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Essentials of Participatory Approach

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Objective of this module

The use of the word 'participation' is chaotic. The objective of this module is to rethink the meaning of 'participation', to distinguish so-called 'participatory development' in each case, and to acquire the basic knowledge and skills for planning workable participatory approach in particular cases.

History of Participatory Approaches

Non-participatory Approaches

In the field of community development, 'participatory approach' has become a common sense. However, its meaning is not clearly understood by some people. Understanding non-participatory approaches may help to understand the meaning of participation.

First of all, economic cooperation at national levels and for large-scale development projects is usually non-participatory. This type of development aims to catching up the economic levels of developed countries under the control of national governments. Priority is given to the development of national economy in macro sense. At the micro level, development assistance has not been so participatory. Western lifestyles and values had often been considered as goals. The characteristics of this type of development are didacticism and paternalism. Also, technical cooperation, such as 'green revolution', is controlled by experts. Even if the target is poor people, this type of development is not participatory.

There are many more non-participatory modes of development and these types have some common characteristics in their thoughts.

- (1) Goals should be set by outsiders.
- (2) Assuming that people are not capable to determine.
- (3) Outsiders know the best solution.
- (4) People are passive objects that only accept what they are told by outsiders.
- (5) Development should be propelled by outside forces (such as economic assistance).

These are typical characteristics of non-participatory approaches. Then, if we think opposites, then we may get the characteristics of participatory approaches.

Emergence of participatory approaches

As many people are quite aware, development works led by outsiders at both macro and micro levels have not gone well. Especially the poor and other disadvantaged groups have not received any benefits but even got worse in some cases. These kind of unexpected results have slowly been recognized by development organizations and development workers. Following sentences describe the brief history of participatory approaches. In reality, there have been many ways. Each organization and individual have reached to participatory approaches in different ways and at different speeds.

In the 1970s, many development agencies had introduced detailed surveys and analysis of target areas. Rather than applying the simplistic assumption of social evolution theory, they had started to search problems, needs, social structures and surroundings of communities. In early stages, large-scale socio-economic surveys and long-term participatory observations by anthropologists were very common methods of researches. Agronomists had also conducted field surveys such as Farming Systems Research. In the late 1970s, more cheap, practical and rapid survey methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) were developed and adopted by many NGOs. By 1985, RRA had spread widely in the world and Thailand had become the RRA center.

However, RRA had still been used by outsiders. It was a tool for outsiders to investigate, diagnose and make plans. This means that it was still outsiders who prepare the plans. People were expected to participate in the ready-made programs. People were still passive entities and considered incapable to analyze and make plans for their development.

The first to change from this situation was NGOs. Some NGOs working at local levels in some South Asian and African countries had gradually become aware of the capability of people themselves. In many cases, people have shown deep understanding of RRA tools and started their own analysis. This finding clearly indicated that not only the development experts but also people themselves could do many things. The real shift was realized when some experts stepped aside and let people do it. People have conducted the whole process of analysis, planning and practices by themselves. This clearly indicated that the experts holding all power had hindered the people's capability.

Then in the late 1980s, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) has emerged. In PRA practices, it is people who analyze, make decisions and act. Outsiders only make opportunities to do so, provide analytical tools and assist technical improvement. Thus, the outsider's role is to facilitate the process. Therefore, development workers in PRA process is usually called "facilitators".

In 1990s PRA has become a well-organized development approach and has been adopted worldwide. On the other hand, there have been many cases in which RRA type surveys were wrongly named PRA. Since PRA is not only an appraisal method, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) has been used to replace the misleading name of PRA.

Below are the some assumptions that support the idea of participatory approach. These are exactly the contraries to those of previous outsider-led development approach. This shift in underlying assumptions is known as a 'paradigm shift'. This shift is a must to introduce a participatory approach.

- (1) People have their own goals.
- (2) People have capacity to make decision.
- (3) People can decide what the best is for them.
- (4) People are the subject.
- (5) Releasing people's potential makes the development.

Of course, these words are too few to explain "what is participation", though there are some essences here.

