Editorial

The increasingly vociferous cry for participation to be an integral part of all rural development is matched neither by a growing consensus on the meaning of participation nor by a commonly agreed methodology. In our inaugural issue of the *Journal of Social Development in Africa* we felt it appropriate to use this theme of participation, its meaning and its methodology, for drawing together the articles that are published, and at the same time to attempt to contribute to the debate. It is more than a happy coincidence that almost all the articles can have their central arguments seen from the perspective of 'participation'—this is because most of the articles were originally written for a seminar on Social Work and Social Development held at the School of Social Work in 1984.

The School of Social Work in Harare is one amongst a number of such institutions that are seeking to explicate and ground the role of social work in Third World settings. Social work is no longer an imported methodology for remedial action, but is offering its knowledge base, its experience and its philosophy to help solve the problems of development and equitable access to social services. This is why the theme of 'social work and social development' has had a wide area on which to draw: research, development, health, housing, resettlement and agriculture are all seen as elements in which the perspectives and interventions of social work could be very beneficial.

In the past two decades participation has become a central concern of almost all the UN agencies concerned with development. In the mid-1970s the ILO focussed on the connection between 'basic needs' and participation and, through its World Employment Conference, set up a Participatory Organisation of the Rural Poor (PORP) programme; the FAO has launched a People's Participation Programme (PPP); HABITAT's 1976 conference, UNESCO's Lima Conference on Participation in Rural Development and the WHO's Alma-Ata Conference, both in 1978, were milestones in the acceptances of participation within housing, education and health respectively. ILO studies began to show that just as conventional development strategies, with the stress on professional planning, have produced patterns of widening differences of wealth, income and power, so the strengthening of power of the poor through the encouragement of autonomous, democratic and self-reliant organisations has produced more equitable development (Md Rahman, 1984). Although participation is universally viewed as a process almost impossible to define, the ILO do say that it involves the active, collectively organised and continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting goals, pooling resources together and taking action which aims at improving their living conditions.

Cohen and Uphoff rather tentatively offer the definition that participation denotes "the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being, e.g. their income, security or self-esteem" (1980:214), though later feel that participation should rather be seen as a "rubric with a number of clearly definable elements" (1980:218).

The authors speak of the dimensions of participation (who, how and what kinds), and contexts (project characteristics and task environment), quoting approvingly of one analysis which finds the developer's job to see all kinds of participation necessary and useful to increasing involvement in benefits (i.e. as a means), whereas politics and statesmen should determine how important as ends in themselves the different kinds of participation are. However, it is worthwhile noting that the narrow (or development planner's) view of participation whereby essentially it is only instrumental in achieving other objectives, seems not to produce any significant changes in the relations of ownership of the mean of production (A Bhaduri *et al*, 1982).

Social development, we feel, involves participation as an end in itself as well as a means to other goals. In other words it is a basic need in itself and it will also facilitate development and the satisfaction of other needs.

The seminal paper of de Graff, 'Catching Fish or Liberating Man', stresses the concept of empowerment and has as a central thesis the importance of participation is decision-making, implementation, benefits, as well as in evaluation. He also argues that development efforts must take into account of self-reliant participation, but more importantly introduces the notion of participation as empowerment. Oakley and Marsden (1984:32) argue that "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the overiding obstacle to meaningful participation by the rural poor in the development process lies with the prevailing socio-political structure". If the marginalised have power to change the system of distribution of resources then they will be more likely to have their basic needs met. This redistribution of power is a process of conflict which uses a scientific analysis of the forces of class and the direction of change. De Graaf speaks in more neutral terms of capacity-building, but the analysis seems to suggest that part of the people's capacity will be to wrest control over their lives and resources from those in power. The end of his article points to the seeming contradiction between a government remaining effective, yet allowing people at the lowest levels to control their own lives. Empowerment involves capacity-building, social action and participation. In short, de Graaf proposed capacity building as a process of development that involves genuine participation which leads to the strengthening of local resources and abilities in solving their problems, in turn resulting in the empowerment of local groups and communities. The belief that participation is part of a process of liberation and empowerment is shared by other articles that

describe and analyse the Zimbabwean context. The articles by Kachingwe, Geza and Chenga represent three government perspectives on the importance of both participation and power-sharing, looking at rural women, settlers and rural housing respectively. Kachingwe's paper represents a call from one section of the Zimbabwean Government for greater participation of women at local and also at national and political levels, so that participation in and control over land and over agricultural resources may be more equitably distributed. Geza's article ends with a question: how far can settler representation and participation in local government and in development strategies be made effective without being hijacked by powerful interest groups? Chenga's article emphasises the government policy of participation in its low-income housing programmes and the UN-sponsored pilot schemes in Gutu and Kwekwe which have a built-in community mobilisation component, are used as examples. Further evaluative studies, however, need to be carried out to determine the extent to which government's ideals of participation have been achieved in practice in these three sectors of Zimbabwean social development, just as de Graaf's claims about the greater responsiveness and participatory nature of NGOs need to be grounded in further empirical analysis.

