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# UNIT 5 PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the first block, we have discussed the concept of participatory management and its genesis. In the first unit of Block 2, we will examine the participatory approaches, participatory development, principles of participation, community organisation, participatory learning, significance of participatory approaches in empowering and people for sustainable development.

Over the last few years, words such as ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘bottom up planning’, and ‘indigenous knowledge’ have become increasingly common in the world of rural development. Such is their popularity that it is now difficult to find a rural based development project which does not, in one way or other, claim to adopt a participatory approach involving bottom up planning, acknowledging the importance of indigenous knowledge and claiming to empower local people. It is increasingly possible to talk, at least provisionally, of an emerging common orthodoxy in rural development, which is shared by a range of practitioners working in the bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental sectors of the development industry.

### Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- appreciate the most developed approaches and techniques in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA);
- explain five streams standing out as sources of PRA and between which insights, approaches and methods are continuously flowing;
- explain as to why a participatory approach is needed in development;
- explain the role of participation in development; and
- discuss the use of participatory methodologies in the empowering process.

## 5.2 PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

For more than two decades, development theorists and practitioners have talked about the need for participation of ordinary people in development. In much of rural development, however, thinking about participation has remained at a very idealistic and ideological level. It lacks analytical tools, practical methods and an adequate theoretical framework. So it has degenerated into a kind of propaganda – words to convince audience, NGOs. Governments have recognised the necessity of involving people in development activities. Sometimes it is the participation of particular categories of people which has to be demonstrated – women, the poorest of the poor, and minority groups. But participation is usually asserted, not demonstrated. Few in the audience have time to examine the indicators, which are in any case poorly developed. Indicators of how participation happens and its effects on participants need to be developed and applied.

Several dimensions of empowerment have been identified, which could help in the development of indicators about participation: a good starting point for developing indicators about participation. Some of them could be: organisation of under privileged; knowledgeable about their social environment; development of their self-reliant attitude; institutional development like mass participation in decision making; ability to handle conflicts and tension and a consensus that all can advance together; evolution of gender equality; awareness that changes were occurring at the grass root level; development of human dignity, popular democracy and cultural diversity.

The most developed approach is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). ‘PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share with each other and with outsiders, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. It is difficult to define as to what a PRA is. Is it a set of techniques (RRA), or a set of techniques wrapped up in a participatory approach (PRA), or a philosophy and approach to life for a professional’s development? Its core lies in the development, adaptation and application of simple, structured interactive techniques based on game theory and social science research methods which produce accurate information through group work and dialogue.

Five streams which stand out as sources of PRA and between which insights, approaches and methods are continuously flowing are listed as below:

- action-reflection research;
- agro-ecosystem analysis;
- applied anthropology;
- field research on farming systems; and
- rapid rural appraisal (RRA)

### **Participatory Action-reflection Research**

The term ‘Participatory action-reflection research’ is used to encompass approaches and methods, which have, in various ways combined action, reflection, participation and research. These range from action and reflection, an action in which professionals act and reflect on what they do and how they learn, to approaches which use dialogue and participatory research to enhance local people’s awareness and confidence and to empower their action.

### **Agro-ecosystem Analysis**

Drawing on systems and ecological thinking, it combines analysis of systems and system priorities (productivity, stability, sustainability and equitability) with pattern analysis of space (maps and transects), time (seasonal calendars and long-term trends), flows and relationships (flow, casual, venn and other diagrams), relative values (bar

diagrams of relative sources of income etc.), and decisions (decision trees and other decision diagrams).

### **Applied Anthropology**

Social anthropology, in its classical form, has been concerned more with understanding than with changing. Social anthropologists helped other development professionals to appreciate better the richness and validity of rural people's knowledge.

### **Field Research on Farming Systems**

Farming systems research systematised methods for investigating, understanding and prescribing for farming-system complexity.

Field research on farming systems contributed especially to the appreciation and understanding of:

- the complexity, diversity and risk-proneness of many farming systems;
- the knowledge, professionalism and rationality of small and poor farmers;
- their experimental mindset and behaviour; and
- their ability to conduct their own analyses.

### **Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)**

RRA began and continues as a better way for outsiders to learn about rural issues. It helps outsiders to gain information and insight from rural people and about rural conditions, which enables them to do in a more cost-effective and timely manner.

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#### **SAQ 1**

- i) Identify various methods and techniques of participatory rural appraisal.
  - ii) Write a note on the following in your own words.
    - a) Agro-ecosystem.
    - b) Farming systems
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## **5.3 PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT**

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The concept of growth with equity and participation is becoming popular in recent years. Many donor agencies and aid organisations now recommend that governments in the developing countries should adopt popular participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategies and encourage the social mobilisation for community organisations, trade unions, youth, women and other associations in the development process particularly in setting goals, formulating policies and implementing the development plans.

Participation is a process of development, whereby people are given the opportunity to express their voice and choice in decisions, which affect their future. This participation needs to be more action oriented than a token one for the justification of other motives. A study by the International Labour Organisation of "Poverty-oriented" project worldwide showed that the poorest were excluded from activities and benefits. All this shows that there is a need for beneficiaries' participation in a development programme at all levels.

Recent years have seen a growing criticism of development strategies followed for the past three decades with only minor adjustments. These conventional strategies have seen development primarily as a series of technical transfers aimed at boosting production and generating wealth. In practice, conventional projects usually target medium to large-scale progressive producers, supporting the technology, credit and

extension, and advice in the hope that improvements will gradually extend to more “backward” strata of rural society. In many cases, however, the channelling of development assistance to the better off has led to the concentration of land and capital, marginalisation of small farmers and alarming growth in the number of landless labourers, which is simply widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

The basic fault in the conventional approach is that the rural poor are rarely consulted in development planning and usually have no active role in development activities. This is because the vast majority of the poor have no organisational structure to represent their interests. Isolated, under-educated and often dependent on rural elite, they lack the means to win greater access to resources and markets, and to prevent the imposition of unworkable programmes or technologies.

