Trends in participatory development

KENNETH B. DIPHOLO[1]

ABSTRACT

Participatory development planning has increasingly gained centre stage in the development process in African countries. In advocating the involvement of community members in the process of development, participatory development as a movement has become so obsessed with the concept that it is presented as a religious theory. Yet by virtue of its broad nature, participation in development means different things to different people and the term is, therefore wide open to misinterpretation. This article provides insights into changing focus of developmental theories and the scope and focus of participatory development, together with the problems inherent in both approaches. It describes a case study to illustrate the divide between "participation" and what actually happens in practice and advocates pragmatism in developmental theory.

Introduction

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the scope and focus of participatory development. It assesses the extent to which participation in development can offer solutions to national problems, with particular reference to the problem of poverty and outlines the framework for participation, its constraints and opportunities. At the early stages of decolonization and subsequent political independence, nearly all Third World countries initiated a form of development planning characterized by five-year planning, mostly limited to increasing production and incomes generally. Since then there has been a paradigm shift from the established, central development planning model towards participatory development. After examining the factors that have undermined conventional practices in development

[1] Department of Adult Education, University of Botswana

planning, it suggests that overall improvements have been achieved, as shown in some of the usual indicators of economic growth and human wellbeing and indicates that things are probably less bad than they might have been without the development efforts of countries and international organizations.

The third section presents the underlying aspects of the new vision of development planning. It attempts to delineate the meaning and rationale for participatory development. Following this it seeks to map out the way forward by outlining the dimensions of the alternative approach. The article concludes by sketching the weaknesses and strengths of the new paradigm and assessing how it seeks to integrate the propositions and strategies of the traditional development approaches.

Development theory at the crossroads

The challenges to development as a process for increasing incomes alongside simultaneous poverty reduction are particularly fierce in the all-pervading phenomenon of increasing levels of poverty and disparities in wealth. The United Nations Development Programme (2000) reports that the world's least developed countries, described as the poorest of the poor, are increasing in number despite 20 years of international efforts to break them out of the vicious cycle of aid-dependency. According to this report, Senegal, Congo and Ghana meet criteria to be added to the list this year (2000) amidst the serious deterioration of their economies. Their distinctiveness lies in the profound poverty of their people despite disproportionate expenditure on infrastructure and other services.

World poverty still persists and is increasing at an unprecedented rate. According to the 1998 UNDP Report there are 1.6 billion people, or one quarter of the world population, who are worse off than they were 35 years ago. Underlying this mystery is the conventional approach to development, based on modernization theory. According to this theory, development is promoted by fast overall economic growth. This can only be achieved through capitalization for high productivity and through the application of science to production and services, such as

in the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution consists of the introduction of high-yielding varieties of seeds for basic crops, developed in research centres set up in Mexico and Philippines and then disseminated to developing countries.

Traditional paradigms of development

There has never been consensus on what development means. A classical understanding of development is that it is a process for increasing per capita income and that aggregate growth in per capita income is a reflection of overall growth. An alternate view is that it is a state of increased welfare and human development. Yet another is that it is a structural change whereby traditional and backward Third World countries develop towards greater similarity with the Western or, rather, the North-Western world (Martinussen 1997). Marxists choose to understand development as implying the gaining of real national independence and self-centred progress. This school of thought is represented by Andre Gunder Frank, who argues that colonialism and imperialism impeded the independent development of the Third World. Gradually such conceptions of development were adjusted to incorporate new aspects and the term came to embrace the concepts of capacity-building and development by people (Martinussen 1997).

Capacity-building here means the capacity to make and implement decisions as well as to reject development assistance or chose not to develop. It embodies peoples' effective participation in decision-making. Consequently, the term nowadays combines a series of competing conceptions that draw their meaning and theoretical formation from different theories of development. It has thus come to embrace economic growth, human development, environmental conservation, the elimination of poverty and other social ills, the elimination of dependency, national and individual security, popular participation, decentralization and so forth.

Significantly, people seem to have mattered little to early development practitioners who had an illusion that they knew the solutions to all problems confronting humanity, that only their prescriptions were right and that the local people were not educated. As some theorists argued,

"Too much involvement of the masses in decision making would impede growth, because ordinary citizens lacked the foresight and imagination required to plan for the future (Martinussen 1997:232).

