



Prospects of Community Participation in the Sphere of Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

In the face of increasing poverty, inequalities and social exclusion the international organisations, national and state governments have shown deepening interest in enhancing the community participation as a means to promote the developing process. Community development is thereby defined as the process wherein the people's and the governments' efforts are united for the improvement of the community's social, economic and the cultural conditions, such that the communities can fully contribute to the nations development progress. It is a collective community initiative by ways such as self-help, mutual help or other initiatives with a view to enhance the well-being of the participants in terms of increased income and personal growth. Thus, it the rightful participation of the community members in the decision making process which directly affect their living conditions.

Participation implies significant control over the decision making process as well as equitable sharing of the benefits. The objects of the development are the people or beneficiaries, whose collaborative involvement in the decision and planning process is the concern. Any development activity is a means of empowerment such that people are able to initiate and influence the actions and outcomes of development. Examples of such community initiative actions include Self Help Groups (SHG), local watershed management or local forest management.

In this study role of community participation in educational development , community health, environmental sustainability and women empowerment have been studied and it has been concluded that community participation is one of the important component of economic development.

Keywords: Community participation, Economic development, Environmental sustainability.

Introduction

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Community participation is in part delivering services to those who are more desperately identified as being in need of them. Community participation expects the community's involvement in the decision and planning process, rather than just providing labour. Thus, the target groups are expected to assume the responsibility of the programme implementation. Once the people are involved in the management of the development process, they will be themselves induced for the maintenance and up-gradation of the project. This implies that there is a sharing of power between the community and the authority. The service provision through community participation shifts the burden away from public sector towards the communities. In other words, there is transference of transaction cost of monitoring the activity. The government resources are not sufficient in expanding the resources to grassroots level. There is big gap between the government authorities and the end-users (**Mustafa and Mir, 1999**). Communities thereby enlarge the possibility of the participants to acquire the basic needs. Subsequently, government's expenditure is lowered with the advancement of specialised services in a cost effective way.

Community participation elevates the information problems between the authority and the community by allowing the communities to identify themselves, the receipts and the potential benefits. It relies on the local resources to be used by the communities for the development process. Repeated interaction between the participations allows collective action owing to greater information among the community participants than the external agents like the Government or NGO's (**Mansuri and Rao, 2004**). Since the people know themselves best of what is required by them, in what proportion, the level to which they can afford and the resulting yield. The social resources are equitably distributed thereby allowing equitable acquirement of the targeted benefits.

Most communities are too large to participate in the decision making process. In such a case, the communities are divided into smaller homogenous units. It implies the formation of a community organisation, where the representatives discuss the project with the entire community. In some countries like Indonesia, the structure of the government extends down to neighbourhood level to form a community organization. Most countries like India have organised the urban-poor into community organisations. But such organisations may exclude some members and promote discretionary power among the rich rather than the poor. The leaders are not the representatives of the community which may shift the provision of services to the non-interest groups.

The demand of community participation in local resource management has increased over time with the Government's lack of responsiveness and corrupt practices that weakens its connections with the marginalised people. Since the eve of independence, community participation assumed high priority in India. Etawah Project was the first major community development initiative launched in 1948 which emphasised on agricultural production. The number of projects eventually increased to 55 by 1952, each covering around 300 villages which comprised of a population of about 3000 people. Thus, by the end of Fifth Five Year Plan (1952-57), the community development projects were operating in 163,000 villages across the country. Nonetheless, non-involvement of the people headed by the centralisation of power was the major concerns that affected the successful implementation of such programmes. Under the Ninth Five Year Plans (1997-2002) the Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been promoted, as it is assumed that only the people's collective initiatives and involvement can sustain process of development. The members meet to collect the savings which are disbursed as loans to the needy members. They meet regularly to discuss their problems and find suitable solutions. Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) introduced in 1999 to alleviate poverty adds to the growing importance of development through collective action (**Wade, 1987**).

