
UNIT 1 PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT – AN OVERVIEW

Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Participatory development is one of the most important approaches for realizing self-reliant, sustainable development and social justice. In the so-called top-down approach to development, the entire process of formulating and implementing policies is carried out under the direction of developing country governments and the people tend to be put in a passive position. The social strata that receive the benefits of development have their position as beneficiaries reinforced by this system for promoting development, leaving unsolved deep-rooted problems of poverty and disparities between urban and rural areas. This, in turn, jeopardizes the success and sustainability of development projects. Participatory development arose from consciousness of these inadequacies. Specifically, participatory development is an attempt to compensate for or overcome the limitations of the top-down development approach by adopting a bottom-up development approach. The latter approach involves taking the needs and opinions of local residents into account as much as possible in the formulation and implementation of development project policy. It is an approach that enables people to acquire the skills needed to implement and coordinate the management of development projects themselves and thus reap more of development's returns.

Therefore, in this Unit we attempt to present you the concept, meaning, principles, approaches, typology of participation, measurement and indicators of participation, which will be useful to you to understand the approaches and strategies to promote participatory development.

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept and meaning of participatory development;
- describe the principles and approaches to participation;
- appreciate the typology of participation, measurement and indicators of participation; and
- explain the approaches and strategies for promoting participatory development.

1.2 PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPT AND MEANING

There are many paths to development. Different paths to development, nevertheless, converge in an assumption that improvement in living conditions are not brought about from above by some outside agency but by the people themselves taking an active part in their development. It is, therefore, generally agreed that if progress is to be achieved, it cannot be imposed from outside and must be based on small locally based and sustainable initiatives. To effectively address issues of sustainability and equity, people centred and people controlled development is evolving as an alternative approach. The focus of current development efforts is, thus, heavily tilted in favour of building institutional capacity through participation and local self-reliance leading to empowerment. The notion of 'people's participation' is now widely recognized as a basic operational principle of development programmes and projects. Participation has come to be recognized as an absolute imperative for development. Some even argue that development, in fact, *is* participation. There is nothing more basic to the development process than participation. Over the last ten years, participation by the people has become a buzzword in the development community.

The failure of past development efforts was largely attributed to the lack of people's participation. Development was carried out for the people, but not by them. The existing planning procedures for the project are not based on the understanding of the critical ingredients of participation; namely participation in decision making, participation in implementation, participation in benefit sharing and participation in evaluation. In response, the emphasis shifted to local development efforts and involvement of the people in development activities. These conventional strategies have seen development primarily as a series of technical transfers aimed at boosting production and generating wealth. The basic fault in the conventional approach is that the 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 organizational structure to represent their interests. Isolated, undereducated and often dependent on elites, they lack the means to win greater access to resources and markets, and to prevent the imposition of unworkable programmes or technologies. The lesson is clear: unless the poor are given the means to participate fully in development, they will continue to be excluded from its benefits. This realization is provoking new interest in an alternative development strategy, that of people's participation through organizations controlled and financed by the poor.

In the traditional approach to development it is well known that the administrators of development projects and the beneficiaries do not sit on the same side of the table. In fact they sit at different levels, the former being always at a higher level. What follows, therefore, is quite inevitable. Each looks at each other with suspicion. Community participation is non-existent. At times the people of a given area are not even informed of project implementation in their area. At other times, after plans are made, the community is informed through formal meetings where the officers justify their plans, but modification is not considered. Projects tend to be identified and designed by donors in consultation with central government officials, and the budgets and timetables are planned in a rigid way

which makes it difficult for the community to play a significant role. The emphasis upon the achievement of physical outputs within a limited period of time and with close supervision and accountability are added difficulties.

1.2.1 Defining and Interpreting Participation

Since the late 1970s there has been a range of interpretations of the meaning of participation in development. The following are a number of examples: 'With regard to rural development . . . participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.' (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977) Participation is also considered a voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development, but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticizing its contents (Economic Commission for Latin America, 1973). Participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in benefits of developmental programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). According to the Asian Development Bank, "Participatory development may be defined as a process through which stakeholders can influence and share control over development initiatives, and over the decisions and resources that affect themselves".

What gives real meaning to popular participation is the collective effort by the people concerned to pool their efforts and whatever other resources they decide to pool together, to attain objectives they set for themselves. In this regard participation is viewed as an active process in which the participants take initiatives and actions that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberations over which they exert effective control. The idea of passive participation which only involves the people in actions that have been thought out or designed by others and controlled by others is unacceptable. Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal group, self-reliance or other values they cherish (Paul, 1987).

