/Project Evaluation**

Rural development projects frequently begin with a period of study or research, in order to ascertain the problems in a particular area, and similarly include a period for evaluation when the effect of the project is analyzed. In the past 5 years or so, it has been increasingly argued that both these basic activities of projects should be participatory and should directly include the local people. **Participatory Action Research (P.A.R.)** and **Participatory Evaluation (P.E.)** have become recognized as critical ingredients in projects which seek to promote participation.

There is now a substantial literature on both the concept and practice of these two techniques and it is not our intention to reproduce it here. Our task is to underline the vital importance of P.A.R. and P.E. and to argue that the two techniques should be incorporated into project activities from the beginning. Both P.A.R. and P.E. establish the very nature of the project and ingrain the participation into all project activities. Their central importance can be diagrammatically presented thus:
P.A.R. and P.E. can introduce a very real dynamic of commitment and involvement in a project which have a better chance of becoming self-sustaining than a participation which is merely involvement in actions determined by others. P.A.R. and P.E. are essentially ingredients in any project which seeks to strengthen participation.

(b) The Project Agent

As the concept of participation has begun to influence the whole way we go about rural development, so this re-thinking has had implications for the type and role of project agent who will work with the process of participation. As with (a) above, there is also an emerging literature on the project agent in the context of participation. Whilst the detail on how the agent will function and what exactly(s) he will do in terms of developing participation will vary from project to project, there is an emerging consensus on the type and role of agent which will be required. This can best be explained by highlighting the differences between what we might term a participatory and a non-participatory project agent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory Agent</th>
<th>Non-Participatory Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works with local people</td>
<td>Works for local people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanies the process of participation</td>
<td>Directs the work of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts as a facilitator</td>
<td>Functions as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops the basis for participation</td>
<td>Communicates knowledge and ideas to local people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above should suffice to suggest the radical differences between a conventional project agent and an agent actively involved in promoting participation. With this in mind there are two major areas of change which are still required in terms of developing this participatory kind of agent:

— The preparation or TRAINING of such agents, with reference to the particular skills and areas of knowledge which these agents will require in order to work with a process of participation.

— How we could INSTITUTIONALIZE this kind of agent and influence more widely rural development projects. To date this kind of agent is largely found in the non government sector. In order to have a wider impact we need to consider whether and how such an agent could emerge within the formal or government sector of rural development.

The latter problem is very real indeed and eventually will have to be confronted. The very style and content of the participatory agent's role is contrary to a long tradition of preparation, training and activity of agents in rural development, and such a tradition will not easily be reversed. But as a problem it must be confronted either in terms of changes voluntarily undertaken by the formal sector or in terms of the inevitable confrontation at the local level between the activities of two different kinds of agents.

(c) The Organizational Base of Participation

Another critical area is the further work that is needed in order to develop an authentic, local level, organizational base for participation. We have already seen in earlier chapters the arguments concerning the role of organizations
in facilitating participation. Much of the practice to date seeks to develop participation but faces the problems of how to sustain it in the long term. In this respect it would appear that organization is the key to strengthening participation and to giving the process and its participants the expectation that it will continue.

The issue here, therefore, is that rural development projects which seek to promote participation, must equally promote and encourage the emergence of some form of organization to provide a structure for and to represent the interests of the participants. Participation, therefore, is an exercise in organization, with the objective of providing the long term basis for the participation to continue. Already there is quite widespread awareness of this issue and a number of projects are pursuing this line of action. There remain, however, a number of basic changes required if such organizations are to readily emerge:

— The ability or willingness of projects to allow such organizations to EMERGE in CONSULTATION with local people, as opposed to being imposed or suggested from outside.

— The need to LEGITIMIZE such organizations and to bring them within, and give them the protection of, the existing legal framework. Legitimacy confers strength, and without this strength nascent organizations lack the ability to survive.

— The importance of INTERNAL STRUCTURING within such organizations so that role and functions become identified and assumed by the participants. Without this structuring, organizations lack the internal commitment or dynamics to develop a life of their own, but become continually dependent upon external guidance.

The developing of an organizational base takes time and must be an equal priority within project objectives. It is also a first step in project operations and cannot be left to be developed at a later stage. Without its organizational base, participation cannot realistically survive the ending of its external support.

