

Summaries

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Participation as an Aim of NGOs and Critiques Relating to Participation

Participation is defined as the deliberate effort to increase the control of underprivileged or marginalized social groups over the conditions of their life. Four different dimensions of participation are considered: participation as a form of codetermination of target groups within development projects and programs, empowerment as a change in the relationship between target groups and the rest of society, participatory development as a reform of the state and devolution of power to the people at the local level and the role of NGOs in the quest for global regulatory regimes. The article then deals in detail only with the first two dimensions outlining the various practices associated with them and the reasons for failures, namely that participation and empowerment are only possible where social compromises between different social classes are also possible. In the final section current critiques of participatory practices and theories are summarised. The author concludes that radical critiques of participatory approaches overlook the fact that target groups often do no longer have the option of non-cooperation and that the search for social compromises and a political culture where compromises become possible may be the only way out. Such reformism ties in with a development theory that stresses the importance of the evolution of social capital as a necessary prerequisite for the sustainability of democratic rule and a socially sustainable market economy.

Benedikt Korf

Has PRA arrived in post-modern society

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a participatory planning method with a long history in community development in the less developed countries. In recent years, PRA approaches have also been promoted for participatory development planning in postmodern rural societies of the industrialised countries with functioning democratic institutions, mainly Switzerland, UK and Germany. This paper asks whether or not PRA is an appropriate instrument for participatory community development in postmodern societies with functioning local democratic institutions.

The paper argues that the prospects for PRA are constrained by five key factors: (1) the sustainability of the process, (2) the costs of participation, (3) the economics of participation, (4) the negotiation process in participation and (5) the impact radius of PRA. It is essential to keep expectations about what PRA can or cannot offer realistic in order to avoid common mistakes undertaken in applying PRA in the less developed countries. PRA can be an innovative approach of incorporating

people in the development process, if the local governance institutions themselves understand PRA as an instrument of modern, client-oriented planning. Nevertheless, PRA is not able to adequately address many of the structural problems of postmodern rural societies.

Elisabeth Hartwig

The power to stand up and to talk: Rural women in the Northwest of Cameroon and their perceptions of power of agency and of participation

A case study from rural areas in the Northwest of Cameroon demonstrates that rural women perceive themselves as conscious actors in all domains of social action. They identify themselves as a social group exposed to discrimination and marginalisation but also able to exercise power over others. Their concrete experience in the field of agricultural production feeds their self-esteem and enables them to build their power from within. It is their common aim to enhance their participation in those domains of social action from which they have been excluded before. Consequently, they consider it most important to enter public spaces and to take part in discourse setting. To them, access to more knowledge and to the market sphere are basic preconditions to get more voice in public arenas. They perceive their different forms of women's organisations as a space for mutual training and reinforcement to be able to enhance their presence in public. Thus they follow their own project of empowerment, a process embedded in the specific historical, cultural and social context of the Cameroon grassfields.

Patrick Heller

Moving the State: The Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa and Porto Alegre

With the decline of the nation-state as an effective instrument of social provisioning, sub-national local governments have emerged an increasingly critical sites for redistributive struggles. If many initiatives at decentralization in the developing world have amounted to little more than downsizing the state in favor of markets, there have been a number of important efforts at democratic decentralization. In the three cases examined here favorable historical and political circumstances created significant opportunities for strengthening the developmental and participatory character of local governments. In the South Africa, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre and the Indian state of Kerala, left-of-centre political parties, vibrant civil societies and national-level constitutional reforms have created a favorable environment for promoting democratic deepening from the bottom-up. In all three cases significant institutional reforms have promoted democratic variants of decentralization by expanding both the range and scope of popular participation in authoritative decision-making. But if

the opportunities and basic enabling conditions have been similar, subtle differences in political and social configuration have produced highly varied outcomes. In the cases of Kerala and Porto Alegre, initial reforms have seen a dramatic increase in participation and a strengthening of local planning and budgeting capacity.

In contrast, in South Africa constitutional and programmatic commitments to nurturing community-based development have given way to concerted political centralization, the expansion of technocratic and managerial authority and a shift from democratic to market modes of accountability. These varying outcomes are in traced to the relational dynamics between political parties and civil society. In Kerala and Porto Alegre, post-leninist political parties have created synergistic linkages with social movements, whereas in South Africa the hegemonic politics of the African National Congress has marginalized the role of civil society and shifted the balance of power from communities to technocratic elites.