The development literature is overburdened with the definitions of the term participation. 'Participation' has been used in different ideological contexts and has been given a variety of more specific meanings in development literature and among development organizations, planners and managers. There is no one comprehensive definition that describes how participation works in development. The definition depends on the objectives of the development organization and their capacity to implement participatory approaches. Each development organization has to define for itself, what exactly they mean by 'participation' (SEGA: FAO, 2001). Participation is most often taken to mean involvement by 'common' people (i.e., by non-professionals) in various types and stages of development work. Frequently, these people are intended beneficiaries of the work that is undertaken. When that is the case, one commonly refers to the involvement as people's participation. But 'participation' may also denote involvement by a range of other stakeholders with different interests and abilities. Most fundamentally, as stated by Keough (1998), participatory development should be considered as 'at heart a philosophy', embedding the belief that 'it is the right way to conduct oneself with other human beings (1998:194).

According to the UNDP (1993:21) ‘participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives’. This appears to be one of the simplest definitions of participation since it implies that people participate only in those economic, social, cultural and political processes that have the potential to bring about favourable changes in their lives. This definition comes very close to the notion of Johnston and Clark (1982:171) who have strongly warned against regarding participation as a ‘free good, desirable in unlimited quantities.’ Participation, according to them, “has a large cost for the poor and they will invest their participation when they believe it will secure them valuable benefits not otherwise available at comparable cost, time and risk”(ibid. :172).

A participatory approach aims to support local people to carry out their own development using the expertise of outsiders to help them achieve their development goals. While local women and men are the experts on local constraints and opportunities, they do not know everything. Small farmers, for example, are usually disadvantaged in their lack of knowledge about the options that development programmes can offer, including improved methods and technologies, and may not receive information about markets, inputs and new government policies. Therefore, while development agencies need greater access to local knowledge in order to play a more effective role, farmers need increased access to information about the wider context in which they live in order to make informed decisions about their development (SEGA, FAO 2001).

Quite often there is a tendency to link participation with some development project as if outside project there is no scope for participation. This type of approach to participation is easily discernible from Paul’s interpretation who says, “participation is an active process by which beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish” (1986:2).

There are other scholars who have tried to interpret participation in slightly different ways by placing more emphasis on the process rather than the contents and outcome of the participation. In this regard special reference may be made of Fraser (1993:190) who makes a distinction between participation that is spontaneous or bottom-up with the participation that is induced, coerced, or top-down participation. Similarly, the United Nations (1981:8) distinguishes between coerced participation, which it condemns, induced participation, which it regards as second best, and spontaneous or bottom-up participation, which it contends ‘comes closest to the ideal mode of participation, as it reflects voluntary and autonomous action on the part of the people to organize and deal with their problems unaided by governments or other external agencies.’ Further, Midgley (1986) also makes a similar distinction between ‘authentic’ participation, in which local people democratically control project decision-making, and pseudo-participation, in which projects are carried out according to prior decisions made by outsiders.

1.2.2 Participatory Development and Participation in Development

At this stage, it would not be out of place, if a distinction between participation in development and participatory development were also made. Participation in

development is usually said to mean the full involvement of people in the development which affect their lives, regardless of gender, race, age, class, sexual orientation or disability. Participatory development essentially means conventional project practice in a more participatory and sensitive manner. Wignaraja (1991:202) has observed that, “participatory development is essentially top-down participation while participation in development is bottom-up participation”. The distinction between participatory development and participation-in-development is central to understanding of practice of participation. Table 1 provides as comparative analysis of the two concepts. According to FAO (1997), participation in development is a process of equitable and active involvement of all stakeholders in the formulation of development policies and strategies and in the analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities.

Table 1.1: Comparative Analysis: Participatory Development vs. Participation – in – Development

Participatory Development	Participation in Development
It means conventional project practice in a more participatory and sensitive manner.	It entails genuine efforts to engage in practices which openly and radically encourage people’s participation.
It is introduced within the predetermined project framework.	It stems from the understanding that poverty is caused by structural factors. It attempts to alter some of these causes which lead to poverty.
It is top-down participation in the sense that the management of the project defines where, when and how much the people can participate.	It is bottom up participation in the sense that the local people have full control over the processes and the project provides for necessary flexibility.
It is the more prevalent practice. It is more dominant in terms of resources available.	It is more prevalent with NGOs than with the governments. Such cases are still a few but increasing in influence.