Unless the rural poor are given the means to participate fully in development, they will continue to be excluded from its benefits. This realisation has provoked new interest in an alternative rural development strategy of people’s participation through community organisations controlled and financed by the poor.

Discussion about participation is never easy, mainly because there are so many contradictory and ambivalent notions of the concept and the practices involved. In a very general way, participation may be defined here as:

*A complex social, technical and institutional process through which communities may become more fully involved in their own development, more particularly taking an active part in the design, implementation and evaluation of specific development initiatives.*

Participation by rural people in the community organisations and other institutions that govern their lives is a basic human right. If rural development was to realise its potential, advantaged rural people had to be organised and actively involved in designing the policies and programmes and in controlling social and economic institutions. There is a close link between participation and voluntary, autonomous and democratic organisations representing the poor. The donor agencies are showing great interest in close co-operation with organisations of intended beneficiaries, and it is being proposed that the assistance be channelled through small farmer and peasant groups.

With their economic survival at stake, many developing countries have been forced to cut back on rural development, giving priority to growth ahead of the alarming concern for participation and equity. Great progress, however, has been made by many development programmes through participatory principles and methodologies.

### 5.3.1 Principles of Participation

The experience of programmes working on the principles of participatory development has demonstrated that true participation is possible only when the rural poor are able to pool their efforts and resources in pursuit of objectives they set for themselves. The most efficient means for achieving this objective are small, democratic and informal common interest groups composed of 20-30 like minded community members. For governments and development agencies, people participation through small groups offers distinct advantages ranging from economies of scale and efficiency to equity and sustainability. People’s participation is likely to lead to the following advantages:

- **Reduced costs and increased efficiency:** The poor’s contribution to programme and project planning and implementation represent savings that reduce projects costs. The poor also contribute their knowledge of local conditions, facilitating the diagnosis of environmental, social and institutional constraints, as well as the search for solutions.

- **Economies of Scale:** The high cost of providing development services to scattered, small-scale producers is a major constraint on poverty and other development oriented programmes. Participatory groups constitute a grassroots “receiving system” that allow development agencies to reduce the unit delivery or transaction costs of their services, thus broadening their impact on the one hand and give an opportunity of pooling their resources for many collective actions to the community members on the other.
- **Higher productivity:** Given access to resources and a guarantee that they will share fully the benefits of their efforts, the poor become more receptive to new technologies and services, and achieve higher levels of production and income. This helps in building net cash surpluses that strengthen the groups’ economic base and contribute to rural capital formation that in most cases has been used for internal lending and carrying on other joint development schemes.
- **Building of community organisation:** The limited size and informality of small groups is suited to the poor’s scarce organisational experience and low literacy levels. Moreover, the small group environment is ideal for the diffusion of collective decision-making and leadership skills, which can be used in the subsequent development of inter group federations that are known as apex organisations.
- **Sustainability:** Participatory development leads to increased self-reliance among the poor and the establishment of a network of self-sustaining community organisations. This carries important benefits: the greater efficiency of development services stimulates economic growth in rural areas and broadens domestic markets, thus favouring balanced national development. Participatory approaches provide opportunities for the poor to contribute constructively to development.

Through active participation, every one in the group is benefitted to some extent. Decisions are made in the group on the basis of equity and saving is the equity capital of the community.

### 5.3.2 Constraints to Participation

In their attempts to achieve participatory approach, many developmental project personnel realised the far-reaching consequences of this choice and the necessary adjustments needed to fit it into the existing social, cultural and institutional conditions of different areas.

Several constraints emerge while implementing the programme. Such problems arise, on the one hand, from the opinions of the planners and development agents, and, on the other hand, those stemming from the cultural values and social patterns of the populations of the programme areas.

In some cases, the planners, decision-makers and social organisers who, while advocating some forms of people’s involvement in the development process, continue to think and act according to a perspective that posits people as ‘passive targets’ and not as ‘active participants’ – as objects, and not as subjects of development. This mentality is firmly based on a number of attitudes and certainties. The following beliefs can be encountered as the programme unfolds.

- Programme and target people share common interests so that people’s participation is simply a matter of collaboration by the community with programme officials for implementing an activity;
- Social issues are either irrelevant or can be dealt with on the basis of a good dose of ‘common sense’;

## Approaches and Practices

- Involvement of people is important only at the implementation stage, after the major technical parameters of the programme have been decided by the experts;
- A 'participatory approach' simply means that people have to be mobilised quickly and easily in order to meet predefined goals, targets and objectives, with no latitude for them to decide on other goals or objectives;
- Rural communities are backward, primitive, and hostile to change, while their production methods are irrational and detrimental to the environment. Thus, people are viewed, on the one hand, as the problem in development efforts and, on the other hand, in need of technical direction since they do not know what is good for them; and
- Women are not important actors in productive activities, perceived as a predominantly male sphere, and thus may be conveniently ignored as participants in or beneficiaries of technical projects in this domain.

Participation becomes a process through which programme officials have to convince people to adopt what, from a technical point of view, has been identified as good for them, as well as implement what is considered to correspond to the political and economic objectives of the country or province as a whole.

Many problems arise in the process of socialisation, because of specific social and cultural values of the people in the programme areas; hold of feudal lords on local poor, the political autonomy of individual households, male honour, and women's seclusion. All of them influence the participatory approach.

- Most of the developing societies have kinship-based groups, which entail co-operation, solidarity, alliances and obligations, membership based on birth and alliance;
- Local social economy is broken down into independent household with local and familial control of production, devoid of wider organisation or centralisation in the set-up of the productive process;
- Most of the rural communities are heterogeneous; and
- Are elderly dominated societies with an off-farm source of income.

Though these factors need not necessarily create obstacles to participatory form of development, they may significantly slow down the process of involving all the community members and categories of people in the development efforts, especially at the initial stages.

Following are the main elements of a pragmatic, step-by-step participatory approach for tackling the above-mentioned constraints to participation.