(v) Principles of Project Intervention

We conclude by examining the way in which projects go about promoting participation. We have reviewed a whole range of project documentation and activities and noted the importance of a number of what we call Principles in terms of the projects approach to promoting participation. In a very general sense we can say that projects should promote participation in all the stages of a project’s life, that is in the planning, decision making, implementation and evaluation. More particularly, however, we draw attention to a number of key principles which, if adopted, could greatly influence the project’s success in promoting participation:

(a) The emphasis and the use, wherever possible on INDIGENOUS (as opposed to external) material and human RESOURCES and SYSTEMS as a means of strengthening the ties between the local people and the project’s activities.

(b) The move away from the more limited, pilot approach of many projects into a SEQUENTIAL APPROACH to project activities over a period of time, which allows for the participation to develop and strengthen and become more responsive to local needs and actions.

(c) Adapting the LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE to the task at hand. The developing and strengthening of participation demand more in terms of time and patience, than in terms of massive capital injections. Participatory projects are intensive in human and not technical resources terms.

The above are offered as a hopefully thought provoking set of principles which we have developed as we have researched our material. We use them to stress the importance of determining the basis upon which an agency might attempt to promote participation and to suggest that they are very real and useful guidelines for such interventions.
REFERENCES

Chapter 1


(3) A. Pease and M. Stiefel: Inquiry into Participation UNRISD, 1979)


(5) P. Oakley & D. Marsden: Approaches to Participation in Rural Development (ILO, 1984)

Chapter 2


(7) WHO: Activities of the WHO in Promoting Community Involvement for Health Development (Geneva, 1982)

(8) WHO: Community Involvement in Health Systems for PHC (Geneva, 1983)


(10) Askew: op cit.


(12) ILO: Poor Rural Women’s Participation through Organization (Geneva, ILO/WEP Unpublished manuscript, 1982)

(13) UNRISD: Popular Participation and the New International Development Strategy (Geneva, 1979)


(15) ILO: Poor Rural Women’s Participation through Organization (op cit)


Chapter 3

(17) The literature reviewed for the Case Studies came from project files which the author had built up as a result of his long involvement with both Government and NGO’s rural development projects. In other instances the material came from the Documentation Centre of the Agricultural Extension and Rural Development Centre, University of Reading.
Chapter 4


(19) Robert Chambers: Rural Development: Putting the Last First (Longman, 1983)

(20) Askew: op cit.

(21) B. Galjart and D. Buijs (Eds): Participation of the Poor in Development (University of Leiden, 1982)

(22) See, for example, W. Fernandes and R. Tandan: Participatory Research and Evaluation. (Indian Social Institute, 1981)


(24) K. Constantino-David: ‘Community Organization and People’s Participation’ in Methods and Media in Community Participation (Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, 1985)
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following are a limited but useful number of references which provide an overview and introduction to the issues discussed in this paper:


K. Bhasin: Participatory Training for Development (Rome, FAO, 1982)

B. Galjart and D. Buijs (Eds.): Participation of the Poor in Development. (University of Leiden, 1982)

J. Midgley et. al.: Community Participation, Social Development and the State (Methuen, 1986)

P. Oakley and D. Marsden: Approaches to Participation in Rural Development (Geneva, ILO, 1985)


ABOUT US

Society for Participatory Research In Asia (PRIA), New Delhi is a non-profit voluntary organization registered under the Indian Societies Act.

Participatory Research is a methodology based on the belief that knowledge is power and therefore contributes towards the empowerment of the oppressed and the poor. It promotes the involvement of the poor and their organisations and representatives in the creation and utilisation of knowledge in their own collective interests. Thus, it attempts to challenge the monopoly over knowledge and its tools in the hands of the few.

PRIA works with local groups and activities involved in the education and organisation-building efforts and struggles of the marginalised and underprivileged sections of society.

We provide support through research, training, evaluation, networking with groups on common issues and preparation and dissemination of learning materials.

In the last seven years of its existence, PRIA has specially focussed on primary health care and adult non-formal education, problems of deforestation, land alienation and large dams, women and work, women and sanitation, occupational health hazards and management issues of NGOs.