Source: Oakley et al. (1981)

1.2.3 Participatory Development: Principles and Approaches

Participatory development is essential for at least two reasons:

- it strengthens civil society and the economy by empowering groups, communities and organizations to negotiate with institutions and bureaucracies, thus influencing public policy and providing a check on the power of government; and,
- it enhances the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of development programmes.

Participatory development, or what is sometimes referred to as popular participation, may be defined as a process by which people take an active and influential hand in shaping decisions that affect their lives. Popular participation

may involve difficult and long processes but brings many benefits: the contribution of local knowledge to; an increased chance of objectives and outputs being relevant to perceived needs; greater efficiency and honesty of officials and contractors because they are under public scrutiny; “ownership” of the activity by community-based organizations. Through empowerment, participation can also lead to changes in knowledge, skills and the distribution of power across individuals and communities thus improving social equity.

“**Empowerment**” is essential to participatory development. Empowerment is enhanced when the organizations in which people participate are based on a democratic approach, strengthening the capacity of members to initiate action on their own or negotiate with more powerful actors. It thus builds up the capacity of people to generate and influence development at various levels, increasing their access to and influence over resources and institutions, including by groups hitherto marginalized such as low-income populations and particularly women.

Participatory development is not ‘blue-print’ development but it is a strategy which constructs its approach in relation to the demands of the project context. In this respect, some basic principles will help to determine what this approach should be. In the practice of participatory development to date, the following are the kinds of key principles which have been seen to be more important (UNDP, 1998).

The primacy of people: whatever the purpose or ultimate goal of the project, people’s interests, their needs and their wishes must be allowed to underpin the key decisions and actions relating to the project. It is not a question of including people as and when it is felt by project management to be convenient; people must sit centre-stage and their interests taken into consideration during the whole course of the project.

People’s knowledge and skills must be seen as a potentially positive contribution to the project: a project which does not seek to make use of local knowledge and skills may not only be less effective but will also be squandering a useful resource. A participatory project should seek every possibility to base its activities upon local resources, both to avoid situations of dependence on external ones and also to help develop local capabilities, which will be important if the development is to be sustained. Participation is to do with developing people’s capacities and this can best be achieved by building on and strengthening their existing knowledge and expertise.

People’s Participation must empower women: participatory development should seek to improve gender inequalities through providing a means by which women can take part in decision making. Women’s participation must be transformative, not be merely tokenistic; while there are often enormous social and cultural barriers which hinder women’s participation, participatory development should seek to bring about change and to create the circumstances where women’s voices can also be heard. This is a sensitive and critical issue, but efforts to involve women in an appropriate manner must be central.

Autonomy as opposed to control: as far as it is realistic to do so, seek to invest as much responsibility as possible for the project with the local people, and thus avoid having absolute control in the hands of project staff. Such a principle is

not always realistic and it should not be pushed too far in such circumstances; but there must be a discernible move to minimize the control of project staff and to maximize the potential responsibility of local people.

Local actions as opposed to local responses: encouraging local people to make decisions and to take action within the broad parameters of the project, as opposed to merely responding passively to initiatives proposed by others. The more that these kinds of local initiatives can be encouraged, the more a sense of ownership will develop among local people; but the major obstacle may see project staff who are unwilling or unable to promote local ownership of project activities and outcomes.

Allow for some spontaneity in project direction: promoting people's participation will mean that, as far as it is reasonably possible, the project should be allowed to develop in accordance with the abilities of local people to play an increasing role and to begin to assume some responsibility. Unless the project is able to plan for and to accommodate people's participation, it will remain a straight jacket and may push on to predetermined objectives regardless of whether local people are on board or not. Participatory projects do often take longer but, if they are truly participatory, the outcome is more positive and sustainable.

After reading this section, you would have gained some idea about participatory development. Now you should be able to answer the questions given in *Check Your Progress 1*.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What is the difference between participatory development and participation in development?

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2) Why is participatory development essential?

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1.3 PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

In promoting participatory development it is important to consider and decide how this is to be done. It is not enough simply to declare a commitment to participation. A strategy must be devised which should purposefully guide the promotion of participation within the project. A major reason why people's participation is not consistent or effective in many projects is because time and resources have not been given to thinking through how it is to be promoted. Clearly a project cannot afford to spend an excessive amount of time on this promotion; hence the importance of devising a strategy and of promoting people's participation in accordance with the expectations of the project. Project management must be able to take a long term view of the expected development of the project and be prepared to promote the form of participation which would be most appropriate. We can structure this examination of a strategy for participation around four key aspects; the initial questions, the basic principles in promoting participation, participation as a sequence of actions and the key stages in a participatory strategy (UNDP1998).