It should also be noted that there have been many more participatory approaches other than PRA/PLA. Why PRA/PLA has become so popular is probably due to the organizations (i.e., International Development Study in Sussex University) that collected experiences and released information on this issue. Other movements in parallel should have been many. For example, Paulo Freire's 'conscientization' (Freire, 1970) has influenced the formation of PRA approach. Many participatory approaches may have no particular names. One of such approaches is the Rural Welfare Improvement Program conducted in Japan just after the World War 2.

Why do we promote participatory approaches?

- Because it works
It's not for stressing ideal situation. We promote participation because it practically works well.
- Criticisms on participatory approach
Most of them are generalizing some particular cases of failure. So be careful!

- To realize participation is easy!
Once participatory approach works, people take action by themselves with their own resources, so there is no need for outsiders to work hard.
Outsiders take action only to enable people to use their capacity.
For example, outsiders should stress some essential ideas, for example, 'they can do it', 'equal opportunity' and 'hand over the stick' and find a way to realize them according to the particular situation.

Why participatory approaches considered difficult?

- Stressing a plan
Outsiders tend to insist the importance of the established plan and its realization. The most important things for the people, however, is the process of learning through doing something.
- Difference of objectives
To achieve project objective becomes the objective of the outsiders. For the people, it is only a land stone in their lives.
- Choosing representatives
When some representatives are selected, outsiders tend to have misunderstandings: those representatives truly represent people's situation and opinions, and people are participating through their representatives. Equal opportunity is a must essential and the functionality of representatives is usually a myth (or a hidden hypothesis).
- Not handing over the stick
Outsiders can not wait for people and decide/do things by themselves.
- Difference in timeframe
Outsiders 'participate' during the period of a project or their assignment. So outsiders expect that the things might happen when they are there. However, for the people, it is not necessary to realize things when a particular outsider is with them.
Generally people have longer time axis and outsiders have shorter ones. But the outsiders often think that they can think in a longer term.

Definition of participation

- Who participates to what?
It's not the participation to a project/program organized or planned by outsiders.
- What kinds of definition are used?
For example, according to Arnstein (1969), there are eight categories or steps of participation. There are many ways to classify participation but important thing is a reality that 'the word participation is used with many meanings attached. Since no one has the authority to decide (there are no ISO standard for participation), no one can say 'this is wrong' or 'this is right'.

Lower degree of participation ← → higher degree of participation							
Manipulation	Therapy	Informing	Consultation	Placation	Partnership	Delegated Power	Citizen Control

- To find the real meaning of 'participation' in a particular context
The use of the word 'participation' has no standard. So, replacing it with another word often reveal the real meaning of 'participation' in the particular context. It varies from nearly a forced labor to a complete autonomy.

Participatory tools

- What are the tools?
Tools are methodologies to be used to get immediate results or responses. The reasons why tools are used vary from controlling people to realizing self-control. Participatory tools are tools with that people can express their views or are used by people themselves.
- Meaning of participation in a participatory tool
A tool only has a very limited focus and the participation in using a tool only means 'attendance'.

Ideals of participation

- Essentials of participation: not tools
If a participation in a visual form is sought, the real essence of participation can easily be lost. Participation is 'self-control' or 'self-realization'. Everyone wants to decide by his/her self and, once it is realized, they can continue and go ahead.
- Conditions to participate in development
It is not an attendance in workshops or works expected by outsiders. It is the realization of a situation that people can seek their well-being in their own timeframe according to their reality.

Reality

- What is 'reality'?
Reality is the recognition of a particular person, that is based on his/her own value system and experience. The reality of a person is different from the realities of others. It is wrong to ask 'whose reality is right'.
- Whose reality counts?
No one can change his/her reality immediately. Development is a place where people with different realities meet. So, whose reality should count? Or whose reality should be given with higher priority?

Misunderstanding participatory project

- Success/failure of a project is different from success/failure of participation
A project can fail because people are fully participate. If people can decide themselves, they may decide not to do things as expected by outsiders. In this case, the objective of the project is hardly be achieved but, at the same time, the empowerment of the people may have been achieved.
- A truly participatory project can exist?
If the participation comes before the project, it is possible. But not other way round.
- Who decides the project objectives?
People should not be given with authorities to decide the objectives of an outsider-led project. In such case, the achievement of project objectives can be done only by controlling other people. Also it should be avoided that outsiders decide what should be achieved by the people.