- Setting up favourable structures allowing the populations to express their views and opinions;
- Allowing different social categories of a community to meet and discuss problems;
- Establishing a dialogue between programme staff and the community as equal partners;
- Bring changes in the attitudes of development agents, through publications and organisation of workshops and training courses;
- Assessing the constraints realistically and steering clear an alternative approach wherever necessary; and

- Demonstrate participation of the people on pragmatic and sociological situation of the community by producing replicable models and use them as learning examples.

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## **SAQ 2**

- i) What do you understand by participation? Explain.
  - ii) Examine various principles of participation.
  - iii) Analyse various constraints of participation.
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## **5.4 COMMUNITY ORGANISATION**

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In order to translate the principles of community development effectively into practice for the attainment of socio-economic and environmentally sound development, the formation of Local Community Organisation is vital for the whole process to follow. Such organisations are local institutions to decide, plan, implement and manage activities in the light of the principles formulated for the comprehensive community development. These institutions may be a mass coalition of village, or an interest group, or a group of like-minded people for the promotion of the groups' interest in the principles of co-operation and democracy.

Such organisations can be created around a single activity of common interest of the community and it can be nurtured over the time by development activities. It is easy to organise but to keep them organised is not an easy task for the social organisers and the community members themselves. They would cooperate when it is profitable. Moreover, they will remain organised if it continues to benefit its members.

The necessary conditions for initiating and sustaining the participatory institutional development process at grassroots level are:

- Steps should be taken to ensure that these measures complement or build upon locally existing institutions and organisations rather than replace them, as there are problems in accepting completely new forms of organisations. Simple transformation or modernisation of "traditional organisations" can also be problematic.
- Group Promoters (GPs) should assist as catalysts in group development and in linking groups to government/NGO services. Community leader's or social organisers role is that of an advisor strengthening the groups leadership, organisation and planning capacity, a participatory trainer teaching basic problem solving and technical skills, and a link person facilitating communication between the groups and government/NGO's development services. Once the groups reach maturity, community leader or social organisers withdraw from the groups.
- Financial support (government or external project) is necessary for financing training of support staff and providing seed money, and or financial topping-ups to self-mobilised savings, and or loans.

Participatory learning method is an interactive learning process engaging the co-operation and problem solving capacities of the poor. It addresses participants at all levels from the local to national. Participatory learning methods are based on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as well as small-group learning techniques. Ideally a participatory learning exercise for institution building is a phased approach. It aims first at team building and group formation processes with a focus on demand-driven skill development in fields, such as organisational management and leadership. This phase of learning is directed towards and brings together representatives from all institutional layers involved in the programme implementation. The second phase focuses on technical skill development addressing mainly the small self-help groups on topics of direct relevance to the rural poor such as group savings and credit and

small business management and accounting. When learning groups are small, members come from the same socio-economic level and have similar concerns learning of technical skill is easier. Beneficiaries set the demands, not outsiders. The use of group-based, participatory learning methods for strengthening the collective learning, problem-solving and enterprise management skills of the poor have proved to be quite successful and a number of tools for doing this are already available.

#### **5.4.1 Advantages of Organisation**

Advantages of organisation can be summarised as follows:

- Solves those problems collectively which are not possible to tackle individually;
- Develop, protect and improve land collectively;
- Investment increases due to pooling of meagre resources through collective action;
- Raises equity capital and controls capital collectively;
- Easy availability and utilisation of services and facilities;
- Co-operative management of capital and credit;
- Collective arrangement for the sale of agricultural produce, thereby minimising expenses and maximising returns;
- Up-gradation of skills, know-how etc;
- Self-arrangement by the community members themselves towards settlement of disputes; and
- Develop a local management system.

#### **5.4.2 Disadvantages of Not Getting Organised**

In a nutshell, the disadvantages for the community not getting organised are as follows:

- All the above mentioned advantages will not accrue leading to great losses;
- The condition of land and the economic plight of the communities will further deteriorate;
- The village communities will remain deprived and neglected;
- Exploitation by the middlemen and commission agents will continue;
- People will lag behind in development and progress; and
- The village communities will never stand on their own feet.

#### **5.4.3 Functions of Organisation**

Functions and responsibilities of the local organisations are to:

- Promote local economic activity, which would lead to higher income;
- Take-up social projects in order to create harmony and mutual understanding among the people;
- Mobilise savings to provide credit to the community members;
- Arrange reclamation and development of land and irrigation facilities and other productive physical infrastructures and their regular maintenance;

- Identify productive projects and prioritise them according to the need;
- Supply agriculture inputs and other requisites of the community;
- Arrange the marketing of agricultural produce and handicraft products;
- Arrange veterinary and plant protection services and facilities in the village;
- Arrange and participate in the up-grading of human skill training programme;
- Participate in the management of local affairs, settlement of dispute and petty affairs in the village;
- Establish projects like poultry, livestock, dairy, agro-processing industries etc, and encourage similar projects among members;
- Sponsor and supervise schemes of primary health with special emphasis on sanitation, conservation, and cleanliness of environment and potable drinking water.
- Encourage primary education and adult literacy;
- Co-ordinate and co-operate with other departments and organisations for their activities;
- Fix credit limit for members in accordance with equity and social justice;
- Examine the accounts, sanction loans to members, supervise their end-use and effect recoveries;
- Sanction contingent expenditures;
- Decide the terms and conditions on which deposits are to be received and arrange for the payment for return of deposits;
- Acquire and construct buildings or carry out works necessary or conducive to the proper functioning of the council; and
- Any other function likely to promote the welfare and economic betterment of the village community.

#### **5.4.4 Salient Features of Community Organisation**

- The members of local organisation should have a clear-cut understanding about the concept of self-help and self-reliance through community development and its own duties and responsibilities within a community organisation.
- The members of a community organisation should have collective and participatory approach towards the solution of their common, social problems.
- They must believe that “all are for one and one is for all” and should have a sense of “we” feeling and collective belonging.
- The community organisation should try to promote the common interest of its members and facilitate them in the attachment of their needs. Minority benefits should be considered minor and secondary factors by community organisations.
- Fortnightly/monthly meetings and savings should be a regular business of the community organisation in order to promote the habit of thrift and savings among the members and to generate capital for seller financing.
- Community organisation should have the spirit of self-management, self-help and self-reliance.