Asking the Initial Questions

- a) What might be the reaction of national and local authorities to efforts to promote participatory development? National and local political systems do have an effect upon the political climate at the local level and it can not be assumed that efforts to increase people's say in and responsibility for local development processes will be looked upon with approval. It will be critical to assess the potential for a participatory form of development within the context of the national political climate in order to avoid any major dysfunctions or adverse reactions once the project has got underway.
- b) What are the social, political, and cultural factors within the area or region in which the project is to be developed, which could influence people's participation? This question is fundamental to understanding the likely reaction to a participatory project and will inform project management of the kinds of obstacles which the project might encounter. It should also reveal those factors which could facilitate local people's participation.
- c) What local traditional practices or organisations could play an effective role in promoting participation? The answer to this question will be fundamental in designing the methodology of the project and it has been shown that, where participatory projects can be built upon existing patterns or structures of participation, they can be more effective. Participatory development projects are introduced into areas and regions where traditional forms of community co-operation and support will already exist and such projects should seek to adopt their ideas to these existing mechanisms and not invent entirely new structures.
- d) What would be the likely reaction of local people to efforts to get them more involved in, to make a contribution towards and to assume some responsibility for the proposed development project? In order to answer this question, it may be necessary to find out what other development initiatives have taken place in the area in the past decade or so and what consequences they had for

the local population. Participation demands time, energy and resources on the part of local people and it would be useful to assess what demands the project might make upon them and what the likely response would be.

- e) What resources, skills and time does the project have to promote participation? A careful and realistic assessment of the project's own potential to promote participation is a prerequisite to the design of an appropriate strategy. There is no point in being overly ambitious if the skills and resources are not available! It is a difficult task to match the resources available with the nature of the participation which can be promoted. The promotion of participation does demand resources and these will have to be assessed carefully before the project begins.

1.3.1 Participation: Means Vs. End

Participation is an objective as well as means when social development is the ultimate goal of any aid activity. In other projects, with economic or sector goals, enhanced participation may be seen as a means to achieving other objectives. In all cases the project framework should make this clear. As regards the rationale for participatory development, it is mostly agreed by many scholars that it can be both utilitarian (instrumental) and moral (final). This dual rationale for participatory development, in fact, lends lot of support to the generally held view that participation is both a means and an end in itself. Tab1.1 provides a comparative analysis of these concepts.

Table 1.2: Comparative Analysis: Participation as Means vs. End

Participation as Means	Participation as End
It implies use of participation to achieve some predetermined goal or objective.	Participation as an end attempts to empower people to participate in their own development more meaningfully.
It is an attempt to utilise the existing resources in order to achieve the objective of programmes/project.	The attempt is to ensure increased role of people in development initiative.
The stress is on achieving the objective and not so much on the act of participation itself.	The focus is on improving the ability of the people to participate rather than just achieving the predetermined objectives of the project.
It is more common in the government programmes etc. where the main concern is to mobilise the community and involve them in improving the efficiency of the delivery system.	This view hardly finds favour with the government agencies. NGOs in principle agree for this viewpoint.
Participation is generally short term.	Participation as an end is viewed as a long-term process.
Participation as a means therefore, appears to be a passive form of participation	Participation as an end is relatively more active and dynamic.

Source: Oakley et al. (1981)

1.3.2 The Argument For and Against of Participation

There are arguments for and against the promotion of greater people's participation. These arguments are less concerned with societal level participation in democratic and representative institutions, but more with people's participation in development activities. There has been a consensus on usefulness of participation in development projects. The major advantages of participation as enumerated by Oakley et al. (1991), and others are:

Participation as Contribution: In a different ways, contribution of the local people is solicited. People's participation is construed as people's contribution to the project. Their contribution can vary from voluntary to even forced. Most of the projects on health, education, water supply, etc. emphasize on people's contribution in form of labour material or other resources.

Participation as Empowerment: Participation is being increasingly viewed as the process of empowering the local people. The focus is on transfer of power-change in the power structure. This is based on the recognition of the relationship between the state and people. Thus participation becomes a process of empowering the people so that they gain more control over their own resources and lives.