Participatory Resource Management

Resource-centered approach vs. People-centered approach

Outsiders, especially trained professionals, often aim at the sustainable management of certain resources such as forests. They think people's participation is a mean to achieve their goal: the sustainable management of a resource. However, this goal is usually totally different from the people's view points. People usually think that the sustainable management of a resource is a mean to sustain their livelihood.

What are the necessary conditions to manage a communally owned resource sustainably

- Rules
There must be a rule enforced to all users of a resource.
- Exclusion
There must be clearly defined users. This means the exclusion of non-users.
- Enforcement
There must be a mechanism to enforce rules and exclude non-users physically.

Is this still a participatory approach?

What do you think?

Non-negotiable principles of participatory approach

- Believing they can do!
Believing that they can do, we can hand over the stick. Prerequisite!

- Equal opportunities
Not merely a rhetoric. Realizing it and being felt by people is very important. Think how we can realize it in particular situations.
- Increasing chances
More the choices and means to depend, more the chances of development and survival. Think what we can provide and how.

Roles of outsiders in participatory development

- Always remember the essence of participation
“People have ability to decide themselves and realize things”. “The best thing is that people decide themselves”. It’s not participation to something designed and controlled by outsiders.
- How people view the outsiders?
The existence of outsiders is opportunities for the people. Knowledge, budget and other development options brought by the outsiders are good resources for the people.
- What outsiders can do?
Only the provision of opportunities and alternative choices. In the case of PRA/PLA, they are often workshops in which people can review themselves together. In the case of PRODEFI Model, they are knowledge learnt in training and the chances to learn itself.
- What outsiders do not do in successful participatory approaches
Outsiders do not decide what the people should do. Let’s compare the Grameen Bank, PRA and PRODEFI Model.

Outline of the PRODEFI Model

- What is PRODEFI Model
PRODEFI Model is an approach that provides intensive training for the people at first step, and then, considers further assistance only after positive movements among the people are observed as the results of the training.
- Entrance is training
Provides training on the issues selected by the people. Training is based on the five principles of the PRODEFI Model.
- Action and reaction
Outsiders decide what should be done as further assistance only after observing the reaction of the people after the training. There is neither prior decision nor expectation.

- Five principles of PRODEFI Model

PRODEFI Model trainings are held locally, by utilizing locally available resources (both human and materials), meeting local needs, not selecting participants and targeting the majority of the people.

'Held locally' gives all community people with opportunity to participate. Even mothers with small babies can join.

Utilizing locally available resources makes the cost low and utilizes otherwise underutilized local human resources. Mutual reactions between community members and human resources can also be expected.

Meeting local needs attracts community members and enhances mutual trust between local people and outsiders.

By not selecting participants, everyone acknowledges that there are equal opportunities for everyone.

By targeting the majority of the people, information can be shared by many people at once, so that the shift to the next action will be quicker. Also simultaneous practices by many people are very visible from around

- Hypothesis in PRODEFI Model

People can make better decision in a good number of opportunities are given. If many people are involved, there would not be isolation of certain people. Outsiders cannot choose the best 'model farmers'. Once majority of the people have learnt same techniques, many people would start the practice at one and the erosion of knowledge among the participants could be slow. Once many people start practice, residents of nearby villages also could observe it well.

- Difference between PRA/PLA and PRODEFI Model

In PRODEFI Model, introductory part (i.e. trainings) is planned by outsiders. At this stage, people do not participate in the decision making. Contrary in PRA/PLA, outsiders only decide the target communities and do not have any plan. People decide everything from the beginning.

Participatory development in top-down styles

- Who decides in PRODEFI Model?

Outsiders only are decision makers at the initial stage.

- Is the Grameen Bank a participatory approach?

Outside experts of finance make the system and the rules.

- What people decide?

In the case of PRODEFI Model and the micro-finance, people decide everything after receiving the resources provided by the outsiders.

- Comparison of good approaches

	PRA/PLA	Grameen Bank	PRODEFI Model
What outsiders provide?	Opportunities to learn themselves in workshops and other events	Minimum capital	Knowledge/techniques and opportunity to learn
What outsiders decide?	Facilitators and target communities	System of lending	Training courses
What outsiders do not decide?	What people should do	What people should do	What people should do

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