## **Approaches and Practices**

- The community organisation should try to obtain maximum benefits from the package offered by development agencies.
- The community organisation should try to obtain benefits from the packages offered by development agencies and NGOs.
- The community organisations should be free of all political and sectarian issues and its sole objective should be the promotion of socio-economic interest of its members. They, however, should make the community members aware of their right to vote and their understanding as to how they can effectively exercise this right.
- The office bearers should be devoted, sincere and dedicated leaders and willing to develop their communities.
- The community organisation should initiate some socio-economic activities from time to time from their own resources.
- It should establish links with other institutions and agencies for the comprehensive village development.

### **5.4.5 Threats to Community Organisation**

Community organisations can encounter active and passive resistance from many sources like local elite, political leaders, religious leaders and in some cases area administrators. To avoid such resistance, the programme should have an equitable and supportive role for all walks of life and for all governmental and non-governmental organisations in the area. The community workers would have to use all organisational tactics to deal with such people during their interaction and motivational visits.

#### **Subordination**

Sometimes the community organisation is dominated by the prosperous farmers, merchants and other businessmen and the organisation is converted to the services of vested interest people and not the whole community. Moreover, in some cases the main cause of the damage or effectiveness of a community organisation may be leadership; and today's leadership might become tomorrow's oligarch to use the local organisation for his own vested interest.

The factor, which leads to domination, is the lack of managerial skills between the leaders and the followers. The major measures for controlling dominance are the training of members of the local organisation in participation, decision-making and other organised activities. Regular follow-up, general conferences of the representatives, papers on different activities and on performance of the local organisation and its wider distribution or reading in the general meetings can improve such situations.

#### **Ineffectiveness**

Community organisation might become ineffective to its members in due course of time. This is mainly due to lack of skills in organisation development, accounts and planning.

The other reasons include no risk taking nature of the rural people and uncertainties surrounding the rural life. The community worker will have to train the office bearers in particular and general members in book-keeping, organisational work and resource mobilisation from the community itself through their leaders. Fund raising through donations and savings will considerably improve the effectiveness of a local organisation. Similarly, follow-ups by the social organisers are also helpful in keeping the community organisation effective.

## **Malpractices**

Dishonesty and lack of dedication are the common problems that threaten the survival of a community organisation. Sometimes individuals use community organisation for their own interest or for the interest of their friends and family, at the cost of collective interests of the members. Sometimes the funds are misappropriated. Smaller groups, regular meetings and simplification of the procedures can help in overcoming the malpractices. In smaller groups invariably there is more interaction which reduces the possibilities of malpractices and increases the prospects of handling the funds in a more honest manner.

Similarly holding the general body meeting regularly makes the representation more effective and prevents misappropriation. Simple bookkeeping procedures can enable the community members to understand the financial position of the community organisation and their own liabilities. The important point of the sustainability of an organisation is to encourage and reinforce members' commitment to their organisation and to their sense of responsibility towards the organisation.

### **5.4.6 Community Organisation and Women**

Participation of both male and female partners in development activities is an inherent part of the participatory development and the social organisation process facilitates it. Women's participation in the development of natural resources and other development activities is not possible without an explicit gender awareness, and without building the techniques for understanding and systematically addressing the issue on a wider scale. The programme staff as well as the community has to be sensitised on gender issues and the concept of gender parity needs to be clarified. All programmes should have a clear strategy for organising women in their respective programme areas.

Participation of women in development activities is certainly wider than the promotion of women only. The programmes should focus on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour and needs through the community organisations. A clear understanding on these issues leads to household security, well-being of the family, use of natural resources and production and many other aspects of rural life. Failure to take into account women and their role often results in unsuccessful project activities.

Therefore, understanding the gender relationships and adjusting methods and messages for them is critical for full participation by all sectors of the community. Separate strategy for women's participation should be devised to ensure a balanced involvement of men and women in the project activities; however, as far as social organisation of women is concerned, it is important to follow all the following steps for establishing women community organisations.

- Understanding and documenting the differences in gender roles, activities, needs and opportunities in the context of each community development programme;
- Data should be collected and organised to highlight women's key problems, underlying causes of problems for men and women, and the relationship between problems and causes;
- A thorough analysis of the data should be conducted to highlight the learned behaviours of men and women;
- Women participation analysis framework should cover various categories of information such as need assessment, activity profile, resources, access, and control profile, benefits and incentive analysis and institutional constraints and opportunities;

## Approaches and Practices

- Specific-training packages should be developed to sensitise the programme staff and the community on gender issues in the context of social and cultural environment;
- Objectives of women participation should be clearly stated in the context of overall objectives of the project. This will help the staff to understand how to get out of conventional approach of thinking only in terms of providing different facilities for women; and
- Special monitoring and evaluation system should be in place to enable the adjustment of women participation, to establish accountability of commitment, and to achieve gender-specific priorities.

The social organisation objectives of increasing women's managerial and organisational capacities, enhancing their self-confidence, and allowing them to control income in their hands, are best met where there is a separate women's organisation. When activities are implemented through the male dominated organisations, the physical and economic objectives of increasing productivity and income or reducing labour time may be met, but the conscientisation effect on women is definitely less or even nil sometimes. By forming an organisation with separate membership and savings accounts, women can initiate a process that enables them to share experience, workload, problems and decision making.

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### SAQ 3

- i) What is community organisation? Explain necessary conditions initiated for the development process.
- ii) Explain the various functions and responsibilities of the local organisation.
- iii) Write a note on the following in your own words.
  - a) Features of community organisation.
  - b) Community organisation and women.

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## 5.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN EMPOWERING PEOPLE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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The family of approaches and methods known as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Interaction in Development (PID), and Participatory Planning and Action (PLA), has gained increasing acceptance during the past decade within development projects. It applies to theory as well as development practice, bringing about a reversal from top-down to bottom-up, from centralised standardisation to local diversity, and from blueprint to learning process. This section focuses attention on what, why and how of such participatory approaches, and their impact on sustainable development. It also makes the case for using such an approach as the intervention strategy for development, be it rural or urban.