This thinking was part of the dominant approach to development, representing the history of industrialization in the West as a blueprint for development throughout the world (Webster 1990). The origins of the approach relied heavily on model of the capital-intensive mining sector in which the application of local technology is not relevant to economic activity. This style of management was replicated in the other development sectors and still remains the most influential management style today.

This style makes little contribution to the creation of direct employment, so a strategy to redistribute the proceeds from this sector to the wider society had to be worked out. On the basis of this, countries like Botswana, who rely heavily on minerals for revenue, focused on the provision of infrastructure and services to improve conditions in the rural areas. This set the tone for the development strategy in general, based largely on the trickle-down theory.

While the provision of social services is indispensable to economic growth, it is not necessarily a guarantee for human development. Between 1966 and 1980, for instance, Botswana experienced the "most rapid rate of growth of GNP per capita (8.3%) of any country in the world" (Harvey and Lewis 1990:1) due to the discovery of minerals. Despite this impressive achievement, both relative and absolute poverty remain a major problem. In 1973–1974 Rural Incomes Distribution Survey illustrated that 45 per cent of the population had incomes below the poverty datum line. In 1989–1990 the Household Income Expenditure Survey indicates that over 55 per cent of the population have incomes below the poverty datum line. Thus, poorer households increased between the period of the two studies, despite the rapid rate of growth. The Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (1997) estimates that 47 per cent of the population lived below the poverty datum line during the period 1993–1994.

Plans, projects and programmes formulated and designed with care to improve the living standard of the people experienced problems during

implementation. For instance, the Arable Lands Development Programme (ALDEP) specifically aimed at improving the production of poorer farmers engaged in subsistence agriculture, did not bring about sustainable improvements in farming outputs and incomes though it had some success in protecting the incomes of poorer arable farmers (The Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis 1997).

Considerable efforts and resources were expended under similar programmes but their outcomes have generally been disappointing. Programmes such as ALDEP, Drought Relief and the Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme (ARAP), among others, perpetuated dependence on government programmes, thus reducing the degree of community participation development (Youngman and Maruatona 1998). The Community Based Strategy for Rural Development, a benchmark for a shift in rural development approach in Botswana, states, "A common failing has been that rural development activities and processes have often been conceived and implemented by government along technocratic lines, with too little emphasis on finding out what rural people want" (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1997:12–13).

Other programmes such as the Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme (ARAP), which offered a 100 per cent subsidy for ploughing, weeding and destumping, could not be sustained and were subsequently terminated. Most projects could not be completed on time and experienced heavy cost overruns. Completed facilities became largely under-utilized and unsustainable. The infrastructure that was completed was disproportionate to the resource capacity of the local communities to use and maintain it.

Traditionally, development was seen as a state of national economy rather than a state of human wellbeing. It was associated with high national income, large, flashy buildings and basic facilities of a substandard quality. The development professionals dished out development prescriptions while communities were expected to swallow hook, line and sinker the development packages handed out. These communities were declared objects of development, (Shepherd 1997). All too often people do not count except when manual labour is needed. They are the passive vehicles of production.

This style of management has failed to enthuse the communities into accepting and identifying themselves with development projects meant for them. On the contrary, the arrangement contributes to, "an (unsustainable) syndrome of dependency on government" (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1997:1) In the worst case, such projects are branded "government facilities", rejected, neglected and vandalized on a regular basis. The extract below captures this position,

> It is not uncommon that facilities and services are created and *offered* [my emphasis] to the people, who then fail to use them satisfactorily. Many drinking water supply schemes have been set up, but the women, the traditional water carriers, do not use the costly pumps installed by programme agency. Rural housing is often built which people refuse to live in...This happens when decision-makers exclude the participation of those affected (Mathur 1986:6).

Towards a new vision of development

When it became clear that most of the theories on which it was based were faulty and inappropriate to Third World conditions, there was widespread criticism of the traditional approach to development planning and widespread frustration among planners. These crises of development led to a search for a new paradigm.