Education and Community Participation- Service Learning

India's flagship programme of universalization of primary education- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emphasises the role of community participation in increasing access and quality of education. Government has a very important tool of disseminating the information through a large network training institutions which can be used to encourage community participation and its use in developing context. Service learning a mode of learning which incorporates an essential element of community participation. It connects the traditional classroom learning with real life experiences which offers a pragmatic learning experience. Professional educational institutions create diverse experimental learning opportunities to the students by engaging them in field experiments, internships and teaching. Students in service learning sections are found to be having more positive beliefs and values towards community.

Community Health

Community health primarily focuses on the improvement of the health status of the of the communities through the promotion of nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation, vaccination, mother-child health care and health education. The traditional health practices were also popularised. Participation is mainly aimed at moderating resource constraints, through contribution in the implementation of health activities like the construction of health infrastructure or the mobilization of community health workers. Participation in health care is assumed a being more impactful in improving the health of poor than the medical interventions. Community participation in primary health care (PHC) is evident in programs routinely implemented like community health-worker [CHW] programs, community-based disease-control programs, com-munity clinics (**Wayland and Crowder, 2002**)

Community Participation for Environment Sustainability

Deforestation is rising owing to growing population and failure of government to safeguard the environment. Local community participation helps preservation and conservation of the forests. **Wade (1987)** asserted that village communities develop stable rules to stop degradation of common property resources and thus help to regenerate them. Joint Forest Management is one such project operating in West Bengal, in which the government and the communities together protect the forests. The communities identify and educate households them to get rid of the use of firewood for the reserve and motivates them to start small business and thereby recommends loans for the same.

Community Participation and Women

Women's devalued community participation in a capitalist system replicates gender inequalities and keeps them dependent on men for financial assistance. Nonetheless, it is one prospect through which women engage in service and political activities for the betterment of their communities and at the same time their own and their family's betterment. Women's involvement in a community is culturally diversified in relation to their age and race-ethnicity. Women negotiate the cultural expectations of their identity as mothers or homemakers through community (**Abrahams, 1996**). Women's positions as decision makers in private and public organisations influence the resource allocation and the development of values in their communities.

Community Participation and the Non-Government Organisations

The voluntary organisations through their tool of human-touch, serve the community development programmes more efficiently. Such agencies through their dedicated volunteers, innovative and flexible approaches help the communities to tackle the challenges of the common people effectively. BAIF- One such NGO was established in 1967, by Dr. Manibhai Desai in Urulikanchen, Pune. The BAIF Development Research Foundation was developed with the aim of addressing the problems of illiteracy, health, women empowerment and quality of life, by providing gainful self employment to the

rural poor. BAIF promoted the formation of SHG's and Local Planning Committees, where the members were trained in various agro-based skills. Another significant contribution in the community development was by the Ahmadabad Sum Networking Project initiated in 1995 with participants from sectors like SEWA bank along with the Slum members. The pilot project is conceived to mark noteworthy improvements in education and health of the slum residents. Panchayati raj institutions collaborative with NGO's form significant tool attain integrated rural development effectively (Behar, 1998). This was further advocated by Amertya Sen in his Capability Approach who calls for developing partnership among government, community organisations and NGO's.

CONCLUSION

Politian's and technocrats oppose the idea of allowing the illiterate and ignorant participants to take part in the decision process. They argue that such a management will cost time, and hence money. This furthers the possibility of poor and ineffective service delivery to the beneficiaries. Free-riders problem and failure to coordinate with member participants are other problems associated with such collective initiatives (Wade, 1987). Heterogeneous communities pose a challenge because of conflicting interests.

Nevertheless, without the community's involvement in planning and decision-making, the plan implementation and the cost recovery will be jeopardised. Community's collective action forms an indispensable component of any development project, such that, any development project cannot meet the needs of the community for its improvement in a feasible and cost efficient way. Community participation strengthens the economic development by addressing the educational and health needs as well as contributing to the environmental sustainability.

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