Participation basically means taking part or sharing. In the development context it goes further, with implications as to who shares, with whom, and in what context. Participation in development has a long history. Various government and non-governmental organisations, both national and international, have focused attention on participation in a conspicuous manner over the past two decades. The terms 'popular participation' and 'people's participation' have now become a part of the development language in both the sectors.

The term participation, as well as the rationale for these approaches, have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) argues for

participation in the following manner: Participation by the people in the institutions and systems which govern their lives is a basic human right and also essential for realignment of political power in favour of the disadvantaged groups and for social and economic development. Rural development strategies can realise their full potential only through motivation, active involvement and organisation at the grassroots level of rural people, with special emphasis on the least advantaged, in conceptualising and designing policies and programmes and in creating administrative, social and economic institutions, including co-operative and other voluntary forms of organisation of implementing and evaluating them.

Similar views are reflected by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), that the value of participation arises from the inherent strength of participation as a means of articulating genuine needs and satisfying them through self reliance and mass mobilisation. UNRISD used the following definition of participation in one of its publications: Participation involves organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.

There are however, significant variations in the usage of the term. According to Chambers, "Participation" is a word, which is experiencing a renaissance in the 1990s. So widespread is its use that some talk of a paradigm shift to participatory development. But he argues that "There are three main ways in which participation is used. First it is used, as a cosmetic label to make whatever is proposed appears good. Secondly it describes a co-opting practice to mobilise local labour and reduce cost. Often this means that they (local people) participate in "our" project. Third, it is used to describe an empowering process, which enables the local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain confidence, and to make their own decisions. In theory, this means, that "we" participate in "their" project not "they" in "ours". In this perspective reversing power relations is the key and weak link in achieving participation. He also notes that the gap between concept and actual practice is overshadowed by the use of the term participation in development jargon today, so much so that the meaning of the term needs clarification.

Field experience clearly shows that participation means different things to different people. For some it means people attending meetings, or labour contribution in development work like *shramadana* (free labour). In irrigation rehabilitation, for example, participation in some cases appears to have meant holding meetings to get people's endorsement to what has already been planned by the technical experts. Such meetings, presided over by the decision makers, came to be known as ratification meetings, where the dominant views of those who knew, prevailed over the others. In other instances, participation means group formation for co-operative/collective action for input supply and marketing.

The highest form of participation appears to be self-organisation and self-responsibility and self-actualisation, which results in the empowerment of the people concerned. Participation is considered by some as an essential part of human growth, that is, the development that guides sustainability.

The meaning of participation used in this unit has empowerment and self-responsibility for collective decision making as its final goal. The achievement of such participation needs to be a process in which the rural poor themselves become more aware of their own situation, of the socio-economic reality around them and of the problems. Having understood such problems they take decisions on the steps to be taken in initiating a change in their situation. Development strategies in such a context should be supportive, and accompany this process.

In such a perspective, participation becomes interrelated with a process, which opens a wide spectrum of free and open interactions. In this process, there can be progress as well as failures, but both must be viewed as opportunities to learn for taking better decisions in the future. Participation becomes a learning process for both the villagers

and the development workers. Such a process cannot be determined from outside. Continuing interaction and reflection generates it.

Experiential learning makes the process the people's own, as opposed to the people being mobilised, led or directed by outside forces. Through collective self reflection on their experiences and problems, people become aware of different dimensions of the reality, and of what can be done by themselves to transform it. With this awareness, they decide upon what collective action to take and analyse its results to promote their awareness further. Thus they move on with progressive and advancing knowledge of their evolving reality.

During the early 1970s the development interventions that were carried out with either local or external funding emphasised two types of actors. On one side were those who engaged in the task of identifying development needs, planning development activities, mobilising resources for development, implementation, monitoring the implementation process to ensure that designs, plans and disbursement of resource were taking place as planned. They also evaluated the success or failure after the event, using monetary disbursements, physical achievements or assessing the impact these activities had on the target groups as yardsticks.

On the other side were the beneficiaries for whom and for whose development all these tasks were undertaken. They were only to operate and maintain structures such as minor irrigation reservoirs, wells and rural roads, and to share the cost of the development activities.

The two categories of actors therefore were those who do things and those for whom things are being done; those who do are the empowered, they have knowledge, authority, access to resources and decision making power. Those who are the beneficiaries, lacked authority, were poor and were basic ally voiceless in the decision making process. The gap that exists between these two groups resulted in mutual mistrust, often leading to antagonism, and had serious implications on the development process.

Therefore bridging this gap between these two parties, namely the doers – the politicians, the bureaucrats, NGO activists, and those for whom things are being done – the peasants, the poor, and the citizenry at large, is identified as a prime need for successful achievement of development activities/projects. Numerous failures have been recorded in a wide spectrum of development activities, owing to the existence of this gap.

The gap can be illustrated by looking at the process through which development activities are usually undertaken. Development work is usually undertaken through projects, with set objectives, a predetermined time schedule, a plan of action, and a budget. Responsibility for implementation is assigned, and the beneficiary clientele comes into the picture only as a peripheral element.

Most of these projects are conceptualised and formulated around the availability of funds. There are many instances where the need for a project to achieve some objective is conceived in the mind of some authority that either has access to funds or enough power to start. After the project is conceived, a pre-feasibility study may be carried out, with data being gathered through traditional methods and a justification for the project worked out. If the initiator of the project is very keen on the project and has enough power, then the projects, which are not really feasible, are manipulated to appear feasible.

Once the pre-feasibility stage is over, a feasibility study is undertaken. The same manipulatory process is carried out in a deeper and more intensive form. If the feasibility study meets requirements, then the project gets off the ground and thereafter the project is implemented. Invariably the project is to benefit a specific clientele but where does the clientele come into the picture in the project planning

process? Often clients are considered a nuisance, because they express justifiable fears about the changes that may result from the project.

