

# Editorial

## Participation: the ends of a spectrum

It is pleasing to note that in its second year of issue our journal returns to a theme central to social development, that of participation. Our inaugural issue published a number of articles that examined participation from the perspective of different sectors and different target groups. The sectors of health, housing and resettlement, and different target groups like the disabled, women, and youth, were discussed. This issue returns to the theme, but looks at the issues of popular participation from wider and more synoptic perspectives. Both ends of a spectrum of views on participation are presented, ranging from, on the one hand, a call by Midgley, in his "Popular Participation, Statism and Development", to be realistic, less romantic about participation and less antagonistic towards the state's role in development to, on the other hand, a study by Hall, "Self-reliance in Practice", of completely autonomous and self-reliant urban associations of burial societies. The ambiguities shown in Hall's study are part of a wider attitude that fears government involvement as stifling to local initiative in development. Yet Midgley argues that the benefits which state involvement bring are considerable and will probably outweigh gains made through what he terms anarchist and introverted approaches to popular participation.

Results of two studies on the state and popular participation are also reported in this issue. Nkunika, in his "The Role of Popular Participation in Programmes of Social Development", outlines methods by which national authorities and governments can facilitate participation, focusing on the use of extension staff, community development and decentralised planning, and relates his study to a Malawian context. He suggests that, in spite of the participation built into Malawian programmes, they still lack meaningful degrees of participation, for what is needed is a search for more appropriate methods of popular participation.

In her "Zimbabwean Women in Cooperatives", Smith examines at a micro level the participation of women within a system supported and encouraged by the Zimbabwe state, that of the agricultural producer co-operative. In spite of the adoption of a socialist mode of production within the co-operatives under study she concludes that this is not a sufficient condition for sexual equality nor for women's full participation within the group. Her conclusions seem to

suggest that much more needs to be done at community and state levels to facilitate women's participation in co-operatives. The two studies, then, seem to support a conclusion that neither one end of the spectrum, complete autonomy from state and total self-reliance, nor the other end, that of state authority and complete control of participatory programmes, will be helpful positions, but state involvement has to reflect the complex realities of local situations alongside the genuine possibilities for local people to control their own destinies.

Our final article by Muzaale, "Social Development, Rural Poverty and Implications for Fieldwork Practice", presents a useful overview of definitional questions concerning social development and rural poverty. In the light of his analyses of casual factors of such poverty he looks at the implications for the types of intervention strategies that a social development worker may adopt. The paper is an explication of these implications as seen by a social work educator, but they would seem to have relevance for all those who are involved with the training of social development workers.