

PARADOXES OF PARTICIPATION: QUESTIONING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article suggests that the concepts underlying participatory approaches to development should be subject to greater critical analysis. Drawing on research on water resource management in sub-Saharan Africa, and on social theory concerning the recursive relationship between agency and structure, it illustrates the need for a more complex understanding of issues of efficiency and empowerment in participatory approaches. Particularly, two key concepts are examined: ideas about the nature and role of institutions; and models of individual action. The article concludes by identifying the questions such an analysis raises about the relationships between community, social capital and the state. Copyright © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

1 PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Heroic claims are made for participatory approaches to development, these being justified in the terms of ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness of investment and of contributing to processes of democratization and empowerment. The conundrum of ensuring the sustainability of development interventions is assumed to be solvable by the proper involvement of beneficiaries in the supply and management of resources, services and facilities.

However, despite significant claims to the contrary there is little evidence of the long-term effectiveness of participation in materially improving the conditions of the most vulnerable people or as a strategy for social change. Whilst the evidence for efficiency receives some support on a small scale, the evidence regarding empowerment and sustainability is more partial, tenuous and reliant on assertions of the rightness of the approach and process rather than convincing proof of outcomes.

Participation has therefore become an act of faith in development; something we believe in and rarely question. This act of faith is based on three main tenets; that

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participation is intrinsically a 'good thing' (especially for the participants), that a focus on 'getting the techniques right' is the principal way of ensuring the success of such approaches and that considerations of power and politics on the whole should be avoided as divisive and obstructive.

In questioning these it is not my intention, as some critics have suggested, to deny the usefulness of a people-centred orientation in development, nor to dismiss all attempts at community-based development as well-meaning but ineffectual. Rather I hope to subject such approaches to critical analysis in the belief that this is equally as important as constant assertions of their strengths.

This paper outlines some of the conceptual underpinnings of participatory approaches and illustrates how the translation of these into policy and practice is not necessarily consistent with the desired impacts. In doing this I have drawn on insights derived from my previous work on the collective management of water resources which is referred to in more detail elsewhere (Cleaver, 1998b; 1998c; Cleaver (ed.), 1998).

Efficiency or Empowerment?

The theorizing of participatory approaches is often dichotomized into means/ends classifications (Oakley *et al.*, 1991; Nelson and Wright, 1995). These distinguish between the efficiency arguments (participation as a tool for achieving better project outcomes) and equity and empowerment arguments (participation as a process which enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives and facilitates social change to the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalized groups).

While the predominant discourses of development engaged in by development agencies are practical and technical, concerned with project dictated imperatives of efficiency, with visible, manageable manifestations of collective action, they are commonly cloaked in the rhetoric of empowerment, which is implicitly assumed to have a greater moral value. Such a conflation of efficiency and empowerment arguments is not necessarily cynical, or even conscious; indeed participation *in itself* is considered by many as empowering, regardless of the actual activity undertaken.

So for example, in the water sector women's participation is seen as both efficient and empowering; these factors working in synergy. Thus women's contribution of labour to construct water supplies is deemed practically beneficial, it is empowering in creating a sense of ownership and the related perceptions of responsibility which then efficiently result in the proper maintenance of facilities. The inclusion of women in management roles on water committees and associations is seen to represent a form of female emancipation, representing women's assertion and control over their lives as well as conveniently ensuring the sustainability of facilities. Poor women paying for water services are supposedly 'empowered' as consumers, whilst the financial efficiency of the project is furthered.

There is an inherent difficulty in incorporating project concerns with participatory discourses. A project is, by definition, a clearly defined set of activities, concerned with quantifiable costs and benefits, with time-limited activities and budgets. The project imperative emphasizes meeting practical rather than strategic needs, instrumentality rather than empowerment. Recent discussions of this issue highlight the limitations of the participants' influence over the wider structural factors shaping the project and the difficulties of trying to explicitly further empowerment approaches within a project framework (Eyburn and Ladbury, 1995; Cleaver and Kaare, 1998).

As 'empowerment' has become a buzzword in development, an essential objective of participation, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualized, empowerment depoliticized. Radical empowerment discourse (with its roots in Freirean philosophy) is associated with both individual and class action, with the transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights, the institutions of society. The model of 'participation' implied is of development practitioners working with poor people to struggle actively for change (Batiwala, 1994). Such ideas, associated as they are with structural change and with collective action both facilitated by and in opposition to the state, are rather out of fashion in development although within feminist scholarship and within the Latin American participatory tradition the debate continues (e.g. Fals-borda, 1998; Jackson and Pearson, 1998).