People's participation in health care services forms an integral part of the argument of Johnson in his 'Rural health care delivery systems and the task of Social Development'. The author takes as his starting point the Alma-Ata declaration, and follows de Graaf's principle that capacity building is the preferred option in development, discussing, for example, the principle of nutrition centres as a method of rebuilding traditional communal life and its nutritional patterns. Capacity-building is essential, the author feels, to the task of training local leaders, and indeed to the whole task of delivering health services. The role of education, community development and leadership training in Zimbabwean health care emerges clearly from Johnson's presentation.

The different kinds of participation specified by Cohen and Uphoff (1980) are those of decision-making, implementation, benefits and evaluation. A fifth type of participation, somewhat different to these four categories, seems to be that which we shall call autonomous, found in self-reliant grass roots organisations, and studied by Rahman (1981, 1984). The article by Nyathi details the particular approach such an organisation of the disabled has taken in Zimbabwe. He makes a clear and helpful contrast between the self-reliant grass-roots structure of his organisation and the service offered by development NGOs and government organs of service for the disabled.

Participation in research and evaluation is examined in Brand's paper on social work research. Here the practical aspects of change towards social development are placed in an historical context and considered in relation to the need for a disciplined and structured approach in programme formulation and action. The Harare's School of Social Work research

programme, fieldwork arrangements, degree dissertation and curriculum are seen as part of a wider move within Zimbabwe which is hopefully seeing social development research as not incompatible with commitment and with a deliberate bias to the alleviation of poverty.

In reprinting an earlier published article on the meaning of social development and the possible types of measurement and indicators, we are suggesting that Valaskakis and Martin's article may stimulate debate among the journal's readers and contributors. Their article examines the idea of moving away from purely economic measures by adopting a GPID (Goals Processes and Indicators of Development) approach and by grounding the economic indicators more in the realities of life.

The concept of social development, some argue, is so vague as to be almost meaningless, and cannot have any way of being measured, but on the other hand the purely economic indicators of growth and development have fundamental flaws that are not sufficiently adverted to. The Journal hopes that debate on both the meaning of social development and on possible systems and methods of qualification may be initiated by this article. This analysis could in turn assist social work to be able to specify, in more precise ways than possible under present conceptual frameworks, its precise relationship to social development.

Social work, as I hinted at the beginning of this article, is not a univocal concept. Social work, too, has had a varying history of concern for or antipathy towards the practice of participation. Some approaches, some models, some views on treatment, change and intervention relied, and still rely heavily on paternalism and appeals to professional authority. In the field of community work, for example, community development, social planning and social action are three different methodologies that treat of participation in very different ways. Henderson and Thomas (1980) show how it is in the field of social action that perhaps we come closest to the understanding of participation as empowerment, and in fact social action can be said to be influential in the analysis and praxis of empowerment from the history of involvement with American urban groups. In its casework and groupwork contexts, too, social work has not always had a completely committed espousal of participation, although strands of this position have always had some influence. Client self-determination is, for example, one of the key values in casework, but many studies show that this is more often an ideal than a reality.

The final contribution of our inaugural issue of the journal, links the concept of participation with that of social integration. In this summary of a larger paper Agere uses examples from some sub-Saharan countries to show that participation is dependent on the political system of each country. He focuses on three groups—women, youth and rural poor—arguing that achieving greater social integration of such marginalised groups can only be achieved by effective participation in

decision-making at all levels. Such participation, he concludes, can often be blocked by situations determined from outside a country and even outside the African region.

There is no doubt that social work and social development training institutes throughout Africa are re-examining their programmes and the successes of their graduates in terms of local needs, local aspirations, and local involvement. Participation, in all the ways specified above, is actively on the agenda of change. The regional association of Schools of Social Work, ASWEA (Association for Social Work Education in Africa), and the OAU's Institute for social development research, ACARTSOD (Africa Centre of Applied Research and Training in Social Development), in association with schools and institutes throughout Africa, are jointly committed to the necessity for intervention strategies that truly involve those in need and that lead to meeting equitably the needs of all, especially the marginalised, the rural poor, the 'last' (Chambers, 1985). It is in that spirit that we at the Harare School of Social Work launch this journal, dedicating it to those with whom we feel a call to work—Africa's poor, who are the ones who can teach us what they *and we* need.

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