Are development projects planned to satisfy someone's ego, to utilise some available funding, or to solve genuine problems? If the objective is to solve problems, all parties affected by the problem should have a say in the solution that is identified. The affected parties should be brought into the project identification and formulation process. But if the involvement of the clientele is desired, how should it be done and what are the methodologies, and processes? It is here that participatory methodologies and implementation become relevant.

The participation of the beneficiaries is needed to achieve success of the projects at a very practical level. A study on rural participation cites an evaluation of over 50 rural development projects, which reveal that participation, and decision-making during implementation is even more critical to project success than participation at the initial stages. Due to lack of participation, a large number of development projects have resulted only in a short-lived progress.

An example can be cited with regard to some minor irrigation projects implemented in the latter half of the 1980s in the districts of Kurunegala and Moneragala in Sri Lanka. In the early 1990s, two to three years after projects completion, the Self Help Support Programme of the Swiss Interco operation undertook an evaluation of some of the completed irrigation projects. The results revealed that about 70% of the minor irrigation tanks rehabilitated were found to be poorly maintained by the farmers, as they were envisaging further external support for maintenance.

When some of the farmers were asked why they allowed the tank bund to get eroded to half its size in certain places, let plants grow uncontrolled, and neglected, the ant hills destroying the bunds, the answer was: we have informed the Field Officers in writing several times but none of them came this way after the construction work was over. This is a clear indication of the lack of involvement in the decision-making and implementation.

Field interaction showed that they lacked a sense of ownership or responsibility for maintaining such structures. There was no organised effort to find alternative means of addressing such issues. The Farmer Organisations appear to have been formed by the intervening organisations to renovate the first set of tanks. When the construction work was over, the need to take collective action for maintenance was not realised.

With this experience, a participatory approach was encouraged with the next set of tanks to be rehabilitated, implemented by two partner organisations in Mahawa and Kurunegala. It took a much longer time to complete the structures, as compared to the earlier experience. The Farmer Organisations were involved from the planning stage, through implementation and monitoring and evaluation, using a participatory approach, PRA. This meant building up the capacity of the Farmer Organisations, and even more so of the field officers who were used to planning and implementing projects on their own for the benefit of the people. The role reversal of these officers did not come about automatically by using the methods alone, but resulted from the follow-up after training in participatory methodology.

This slow process of reflection and action finally allowed information generation, analysis, planning and action by the farmers based on their own decisions. The results can be seen today. Urapolayagama, Heeralugam, villages in the Kurunegala District facilitated by the National Development Foundation, Kandubodagamawewa in Mahawa facilitated by the Sri Lanka Freedom from Hunger Campaign Board, Savings and Credit Groups at Mahiyangana facilitated by Future in our Hands, are examples of successful efforts of this approach. In these instances farmers organised themselves to maintain the rehabilitated schemes backed by groups funds and collective action. The difference in the results and impact of the implementation strategy has been evident.

These experiences also show the importance of the participation of the people concerned in the decision making process throughout the development cycle. A sense of ownership of assets arises when there is participation in planning, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

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## 5.6 PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES IN THE EMPOWERING PROCESS

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The recognition of the importance of participation in the development process has led to the development of a variety of methodologies in order to achieve its objectives in development projects. Current practices in implementing the participatory approaches in development are drawn from a variety of traditions such as Activist Participatory Research, Applied anthropology, Field Research on Farming Systems, Traditions and Methods of Participatory Research, Agro-Eco Systems Analysis and Rapid Rural Appraisal. According to Chambers, it represents a growing family of approaches and methods, which will enable local people to share, analyse and act to enhance their living conditions.

In the Sri Lankan Context, the national network promoting participatory approaches uses the term Participatory Interaction in Development (PID) in order to identify the methodology used in this country. This connotes participatory interaction among all actors in development, while recognising the key role of the people themselves and its relevance at various stages of the development cycle. In promoting the use of this approach in Sri Lanka, the experiences of social mobilisation, such as in the Change Agent Programme that has evolved during the past decade in Sri Lanka has been kept in mind.

PID draws heavily on PRA in the use of visualisation of tools and techniques and changes in the behavioural patterns and attitudes, while focussing on the interaction and process. It is envisaged that such a conceptual outlook promotes sustained participatory development, which will contribute to the empowerment of the people. This approach needs to be treated as an adapted version of participatory development, which is supported by creative ingenuity. Similarly, like the participatory approach, these methodologies are bound to change with experience.

Field experience over many years has shown that PID/PRA tools and techniques have a strong potential for achieving the participation of all actors concerned, particularly the villagers whether literate or illiterate. The key to this is the element of visualisation associated with such tools. The shifts from verbal to visual help even the non-articulate members, such as the under-privileged, women, and children, to participate. It creates a free and open environment for interaction.

The methods and tools often used are participatory mapping and modelling, direct observation and transect walks, seasonal calendars, time lines and trend line's matrix scoring and ranking, wealth and well-being ranking and grouping, institutional diagramming (Venn diagrams), and other forms of analytical diagramming such as different types of graphs. Information generated through these techniques is often supplemented by secondary data, which can be used for crosschecking. Focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and key informants are also used in combination with the other methods.

The opportunities for triangulation of information generated are another aspect, which come out very significantly in the use of participatory tools and techniques, and are built on the principle of visualisation. This means that the reliability and the validity of the information generated can be established through crosschecking. Visualised information also allows for the perceptions of different sectors of the populations – men and women, young and old, privileged and disadvantaged to come together on a common basis.

Interaction within the groups, between groups, and sharing with those from different locations, is made more feasible by the use of visual techniques. When farmers from Dambana in Mahiyangana presented their experience in Colombo to some well-educated development workers, they could articulate their views effectively with the use of visuals they prepared themselves. The same was true of the farmers from Urapolyagama in Kurunegala, where they presented their case to the members of the national Network for PID/PRA. Exchange visits between farmer organisations and exchanges between farmers within the group, have become more realistic and understandable with the use of these techniques. Handled carefully and skillfully by a facilitator, they become an instrument for bringing about the envisaged change in behaviour and attitudes, and for breaking barriers between different sections of the population.