The alternative approach departs from the comforts of a modernization theory premised on the universal prescription of identical development packages to diverse regions with varying problems. This marks a shift in thinking in the area of development planning and administration. New thinking admits that development is not uniform but an adaptive process determined by locale (Webster 1990). It appreciates that regions are diverse both in resources and the problems that confront them.

The new paradigm seeks to promote indigenous knowledge. It embraces community participation, environmental sustainability, domestically-induced growth and good governance. It conceives the development process not only as a process for the people but as a process by the people for their own sustained growth. It suggests that

the fundamental challenge of sustainable development is the transformation of communities themselves into dynamic and self-reliant entities, which, by virtue of their effective organization and development capacities and on the strength of their own internal momentum, are capable of solving most of their development problems on their own on a continuing basis (Dipholo 1996).

The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 stresses that people living in poverty must be empowered through organization and participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life and in planning and implementating policies that affect them (UNDP 1995). It makes specific reference to involving the poor themselves by elaborating the strategies to be taken to build on their own experiences, livelihood systems and survival strategies.

People-centred development

People-centred development reverses the old paradigm, arguing, "the goal of development is not to develop things but to develop man" (Mathur 1986:14).

The involvement of the people entails allowing them to discover the possibilities of exercising choice and thereby becoming capable of managing their own development. Consequently, participatory development embodies a "process of enlarging peoples' choices" (Martinussen 1997:38). The opportunity to make choices should include the opportunity to choose not to develop, or to develop according to their own understanding of development. This is the direct opposite of the conventional practice, as is shown when villagers were asked to state their views about government officers during a participatory project in Botswana. They observed that the officers "tell us things like children" and, further, that "we can never ask or discuss things" (Prinsen et al. 1996:7)

The justification for participatory development is not an attempt to invalidate the knowledge of development professionals. Expert knowledge is indispensable to the development process, but development cannot be planned exclusively on the basis of opinions of or studies conducted by experts from outside. Local people may not have the required technical expertise to undertake a particular project

and they will therefore need the input of experts from outside. But by the same token, outsiders may not necessarily have a better understanding of local problems than insiders and they, too, will need assistance from locals.

Participation helps to develop a better compromise between what people want and what development agencies can offer. When initiated at the very early stage of planning, as it should be, participation provides planners with information that is otherwise hard to come by. Greater participation helps "to maximize the use of human capabilities and is thus a means of increasing levels of social and economic development (UNDP 1993: 22). Participation implies an increased role of the communities and a decreased role of the state, entailing a major exercise in democratization and the redistribution of political power.

Yet states are required to make available more resources which should be under the control of the communities themselves. Local people need to be empowered by strengthening local institutions through which sustained participation is guaranteed. Participation is not confined primarily to the involvement of local communities in development projects, but concerns the development of organizations in which local people can articulate their interests and defend what they treasure.

The message of participation has been spread and continues to be spread. The growing canon of literature on participation can be a source of confusion. The term is used as a propaganda tool by external funding agencies to victimize national governments by making it a conditionality criterion for financial support, thereby encouraging agents of change to include superficial participation in their projects. It is used as a catchword to justify funding proposals or to legitimize externally promulgated programmes. Sometimes facilitators of participation manipulate their audience to ensure a quick, rapid application of the concept without ensuring they genuinely understanding it.

Problems with the participatory approach

The difficulty is that, although participation is a practical concept, in many parts of the developing world it lacks analytical tools and an adequate theoretical framework. The irresistible urge to participate

clashes with inflexible systems and procedures that are an integral part of the old bureaucratic style of development management. There will be those opposed to participatory development because it introduces a new order that will erode their former power base.

Thus, in order to empower the powerless, participatory development must facilitate the organization of disadvantaged members of society in structures under their control on the understanding that genuine peoples' organizations have the ability to serve their own members' interests and this in turn legitimizes them (Martinussen 1997). Such organizations are also self-reliant, for their continued existence is not dependent on outside initiatives. The powerful are already well organized in strong institutions. Participatory development contends, in addition, that local institutions represent structures with which local communities identify and control, despite their state of dysfunction. Thus, strengthening of existing structures takes precedence over the creation of new institutions, a move usually employed by agents of change.