Participation, however, doesn't always lead to empowerment. It takes a supportive environment in which to nurture people's aspirations and skills for empowerment to ultimately occur. Some means of achieving this are:

- Don't underestimate people. Give them tools to manage complexity; don't, shield them from it;
- Divide the issues into bite-sized chunks
- Start with people's own concerns and the issues relevant to them
- Don't superimpose your own ideas and solutions at the outset;
- Help people widen their perceptions of the choices available and to clarify the implications of each option;
- Build in visible early successes to develop the confidence of participants; "Staircase" skills, trust and commitment to the process: offer a progressive range of levels of involvement and help people to move up the ladder;
- Direct empowerment training for participants may not be appreciated - it may be better to develop skills more organically as part of the process;
- If at all possible, avoid going for a comprehensive irreversible solution. Set up an iterative learning process, with small, quick, reversible pilots and experiments;
- Continuously review and widen membership. As new interests groups are discovered how will they be integrated into the process?
- Help people to build their understanding of complex and remote decision processes which are outside the delegated powers of the participation process but which are affecting the outcomes.
- Nurture new networks and alliances;
- Plans must be meaningful and lead to action;

- Manage the link between the private ability of the various interest groups to deliver on their commitments and the public accountability and control of the implementation;
- Build in opportunities for reflection and appraisal; *and*
- Make sure people are having fun!

The FAO (1997) has argued that for governments and development agencies, people's participation through small groups offers distinct advantages which, among others, include:

Economies of scale: The high cost of providing development services to scattered, small scale producers is a major constraint on poverty-oriented programmes. Participatory groups constitute a grassroots "receiving system" that allows development agencies to reduce the unit delivery or transaction costs of their services, thus broadening their impact.

Higher productivity: Given access to resources and a guarantee that they will share fully in 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 to build net cash surpluses that strengthen the groups' economic base and contribute to rural capital formation.

Reduced costs and increased efficiency: The poor's contribution to project planning and implementation represent savings that reduce project 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.

Participation can ensure effective utilization of available resources: The people and other agents work in tandem towards achieving their objectives. The local people take responsibility of various activities. All these improve the efficiency and make the project more cost-effective.

The major allegation against this, however, is that the government and other agencies in the name of people's participation may assign fewer resources and transfer the burden of project costs onto the local people.

Building of democratic organizations: The limited size and informality of small groups is suited to the poor's scarce organizational 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.

Sustainability: Participatory development leads to increased self-reliance among the poor and the establishment of a network of self-sustaining rural organizations. 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; politically, participatory approaches provide opportunities for the poor to contribute constructively to development.

The pivotal role of people's participation in development is now re-emerging in economic and social development thinking. The strategy for sustainable development includes a "people-centered" approach that will improve the poor's

access to productive assets, allow them to participate in designing and implementing development programmes, and foster their involvement in institutions from village to national level (FAO, 1997).

Effectiveness

Lack of people's involvement has been seen as one of the major causes of failure of most projects. People's participation can make the projects more effective by providing them say in deciding the objectives, strategy and participating in implementation there by ensuring effective utilisation of the local resources.

Self-reliance

A major criticism of many development interventions has been that they create a kind of dependence syndrome. However, if the local resources – both human and material are utilised, the realisation grows that many problems have local solutions. With active involvement of the local people, it is not only possible to break the mentality of dependence but also increase the local people awareness, confidence and control. In fact, the involvement in decision making, implementation and monitoring develops human resource, which can enable them to participate at other levels.

Coverage

Despite professed target groups and attempts to cover the weaker sections, most projects have been found lacking in this aspect. The benefits are cornered off by the elite and powerful. People's participation can be a potent way of ensuring the benefits to the target group. Further, the cost effective operations can ensure that resources are available for wider coverage.

Sustainability

Most of the externally assisted projects fail to sustain the level of activity once support or inputs are diminished or withdrawn. People's participation is regarded as an essential pre-requisite for continuity of the activities. The involvement of local people and utilisation of local resource becomes essential for sustainability.

However, the litmus test is whether people's participation brings them tangible benefits or it is just a ploy to get people's contribution or unfairly burden them. They can be summarised as follows:

Arguments against Participation:

- Participation costs time and money; it is essentially a process with no guaranteed impact upon the end product. Participation can greatly add to the costs of a development activity and therefore its benefits have to be carefully calculated;
- Processes of participation are irrelevant and a luxury in situations of poverty and it will be hard to justify expenditure on such a process where people need to be fed and their livelihoods secured;
- Participation can be a destabilising force in that it can unbalance existing socio-political relationships and threaten the continuity of development work;
- Participation is driven by 'ideological fervour' and is less concerned with seeking to secure direct benefits for people from development activities than with promoting an ideological perspective into development; and

- Participation can result in the shifting of the burden onto the poor and the relinquishing by national governments of their responsibilities to promote development with equity.
- Certain costs are associated with people's participation. Oakely *et al.* (1991) has identified the major arguments against people's participation as follows:
- Delayed start and initial slow progress in terms of achievement of physical as well as financial targets.
- Increased resource requirement in terms of material as well human to support participation.
- Process taking its own course and not moving in the expected lines.
- Relinquishing power and control is not easy.
- Increased expectation due to the involvement of the local people.