A number of problems arise when we critically analyse the currently fashionable version of empowerment (the concept is often implicitly rather than explicitly referred to in policy documents). It is often unclear exactly who is to be empowered; the individual, the 'community', or categories of people such as 'women', 'the poor' or the 'socially excluded'. The question of how such categories of people might exercise agency is generally side-stepped. In many policy documents we see an apolitical individualization of the concept: the individual is expected to take opportunities offered by development projects to better themselves and so contribute to the development of the group or community. The mechanisms of such empowerment are either startlingly clear (i.e. empowerment of the individual through cash transactions in the market) or conveniently fuzzy (as in the assumed benefits to individuals of participation in management committees). The scope (and limitations) of the empowering effects of any project are little explored; the attribution of causality and impact within the project alone problematic.

There seems then to be a need to conceptualize participatory processes more broadly, for more complex analyses of the linkages between intervention, participation and empowerment as suggested by Moser and Sollis' (1991) analysis of a participatory slum upgrading project in Ecuador. We need to better understand the non-project nature of people's lives, the complex livelihood inter-linkages that make an impact in one area likely to be felt in others and the potential for unintended consequences arising from any intended intervention or act (Giddens, 1984; Long, 1992).

A move away from narrow project approaches may be seen in the current concern with the role of social capital in development. Ideas about overcoming the problem of social exclusion have linked concepts of individual responsibility and citizenship with participation in the institutions of community and democracy. The concept of social inclusion emphasizes involvement in the structures and institutions of society — 'most fundamentally, the participatory and communicative structures, including new forms of social partnership through which a shared sense of the public good is created and debated' (HLS/UNDP, 1997). Although not a major focus of this paper it will be argued that concepts of social inclusion mistakenly assume automatic linkages between involvement and social responsibility.

The Tyranny of Techniques

Much of the discourse of participatory approaches is conducted through debate and analysis about the appropriate techniques for uncovering the 'realities' of poor people

and ensuring their involvement in decision making. Any cursory review of the literature on participation in development reveals a huge volume of work on techniques; as the 'solution' to locally based development they have the advantage of being tangible, practically achievable and of fitting well with project approaches. This techniques-based participatory orthodoxy is increasingly being subjected to critical analysis (Mosse, 1995; Goebbel, 1998). Biggs (1995) suggests that a techniques-based approach to participation fails to adequately address issues of power, control of information and other resources and provides an inadequate framework for developing a critical reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of technical and social change. It is not my intention here to deal substantially with this debate except to point out that reviewing and improving participatory techniques cannot substitute for a more fundamental examination of the very concepts which inform such approaches; issues to which I now turn.

2 CRITIQUING THE CONCEPTS

The Place of Structure and Agency

The following analysis is drawn strongly from ideas about the recursive relationship between agency and structure. I do this because it helps to resolve some of the artificial dichotomies present in our current thinking about development and to accommodate a number of critical paradoxes and apparent conflicts. Considerable attempts have been made to understand the complexities, diversity and regularities of patterns of interaction between individuals and social structure (Giddens, 1984; Douglas, 1987; Granovetter, 1992; Long, 1992; Goetz, 1996, etc.). However, such critical reconceptualization and analysis apparently makes little impact on the development mainstream as articulated through policy and practice. Concepts of 'the individual' underlying participatory approaches swings widely between 'rational choice' and 'social being' models. The former attributes individual behaviour to calculative self interest, the latter to culture and social norms. Social structure is variously perceived as opportunity and constraint but little analysed; the linkages between the individual and the structures and institutions of the social world they inhabit are ill modelled. A convenient and tangible alternative is found in the ubiquitous focus on the *organizations* of collective action; organizing the organizations then becomes a central plank of participatory approaches to development. It is in an attempt to highlight some of these issues that the following discussion will be structured.

3 INSTITUTIONALISM

Discourses of participation are strongly influenced by the new institutionalism, theories which suggest that institutions help to formalize mutual expectations of co-operative behaviour, allow the exercise of sanctions for non-co-operation and thereby reduce the costs of individual transactions. Social institutions are perceived as clever solutions to the problems of trust and malfeasance in economic life as they can make cheating and free riding too costly an activity to engage in (Granovetter, 1992). Institutions (mostly commonly conceptualized as *organizations*) are highly attractive to theorists, development policy makers and practitioners as they help to render

legible community; they translate individual into collective endeavour in a form which is visible, analysable and amenable to intervention and influence (Scott, 1998).