The basis for capacity-building in participation is less to do with individual involvement than with the development of organizations in which local communities can face and challenge the powerful and articulate. Communities, such as the Chipko environmental movement in the Indian Himalayan foothills, have to protect their interests from well-established forces. The management of natural resources has taken centre stage as the basis for meaningful participation largely because natural resources constitute the backbone of survival strategies for many communities. Where the local communities are excluded from the management of such resources, especially wildlife, they tend to use them in an unsustainable way. Activities like poaching become widespread while the stripping of veld products reflects an irrational harvesting of resources with little regard for conservation. In Zimbabwe communities were entrusted with the responsibility for wildlife conservation and management. This gave them the opportunity to appoint game scouts from among themselves. This was effective in preserving wildlife and cultivating a sense of ownership and it considerably reduced the incidence of poaching in areas where it was implemented. If planners (development practitioners) and policymakers

shrug off their biases long enough to realize that the experiences and perceptions of the people are valid, then viable strategies for conservation can be worked out (Shepherd 1997).

Participatory rural appraisal: the case of Botswana

After 80 years as a British Protectorate, Botswana eventually got political independence in 1966. With a land mass of 582,000 km² and a population of 1,326,796 (1991 census) human settlements are both numerous and dispersed and most people live in rural settlements commonly called villages. This has necessitated the adoption of a strategy to provide villages with basic services such as potable water, health and primary schools and decentralization used to promote rural development.

The government established local authorities (district and urban councils) to spearhead development at the district level, though many projects implemented in the districts are under the authority of the central government. At the village level, village development committees were established and made responsible for development in villages by preparing and implementing village development plans. These plans are first submitted to the responsible district council for approval and funding. Much of the identification of development activities takes place at the *kgotla* (a traditional village meeting-place for consultation with the community) where members of the community are consulted and involved.

Past efforts in Botswana to involve the people in development were confined to consultation within the framework of information dissemination. In most cases communities were consulted and informed about what the government had in store for them as development programmes were formulated by urban-based officials. Village communities could neither alter the contents of such programmes nor seriously debate them.

For instance, during consultations on the 1975 Tribal Grazing Land Policy, an officer of the Rural Development Unit remarked,

> You should not persist in discussing a policy which has already been decided. These decisions were made two years ago... Whatever we may talk about here, these things should not be discussed at the district level. These are very ticklish subjects and they must await

> Cabinet and Presidential clearance. All discussions of land development policy have been concluded. We have been given the green light to go ahead with the land policy as it is presented. We must give this land to the people who can afford to develop it and get on with it. (Picard 1987:248)

This threatening remark typifies the participatory style understood by government officers. In a government paper that announced the consultation process it was stated,

> The purpose of the public information campaign must be made clear. It is not intended to steamroller public opinion. Most members of the public know nothing about land development policy. We have now reached a stage of deciding how to implement the grazing land policy...(Republic of Botswana 1977:132)

When there was some attempt to involve the local people, those attempts were limited to the involvement of the dominant ethnic groups. This is illustrated by an incident during a *kgotla* meeting when one member of the subordinate ethnic groups attempted to speak only to be "rudely pulled down by *Bangwaketse*" (dominant ethnic group) who said: "Sit down, you will bring bad luck" (Mompati and Prinsen 2000: 630). In this way subordinate ethnic groups are denied participation.

The participatory rural appraisal model

Participatory rural appraisal constitutes a family of approaches and methods that enables people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and act. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) seeks to systematize and develop criteria for participation. It is a combination of several participatory approaches, enabling communities to identify and define their own way to sustainable development based on actual felt needs and within the capacities of local institutions (Egerton PRA Field Handbook, 1999). PRA enables local communities to streamline the roles of external agencies that can be called upon to provide assistance. It allows communities to identify their problems and opportunities and formulate a community action plan (CAP), which represents development activities

that need to be undertaken, with a clear division of roles among local institutions. PRA thus conscientizes underprivileged members of society about their role in their own development. Since PRA lays out criteria for participation, issues of gender, ethnicity, age, disability—and, of course, the degree to which agents of change enhance the capacity of these different groups to determine their own future—are given centre stage.