Hence, many projects just prefer to involve people only in the implementation stage to avoid problems. In most projects participation is more illusory than real. Therefore, participation remains rhetoric than a practical reality. This is despite a general realisation that participation has to be an essential ingredient in development projects.

1.3.3 Obstacles to People's Participation

People participation takes place in a socio-political context. A host of factors have been identified as obstacles to participation. Oakley *et al.* (1991) has listed the three major obstacles to people's participation namely structural obstacles, administrative obstacles and social obstacles. Structural obstacles comprise of those factors which form the part of the centralised political systems and are not oriented towards people's participation. The other set comprises of administrative obstacles. The administrative structures are control oriented and hardly provide any significant space to local people to make their own decisions, control their resources etc. Finally the social obstacles which include mentality of dependence, domination of the local elite, gender inequality etc are quite crucial to people's participation.

Most of participatory development fails to take into account the larger obstacles and hence the impact such projects is hardly sustainable and pervasive.

1.3.4 Participation and Empowerment

Participation is a qualitative process leading to qualitative change in the form of empowerment. But can we measure the qualitative change? Essentially the question that we have to ask is whether the outcome of participation in development can be evaluated and characterized as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful'? Uphoff (1980) has very correctly observed that, "empowerment is a key aspect of participation, but it is not the whole of participation. For Freire(1973), "the supreme touchstone of development is whether people who were previously treated as mere objects, known and acted upon, can now actively know and act upon, thereby becoming subjects of their own social destiny. When people are oppressed or reduced to the culture of silence, they do not participate in their own humanization. Conversely, when they participate, thereby, becoming active subjects of knowledge and action, they begin to construct their properly human history and engage in progress of authentic development".

Oakley and Marsden (1984:86) have identified three levels of participation leading to empowerment. The first level they call as 'manipulatory' or 'therapeutic', and place mass mobilisations campaigns (for example literacy campaign in India) in this category. At the second level they say only 'token' forms of participation with the extension of information, consultation and collaboration of one sort or another (like beneficiary oriented rural development projects). At the upper levels is partnerships, delegated power and citizen control, which are, regarded as "real" forms of participation.

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In the UNDP's Human Development Report (1993:21), it has been very categorically mentioned that, "since participation requires increased influence and control, it also demands increased empowerment. Any proposal to increase participation must therefore pass the *empowerment test* — does it increase or decrease people's power to control their lives"? Almost similar view echoes in the opinion expressed by Oakley and Marsden (1984), "participation as end is the inexorable consequence of the process of empowering and liberation. The state of activating power and of meaningfully participating in the development process is in fact the objective of the exercise". Giving a new term as 'knowledge empowerment' which participation brings about, Kronenburg (1986) also links participation with empowerment when he says, "with the newly acquired power of knowledge, which has not been given or taken away from somewhere but has been auto-generated, the participants can influence the course of events to liberate themselves from oppressive situations and determine their own destiny".

Successful participation must be concerned with achieving power: that is power to influence the decisions that affect one's life. But can we ignore the strength of Goulet's (1989:175) view that, "limits exist as to how much participation can occur, and as to what goals it can achieve". He even cautions, "in participation gestation times for success are long and unpredictable"(*ibid.*, 176). And he deplores, "participation, is no panacea for development: its dual nature as both goal and means implies unending compromises between the antagonistic requirements of efficiency and equity (*ibid*, 175).

UNDP in its Human development Report (1993:31) has very aptly noted, "Participation is a process, not an event. What is important is that the impulses for participation be understood and nurtured", since "participation is a plant that does not grow easily in the human environment."

1.3.5 Typology of Participation

Manipulative Participation: Participation is simply pretence, with “people’s” representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.

Passive Participation: People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people’s responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.

Participation in Information giving: People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaires surveys or similar approaches. People do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings of the research are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.

Participation by Consultation: People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views. The external professionals define both problems and solutions, and may modify these in the light of people’s responses. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people’s views.

Participation for Material Incentives: People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Much on farm research falls in this category, as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in the experimentation or the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.