Field experience shows that information needed for a situation analysis, or baseline data for establishing indicators for monitoring and evaluation in a participatory manner can be elicited, understood and agreed upon in such a process. Therefore the same tools could be used for interactive monitoring of progress of impact evaluations.

One such example is the experience of the National Development Foundation. In this organisation information generated through a participatory process has been helpful for group interaction during monthly meetings, to compare progress among themselves, with the tools providing the base for information generation analysis and discussion. Such information has proven to be equally effective for joint reviews and evaluations with the intermediary organisations and funding partners. This, however, should not be interpreted to mean that participatory evaluation and monitoring rules out hard data. Hard data can be aggregated or drawn from such basic information by the parties concerned. But the fact remains that the local organisation should do it for the purpose of monitoring.

Wealth ranking exercises are very useful for learning about the social structure and identifying a target group. They must be carefully handled, as they can become sensitive issues. The Farmer organisation of Kanudubodagamawewa in Maho is an example where such analysis promoted the community to organise itself to help the poorer sector for example, the landless poor were allowed to use small plots of paddy land allocated to them by the community for cultivating vegetables during the Yhala season. The analysis of power relations in the local set-up, which is crucial for the empowerment process, is often being done with the use of the flow charts and impact diagramming.

The use of the tools and techniques is limited by the skill of facilitation. Assessing the limits of local knowledge and awareness, and when to bring in technical and scientific know-how available with experts, can be addressed with the analysis of information generated through the use of participatory tools and techniques. The experience of building on what people already know, particularly with regard to farming systems, has shown the possibility of harmonising different types of knowledge at the local level.

None of the above should be taken to mean that the use of such methods automatically ensures participation in the manner expected that leads to empowerment, enabling villagers to conduct their own analysis, and to own the information generated. Many who pay lip service to PRA have a tendency to look at the technique as an end in itself, and not a means for attaining development goals.

The critique that tools and techniques of PID/PRA are only cosmetics to social mobilisation can be challenged in that sense. Why do people use cosmetics? They realise the existence of a shortcoming that can be covered by such an action, or at least to improve on what exists. Such visualised tools and techniques could be considered as a strong medium or a means for social mobilisation to be effective. This is particularly so if the agent wishes to change the role from an activator to a facilitator, who allows the key actors or the community to articulate views, generate information,

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analyse, draw conclusion, assess options, take decisions, implement, and monitor by themselves. Therefore, as a concept, it goes much deeper, and becomes complementary to the agent. All such approaches stress the importance of commitment to the process as a means for empowering the people. The complementarity of the approaches needs to be recognised in such a context that they should not be seen as additions for subtraction. Complementarity makes the final product of the empowerment richer, stronger, and mutually reinforcing.

A farmer, in a recent video, is shown taking pride in the fact that they could produce a result, which they never imagined they could. Therefore, it is not merely playing with stones, and sticks, or belittling the literate and the intelligentsia. While it looks like Montessori work, as some say, the basic principle behind the Montessori Method is learning by doing. A participatory approach, with a reversal of roles, is also attributed to experimental learning, in which actors in development are in partnership with those to be empowered. In other words, it helps the potential and enthusiasm inherent in human beings to grow and blossom.

### Attitudes and Behaviour

Attitudes and behaviour are an integral part in PID/PRA. As observed earlier, in the project mode of development intervention, over the past half a century, the emphasis was on planned projects being implemented with the involvement of the beneficiaries. This has meant that the implementer has a dominant role, and the beneficiary a passive role. In the use of participatory approaches, these roles are reversed, and the beneficiaries become key actors in development.

An analyst further elaborates this point as follows: the major shift, however, during the era of participatory approaches, in the past two decades is one that recognises people from a professional paradigm centering on things. This emphasis was dominant in projects implemented during the 1950s and 1960s with large infrastructure irrigation works and industrialisation being the major sectors. Another expert refers to it as handing over the stick to the poor from the bureaucracy, implying a reversal of roles.

This means PID, as an approach, emphasises a change in behaviour and attitudes, as well as in concepts, values and methods. This challenges the accepted norms, which is dominant in bureaucracies, professions, careers, and the idea of transfer of knowledge from the expert to the ignorant. It also means loss of central control of power and recognising local diversity and empowerment. Such a role reversal applies to all the steps of the development cycle.

Experience shows that the methods and tools previously described, and the process adopted contribute to reinforcing the behavioural changes among the main actors in development. This aspect of participatory approach is the most difficult to achieve. Sometimes, depending on the behaviour of the so-called facilitator, even a participatory tool or technique may lead to top-down implementation. After many years of conventional bureaucratic behaviour, it is certainly a challenge to bring about these different behavioural patterns.

Frustration, due to non-fulfillment of promises and specific biases of projects to which the community has been exposed for generations, makes this paradigm shift a difficult process for the village. In the eyes of the villager, the outsider is the officer, and the past experience with outsiders often inhibits free and open expression.

However, there are instances where participatory methods have helped people to articulate their views to the politicians and decision makers effectively. Even in the contexts such as the plantation sector, where there is a dominant management set-up, workers have used the results of participatory analysis to open a dialogue with the superintendent.

The culture of collaboration between development partners, based on openness and democratic decision-making is essential for sustained development. This can only be realised through a participatory relationship with the communities. The more experience we gather in the use of such an approach, the more we shall understand its implications. It is important to emphasise the spirit in which these methods are used. It is not the tool or the approach, which is often at fault, but the way it is used. Therefore, improving effective facilitation skills on the part of the development workers becomes critically important. The way in which the approach is implemented can help to prevent biases on the basis of community leadership, gender and the disadvantaged.

### **Process and Sharing**

The third significant element in PID/PRA is the process or the sharing of experience. Participatory approaches, particularly PID/PRA, emphasise the need to think beyond projects. In other words, there is a commitment to a process, and is not limited to a project which is time bound. Such a process will create an environment where people actively pursue development activities, on their own initiative. In other words, experience in field situations reveals that self-organised collective action can evolve as a result of a positive environment, which we, as development workers, may have helped to generate through facilitating a process.