Gender and PRA

In many African societies women are not allowed to speak and it is taboo for them to demand to be heard. The new paradigm challenges this cultural barrier so as to integrate gender in development. This is a great challenge: African women have come to accept the old order as normal and they are themselves to a large extent obstacles to their own involvement. The criteria for participation set by PRA enables women to have a voice and to influence the decision-making process on issues that significantly affect them as a specific social group. By appreciating and distinguishing between social groups, PRA challenges the common fallacy that conceives communities as homogeneous groups with similar development problems and priorities. In this context, PRA offsets the influence of cultural judgments, as when male villagers identify landless males as the poorest of the poor, whereas women identify widowed households as being worse off.

PRA ensures that participation begins at the very lowest level by ensuring that there are real opportunities to participate. Sustainable participation takes place at all levels of the development process and this is what PRA ensures by being systematic.

The Government of Botswana recognizes the validity of participatory development as a key to sustainable development. Consequently, in 1997 a comprehensive rural development strategy known as Community Based Strategy for Rural Development or the Community-Based Programme was formulated. Subsequently, PRA was adopted as an extension model to impart knowledge of the techniques of a systematized participatory development approach.

However, while the use of PRA as a set of qualitative research tools for participatory development is laudable, the approach has already be

torpedoed by the excessive speed of implementation. This is so as to cover as many communities as possible within a short space of time, convenient only to government officers who are eager to attend to other more important matters in their offices. As an illustration, recently the Ministry of Finance and Development organized a PRA seminar in the Southeast District with the objective of training district extension team members in the application of PRA. The whole training took only three days to cover all materials relating to PRA training and including practical exercises. Under normal circumstances when the ethics of PRA are respected, training alone could not have taken less than two weeks (Egerton PRA Field Handbook, 1999). PRA evolves around learning and revisiting earlier objectives as a result of discovering new facts. The training is action-based, requiring practice in the field: it should not be reduced to a simulation exercise based on the need to have all district extension team members in all districts trained in the application of PRA in accordance with an inadequate, prearranged time-frame.

Looking to the future

Integrating development theories: growth with participation

This part of the article takes a closer look at the proposed alternative approach to development with specific emphasis on the role of local communities in development. The core of this new vision of development is that, although the earlier theories of modernization are limited in their application to Third World conditions, they remain indispensable to the theory and practice of development. As a result, an alternative theory of development does not necessarily abandon the earlier, mainstream theories.

Economic growth is clearly a desirable condition in terms of increasing incomes and production. Yet, on its own, economic growth is not a sufficient condition for improved standard of living of the majority of the poor, as has been shown elsewhere in this article. Nevertheless economic growth is a necessary condition for human wellbeing. Thus, while practice based on modernization theory has marginalized underprivileged members of the society who cannot board the treadmill of commercialization, modernization theory of development administra-

tion and management has contributed significantly to the creation of wealth. It is thus integral to development both past, present and future. This is why it is difficult to propose a wholly radical alternative approach.

But with its focus on the role of local communities in development, the alternative approach to development boils down to the concept of sustainable development, enriched with a fundamental summary of the propositions and strategies of the traditional approaches to development. Participatory development planning, as an alternative approach, is a direct counter force to Western prescriptions of development in the Third World. While the practice of modernization cannot be detached from the proposed development theory and practice, it might be more meaningful if it is adapted, adjusted or better still, integrated into the specific conditions prevailing in the Third World so that development becomes a culturally-grounded process where objectives are not formulated on the exclusive conceptions of outsiders. Such development would give people a choice to, "retain those aspects of their culture, which they deem important and alter or abandon others, which they want to change" (Martinussen 1997: 45)

As an alternative approach, participatory development seeks to give the beneficiaries of development an opportunity to choose either not to develop or to develop, according to their capacity and the resources available to them. It seeks to reconcile public participation with economic progress beyond the framework established by existing official institutions. Within the participatory development framework specific proposals for institutional rearrangement are adapted to increased participation rather than control. This, therefore, is the basis for strengthening existing local institutions and groups or social movements such as the Chipko movement mentioned earlier.