Functional Participation: People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organisation. Such involvement does not tend to be at early stages of project cycles or planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but may become self-dependent.

Interactive Participation: People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals.

Self-Mobilisation: People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contact with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated mobilisation and collective action or may not challenge existing inequitable distributions of wealth and power!

Adapted from: Socio-cultural Impact (www.socio-culturalimpact.com). “Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer’s Guide. 1995.

1.3.6 Measuring Participation

Participation is often recognised as being an important element in project design and some projects go so far as to have participation itself as an objective. One should try to measure project effectiveness in terms of the participation of different interest groups in the decision making process. This will include a measure of

the quality of participation as well as its quantity. For example, in the case of a water-supply project, the formation of a village or urban water committee was a prerequisite of the project providing assistance to a village or to an urban area and one of the tasks of the project manager was to examine the effectiveness of these institutions. Questions that had to be answered included:

- Which committees are more effective and why?
- Are the committees representative?
- Is there a trade-off between effectiveness and being representative?
- Who is using the water supply?
- Are any standpipes broken?
- How effective is the village/urban committee at managing the repairs of the standpipes?

In order to measure the institutional health of the village water committees the project manager might use an institutional maturity index. This would consist of a more than just a list of village/urban committees. It would include, for instance, information on each committee's membership, the numbers of meetings it held, their degree of representativeness and whether or not a record of decisions taken by the committee had been kept. This information should allow the bare facts of project progress to be unpacked and the reasons for success and failure understood.

1.4 INDICATORS OF PARTICIPATION

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) involves asking a number of broad questions concerning project output, effect and impact. Essentially, we need to know what has happened as a result of the project's activities, when and to what extent. We also need to understand the economic, political and social changes which have occurred and how these are perceived. In order to do this we need to identify and agree the indicators which will be used to describe and to illustrate the results and changes which we are looking for. The use of indicators is a prominent feature of most M and E systems and there is extensive literature on their nature, purpose and how they should be used. In particular, emphasis is placed on the need to ensure that the indicators selected for the M and E of a particular project are:

- valid
- relevant
- specific
- timely
- reliable
- sensitive
- cost-effective

The selection of indicators is a critical issue and the most important thing is to ensure that proposed indicators meet the above criteria. There is little point in selecting indicators which, for example, are over-complex, demand enormous amounts of staff time or appear to be un-related to the objectives of the project. Furthermore, indicators of participation will need to be both quantitative and

qualitative; quantitative indicators to measure the extent and the magnitude and qualitative indicators to describe and to explain the nature and quality of the participation which has occurred. The following is a composite list of possible indicators of a process of participation which is drawn from a range of project level examples:

1.4.1 Quantitative Indicators of Participation

- Improved and more effective service delivery
- Numbers of project level meetings and attendance levels
- Percentages of different groups attending meetings (e.g. women, landless)
Numbers of direct project beneficiaries
- Project input take-up rates
- Numbers of local leaders assuming positions of responsibility
- Numbers of local people who acquire positions in formal organisations
- Numbers of local people who are involved in different stages of project

1.4.2 Qualitative Indicators of Participation

- Organisational growth at the community level
- Growing solidarity and mutual support
- Knowledge of financial status of project
- Concern to be involved in decision-making at different stages
- Increasing ability of project group to propose and undertake actions
- Representation in other government or political bodies with relation to the project
- Emergence of people willing to take on leadership
- Interaction and the building of contacts with other groups and organisations
- People begin to have a say in and to influence local politics and policy formulation

The above are not a model list of indicators of participation; they are far too many and are presented merely as examples of the kinds of indicators which could be used. The two critical issues are (i) to work with the minimum number of indicators which could give a realistic understanding of the evolving process of participation, and (ii) to determine the indicators on the basis of the characteristics and purpose of the project. There are no generic indicators for the M and E of participation. A further question concerns who determines the indicators and how far indicators necessarily have to be external and supposedly objective; there is an increasing awareness that local people should also be involved in determining how their increasing participation could best be monitored and the more appropriate indicators. It should be borne in mind that 'indicators' is a term employed by external development projects and that it may need to be translated in a different way in the local context. Indeed, as we shall see below, there are even suggestions that indicators are not very useful in the M and E of processes like participation and that less structured and more flexible means are needed to evaluate qualitative change. Recent experiments broadly in

the field of social development have begun to monitor qualitative processes such as participation, not on the basis of predetermined indicators, but by using a series of open-ended questions which project participants answer (UNDP, 1998).