Due to the emphasis given to the process in participatory approaches, there is no direct guideline, which can be applied or replicated. The process of learning takes place both vertically and horizontally. Farmers learn from each other through interaction. Farmer groups share experience through interaction between groups, which leads to local people becoming good facilitators for each other's analysis. Local people, such as farmers and villagers, become confident of their own expertise and acquire skills through the process.

This has made it possible for them to share their experience with other local, national and international organisations. In 1991, villagers from Mahiyangana presented their analysis, how they did it, and the purpose for which it was done, to a large gathering of managerial personnel and decision makers from the governmental and non-governmental organisations at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo. A similar experience took place in the network for PID/PRA gathering in Colombo, where farmers from Kurunegala presented their case in 1994. In spite of the change in environment from a simple village life to metropolitan Colombo, the farmers remained unruffled by the questions raised by the audience. This shows a clear indication of a high esteem arising from self-actualisation and confidence. They could explain to anybody with confidence what they had analysed, planned, implemented and monitored. Recent training conducted for field officers through farmer resource persons, by Action Aid India, is another example of this form of sharing.

It is pointed out that various technologies, approaches and methods are spread laterally by peers rather than vertically through transfer of technology. Farmer to farmer extension is becoming more prevalent, both within and between countries and ecological zones. In PID/PRA, the best trainers and facilitators for adjoining villagers are those who have already gained experience in the application of the approach.

A villager who has gone through a participatory process of development in his village was asked as to what he would suggest to do differently, if the PDA/PRA process was to be replicated in another village. He promptly replied: 'this is how we did it, and it makes sense to us; others may do it differently. Please ask them to evolve their own system'. This simple statement from a farmer in a remote village in Kurunegala has an in-depth philosophy behind it. It shows trust in the potential, and belief in the evolving nature of the participatory process. However, when reference was made about improved farming practices, he said: 'those could be shared with our colleagues in the next village. Friends from other villages have visited us to learn about intensive rice

cultivation practices from our demonstration plots'. Thus experience spreads from farmer to farmer, and village to village. It is also spreading from non-governmental to governmental organisations and vice versa through national networking. Regional exchanges provide a forum for sharing of these techniques between nations.

### **Process and Time**

A participatory approach is a catch word in the development jargon today. However, when it comes to the progress and monitoring of the projects and programmes, the tendency is to look for easily accomplished and tangible targets. Naturally the development worker gets sandwiched between the community based participatory approach emphasising people and their reality, and the demand for physical and financial targets. This dilemma still prevails, even though participation has entered as a buzzword in the development literature.

An expert's comments on this conflict are as follows: "development workers do not seem to have very much time or patience. Perhaps it is all a result of the invention of the jet engine- if we can get there in only ten hours why do we need ten years to develop the place? On a more serious level, we do seem to want results amazingly quickly. It is however doubtful that the development process can be compressed to meet our ambitions. We used to talk about three year projects; perhaps we should be talking about twenty year programmes. How many rural areas have developed in one generation? We are working with people, people with their own urgencies, priorities and time scales. It is their development that is the measure of success."

This highlights the fact that if people matter in development, there is no short cut. We have to facilitate a process whereby people become sensitive to their problems and express readiness to change their situation by taking responsibility for their own organisations and acting correctively, taking decisions for the desired changes. We, as development workers, need to facilitate such a process and support strengthening of such organisations. This is a long-term process demanding the necessary commitment.

'A great deal of heartbreak which in the past has too often turned over optimistic idealists into later cynics, would be avoided if those who wish to help in development could learn to be content to do good slowly.' As Burkey rightly says, poor people who never had the opportunity of participating in a democratic process require time to learn to formulate and express their ideas, participate in open debate, take collective decisions and follow up with cooperative action. Mistakes can be made into lessons leading to better decisions in the future. Development workers need to remember that behavioural patterns cannot be changed at once. Change must be a gradual process, a process in which the ideas and behaviour of all actors in the development process will most probably change over time.

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### **SAQ 3**

- i) Explain the significance of participatory approaches in empowering people for sustainable development.
  - ii) Write a note on the following in your own words:
    - a) Methods and Tools.
    - b) Process and Sharing.
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Let us now summarise what we have studied so far.

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## **5.7 SUMMARY**

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In the case of specific grassroots level organisations, the potential of participatory methodology has been proven in many instances. Participatory methods using visual and verbal modes of communication have been effectively used for appraisal,

planning, monitoring and evaluation of the development programmes. But the use of methods alone is not enough to sustain the participation of the community in the development process. Other significant aspects which need to be strengthened include the institutionalisation of the processes, delegation of responsibility, and decentralisation of decision-making and resource allocation.

The anticipated role reversals are extremely significant for the key actors, namely the villagers, to perform effectively.

Participation, in the context of participatory approaches, specifically PID, can be used in a much wider perspective than it is currently used. All actors in the development scene have a role to play - the farmers and villagers who are the prime actors, the facilitators or change agents from government or non-governmental sectors, the decision makers in managerial positions, and policy makers and politicians. The roles of different actors can be geared towards the realisation of the common objective of sustainable development through empowerment of the people. There is a need to create an environment where people themselves are the key actors, and all the other actors play a facilitative and supportive role.

This should rule out the misunderstanding that a bottom up process is one where people do everything by themselves, know everything that needs to be known and consider that modern technology/research has no role to play.

In a participatory approach, there is certainly room for scientific research and technology. The only difference is that we build on what is already known by the farmers as indigenous technology, and there is an opportunity to harmonise or adapt research findings in an acceptable and sustained manner. This means a re-orientation of the conventional extension systems, the field workers' role, and that of the institutions they represent, in order to evolve a system which emphasises support and facilitation for local farming initiatives, which are essential for sustainable development.

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## **5.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Explain various approaches and methods of participatory approach.
2. Discuss participatory approach and the principles of participatory development.
3. Write a note on the constraints of participation.
4. Explain various principles of community development.
5. Write a note on the salient features and functions of community organisation.
6. What is Community organisation? Briefly examine the role of women in these organisations.
7. Examine the role of participatory approach in empowering people for sustainable development.
8. Explain the participatory methodologies in the empowering process.

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