Since the new paradigm advocates a reduced role of the state, it inevitably gives a prominent role to the establishment and strengthening of autonomous local communities both as a means to promote human wellbeing and as an end in itself (Korten 1990, quoted in Martinussen 1997). Participation becomes a goal in itself, expressed in terms of empowerment of local people by strengthening their capacity, skills and knowledge. The distinguishing factors are participatory

development, rather than participation in development. This is at the kernel of this presentation. Participatory development is underlined by participation as an overriding operational principle that underpins all development activities. Thus, participation must be intrinsic to projects' development rather than an activity that is undertaken at intervals to ignite interest from the locals.

The rational farmer transforming agriculture

Efforts to transform the agricultural sector, that in many parts of the developing world still forms the backbone of the rural economy, should appreciate the coping and survival strategies of local communities. Since the majority of the rural population are reliant on "self-improvising agriculture" (Nelson and Wright,1997), efforts to develop them must reflect on what they currently do—their culture of doing things. Such development efforts within the framework of participatory development will be integrated with local technologies to release dormant forces and resources that can be used in the overall development efforts. The new paradigm challenges the notion that local communities are irrational because they do not exploit opportunities available to them in agriculture in increasing production. Instead it seeks them as rational agents in terms of their own circumstances and available options.

Technology

The adoption and application of modern technology in local conditions is a complex and intricate matter. In one instance farmers may reject such technology if they do not value it, yet in another they will readily adopt and apply it if it is of value to them and if they feel part of it. The adoption and application of technology by local farmers is largely dependent on their involvement in the decision-making process as much depends on its relevance and affordability. Otherwise, the impact of imposed technology is generally negative, as was the case with the Green Revolution and its repercussions relating to the small farmer. The poorest members of the farming community got even poorer as a result of their inability to cope with the commercialization of agriculture. Monoculture increased diseases and pests and poor farmers failed to raise the money to purchase pesticides. Their crops were eventually destroyed and they were forced into servitude.

As Shiva puts it, "ecologically and socially appropriate research strategies could only evolve with the active participation of the peasantry" (1993:32) The science and technology of the Green Revolution failed to improve agricultural production of the poorer farmers because it excluded them and their sustained options from its initial design. Consequently, she concludes that, "Social and economic process could be achieved not through dependence on foreign expertise or costly imported agricultural inputs but rather with the abundant, under-utilized resources of the local peasants" (ibid.:46).

A similar trend in agricultural development is clearly discernible in Botswana. Extension workers condemn subsistence agriculture based on traditional cropping as naïve and unproductive and offer farmers incentives to discard these "primitive" methods of planting, such as mixed cropping and broadcasting of seeds. But, as it turns out, "the adoption of mixed and rotational cropping by local farmers is not just an irrational choice but rather a conscious choice based on knowledge derived from a long process of trial and observation" (Dipholo 1996:99). This method of farming was adopted as a strategy to counter crop diseases and pests. Planting different crops in different seasons and different years causes large reductions in pest population (Shiva 1993).

Subsizided credit

In a bid to improve arable agricultural production in Botswana, professionals have always given centre stage to subsidized credit on the unexamined assumption that farmers lack credit to lift themselves out of poverty. Yet such credit programmes have regularly failed either to motive farmers or to increase agricultural production and were subsequently terminated. Other programmes mentioned above, such as Arable Lands Development Programme, followed the same process: failed centralized prescriptions based on the assumption that the professionals have supreme knowledge. All these point to the absence of a participatory mode of development in agriculture.

Resistance to participatory approaches

The traditional approach to development planning and management is well-entrenched. It commands respect for reasons of accountability

and the comforts of working from offices, what has come to be known as "rural development tourism" (Chambers 1993). For instance, urban officials travelling to rural areas on official assignments like to combine work with leisure. They enjoy visiting rural places that count among world-class tourist destinations like Chobe area (in Botswana) with its abundant wildlife; and doing so during the a convenient season such as winter, when there are few mosquitoes. When they are compelled to visit less interesting places, they chose those that lie are along the tarred roads to represent those that are remote and make the visit a day trip. Thus, the traditional approach has become part of the wider approach to development planning and management.