1.5 RELEVANT TERMS EXPLAINED

Development: A process of social and economic advancement, in terms of the quality of human life. The term often implies the dominant Western world-view, involving such elements as a belief in progress, the inevitability of material growth, the solution of problems by the application of science and technology, and the assumption of human dominance over nature. Alternative philosophies are suggested by terms such as “sustainable development” or “participatory development.”

Empowerment: The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts. The term empowerment which connotes different meanings includes:

- self-strength,
- control,
- self-power,
- self-reliance,
- own choice,
- life of dignity,

in accordance with one’s values, capable of fighting for one’s rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability - to mention only a few. These definitions are embedded in local value and belief systems. In its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life.

Facilitation: A process used to help a group of people or parties have constructive discussions about complex, or potentially controversial issues. The facilitator provides assistance by helping the parties set ground rules for these discussions, promoting effective communication, eliciting creative options, and keeping the group focused and on track.

Indicator: An indicator is a pre-defined variable which helps to identify (in)direct differences in quality and/or quantity within a defined period of time. As a “unit of measure” it allows to judge if an intervention was successful or not. With the aid of indicators, complex problems are simplified and reduced to an observable dimension.

Participation refers to involvement whereby local populations in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. Participation requires recognition and use of local capacities and avoids the imposition of priorities from the outside

Participatory development: An approach to “development” that empowers individuals and communities to define and analyze their own problems, make their own decisions about directions and strategies for action, and lead in those

actions. The approach is contrasted with “top-down” development processes, in which outsiders, with greater socioeconomic and political power, make the key decisions about local resource use and management.

Public participation: A process that consists of a series of activities and actions conducted by a sponsoring agency or other entity to both inform the public and obtain input from them. Public participation affords stakeholders the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Other terms for public participation include public involvement and public engagement.

Stakeholders are any individual, group or institution, which could be involved in the transfer of knowledge and best practice to improve the urban development process, can be considered a stakeholder.

After reading this section, you would have gained some idea about participatory development. Now you should be able to answer the questions given in *Check Your Progress 2*.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Give any two arguments against participation.

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2) What do you understand by passive participation?

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3) What are the qualitative indicators of participation?

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

Participatory development is one of the most important approaches for realizing self-reliant, sustainable development and social justice. In the so-called top-down approach to development, the entire process of formulating and implementing policies is carried out under the direction of developing country governments and the people tend to be put in a passive position.

Participatory development leads to increased self-reliance among the poor and the establishment of a network of self-sustaining rural organizations. 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; politically, participatory approaches provide opportunities for the poor to contribute constructively to development.

The pivotal role of people's participation in development is now re-emerging in economic and social development thinking. The strategy for sustainable development includes a "people-centred" approach that will improve the poor's access to productive assets, allow them to participate in designing and implementing development programmes, and foster their involvement in institutions from village to national level.

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1.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Participatory Development	Participation in Development
It means conventional project practice in a more participatory and sensitive manner.	It entails genuine efforts to engage in practices which openly and radically encourage people’s participation.
It is introduced within the predetermined project framework.	It stems from the understanding that poverty is caused by structural factors. It attempts to alter some of these causes which lead to poverty.
It is top-down participation in the sense that the management of the project defines where, when and how much the people can participate.	It is bottom up participation in the sense that the local people have full control over the processes and the project provides for necessary flexibility.
It is the more prevalent practice. It is more dominant in terms of resources available.	It is more prevalent with NGOs than with the governments. Such cases are still a few but increasing in influence.

- 2) Participatory development is essential for at least two reasons:
- it strengthens civil society and the economy by empowering groups, communities and organizations to negotiate with institutions and bureaucracies, thus influencing public policy and providing a check on the power of government; and,
 - it enhances the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of development programmes.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Two arguments against participation are as follows:
- participation costs time and money; it is essentially a process with no guaranteed impact upon the end product. Participation can greatly add to the costs of a development activity and therefore its benefits have to be carefully calculated;
 - processes of participation are irrelevant and a luxury in situations of poverty and it will be hard to justify expenditure on such a process where people need to be fed and their livelihoods secured;
- 2) Passive participation is where people participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people’s responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.

3) Qualitative Indicators of Participation are

- Organisational growth at the community level
- Growing solidarity and mutual support
- Knowledge of financial status of project
- Concern to be involved in decision-making at different stages
- Increasing ability of project group to propose and undertake actions
- Representation in other government or political bodies with relation to the project
- Emergence of people willing to take on leadership
- Interaction and the building of contacts with other groups and organisations
- People begin to have a say in and to influence local politics and policy formulation