To shift from what is an already well-established, strong, conventional approach to what is rather new and seemingly a challenge to existing power (participatory development) may be a receipe for anarchy. Bureaucrats are not entirely comfortable with the working methods for participation that entail frequent and long visits to remote areas and close interaction with those they have always perceived with outright contempt. Participatory development means giving away some of the authority that is most treasured by the development practitioners—the authority to decide for others. It means handing over the initiative to others, giving up their own holier than thou attitude. Above all, it calls for a total change in management styles, official and personal interaction as well as procedures. It requires development agencies to soften their hierarchy, to revise project management procedures and produce new training materials for project planning and implementation.

It has always been asserted that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the most relevant in spreading the ideals of participatory development since they are "closest" to the communities. Yet, it has been pointed out that NGOs are at risk of being co-opted by particular interests (Watkins 1995). Their reliance on external funding means that they account to their financiers rather than to the communities they are supposed to assist. NGOs have become bureaucratic as a result of their reliance on government funding, which also reduces their autonomy.

While we promote participation through agencies that are believed to be participatory, we must avoid implying that they are, in fact,

participatory. For instance, Northern NGOs emphasize the practice of decentralization, yet they continue to influence and direct the development process elsewhere by controlling funds and not disbursing them to Southern NGOs to spearhead local development. So far much of the training in the application of PRA is done with little follow-up monitoring. Once a training programme is formulated and completed, the trainers depart for good.

Participation is a direct reversal of past procedure of delivering services. It entails a new interaction between communities and development practitioners. It demands that the local communities change their perception of the professionals and view them as partners in business rather than as bosses who should be respected no matter what they say.

This is a great challenge to the local communities, whose experience with development agencies is now part of their culture and is a recipe for holding them back from active participation. They are bound to view the new order with suspicion. Local communities also lack the resources for effective participation: they lack adequate information, appropriate contacts; money and time. They have good grounds for believing that whatever demands they present before the government, these will be ignored or refused. Thus, participatory development has the task of reversing the traditional client-provider relationship (Leurs 1996).

Extension staff have always been viewed disdainfully by the government officers at the high level of decision-making. They are thought to be lacking in competence and not to be entrusted with policy issues. Invariably, extension workers also view decision-makers as very powerful individuals whose decisions cannot be questioned. Consequently, extension workers withdraw into their own shell, leaving the people to their own devices (Mathur 1986) in protest. If extension workers do not participate at the level of policymaking, they have no real incentives to involve people at the grassroots in implementation. Besides not being motivated to embrace participation, extension workers have always had endless clashes with local communities who view them as dispensable, arrogant and opinionated, as the following quote illustrates:

> Their higher incomes, their life styles and their education set them apart in a very fundamental manner from the average villager.... They are relatively more closely identified with "town people" and government (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1983:8).

This stigma detaches extension workers from local communities and creates a network of antagonism and suspicion. The new participatory development paradigm challenges decision-makers to let go their superior status and work with extension workers who will then be enticed to involve the local communities.

This article suggests that the theory and practice of participatory development should not be presented as a dogma or biblical proposition. It is therefore necessary to conceive of participation as a challenge that needs to be promoted in the face of competing processes. Efforts to promote participatory development must reflect the cultural context in which participation is to occur.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to present a theoretical framework for participatory development as an alternative approach to centralized development planning and management. This paper has argued that modernization theory has greatly alienated the beneficiaries of development from the process of development itself and reduced the subjects of the development process to mere recipients (objects). Dependency and alienation resulted.

This article gives credit to modernization theory for its contribution to increased wealth. Modernization theory is indispensable to development, but its application, especially in the Third World, where the majority of the people still rely on self-improvised subsistence agriculture, is limited. Participatory development is an alternative approach. Local communities have, over generations, discovered how they can most appropriately allocate their scarce resources and achieve the highest possible efficiency under their conditions. As the basis for their survival, this knowledge should be strengthened by infusion of

relevant, adaptable and locally-grounded innovations. Thus, participatory development may build on the wealth of the poor.

Nonetheless, participatory development should not be seen as a panacea to all development problems in the Third World. The article notes that one major weakness is that it needs to penetrate established relationships and ways of doing things.

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