The aim of many development interventions is apparently to establish or support formalized community structures which most clearly mirror bureaucratic structures. (A paradox surely, when part of the justification for participatory approaches is that they avoid the shortcomings of development delivered by state bureaucracies?)

Ideas about social capital and civil society are also strongly institutionalist, although often vague. Visible, often formal, manifestations of association are attributed normative value, denoting initiative, responsibility, good citizenship and political engagement among the community as well as allegedly contributing to a vibrant economic life (IILS/UNDP, 1997; Putnam, 1993).

Institutional inclusion then has become an integral strand of participatory approaches; a process which is assumed to ensure the more efficient delivery of development, the inculcation of desirable characteristics amongst participants (responsibility, ownership, co-operation, collective endeavour) and therefore empowerment. Exclusion from local institutions is considered undesirable, marginalizing, inefficient.

Such institutional models of participation may be criticized on a number of grounds.

3.1 Formalization and Functionalism

There is a tendency in the development literature to recognize the importance of social and 'informal' institutions but nevertheless to concentrate on the analysis and building of formal institutions (Uphoff, 1992a; 1992b).¹ Here there is a concentration on contracts, associations, committees and property rights as mechanisms for reducing transaction costs and institutionalizing co-operative interactions (Brett, 1996; Folbre, 1996). Formalized institutional arrangements are considered more likely to be robust and enduring than informal ones, desirable characteristics for example include a clearly identified group and boundaries, a system of graduated sanctions imposed on those who offend against collective rules and public conflict resolution mechanisms (Ostrom, 1990). Formalization is strongly linked to evolutionism in these models. A general progression from traditional (implicitly 'weak') forms of management to modern (by inference 'strong') forms is considered desirable and is the focus of much 'local institution building' in development (INTRAC, 1998). Very influential here is Elinor Ostrom's concept of the possibility of 'crafting' institutions to render them more fit for the job in hand. Such crafting generally is seen to involve formalization in the interests of functional ends.

These models have been criticized for an over-simplistic evolutionism (Nelson, 1995) and for a blindness to historical and social context and the importance of path dependency in shaping institutions. Evidence suggests more complex and fluid processes of institutional evolution; their ebb and flow according to circumstances

¹ The terms 'formal' (modern, bureaucratic, organizational) and 'informal' (social, traditional) institutions are convenient but misleading. Traditional and social institutions may indeed be highly formalized although not necessarily in the bureaucratic forms that we recognize. Much literature also exists in organizational studies about the informal dimensions of organizations. An alternative terminology might characterize institutions as 'organizational' and/or 'socially embedded' more nearly representing our actual usage of the terms. Obviously the two terms are not mutually exclusive; the dichotomy is a false one.

(season, political intervention, need), the *ad hoc* use of different institutional arrangements as appropriate, not necessarily conforming to project activities. For example in the water sector a concern with institutions has been manifested through much work on water committees, water user groups and associations, that is with the organizations for water resources management. In other papers I have shown how water resource management may also occur almost entirely outside such structures, through practices embedded in social networks, daily interactions and the application of cultural norms (Cleaver, 1995; Cleaver, 1998c). Drawing on a rural Zimbabwean example I have illustrated how the institutions for the management of water and grazing land are socially located and critically depend on the maintenance of a number of grey areas and ambiguity regarding rights of access, compliance with rules, on a continuous process of negotiation between all users, on the strong principle of conflict avoidance and on decision making taking place through the practical adaptation of customs, and everyday interactions.

A project focus defines institutions functionally as specific to the project task, but people rarely organize their decision making solely in this way. In one village in Tanzania local water management indeed took place through 'formal' organizations, but not those specified by project plans. In this case a narrow project focus on establishing new participatory institutions (Water User Groups) was in danger of obscuring the actual water management activities being undertaken by community members loosely organized through other well established, familiar and locally adapted channels, such as savings and women's clubs and sub village administrative structures (Cleaver and Kaare, 1998).

Organizational approaches to institutions contain two strong and conflicting ideas about individual participation. Because of a focus on committee-like institutions there is a strong tendency to emphasize participation through democratic representation, and a concentration on the election of representatives. Paradoxically, there is also a strong assumption that meaningful participation in public meetings is evidenced by individual (verbal) contributions. Neither idea is necessarily in concurrence with local norms and practices and an insistence on them may both exaggerate and disguise people's actual involvement. For example, research into community decision making in Tanzania revealed that when women spoke at public village meetings, they were representing other women. When men spoke, they were speaking as individuals. Thus, while fewer women than men spoke at such meetings this did not imply a lack of participation on the part of the majority of women who were actively engaged in choosing and briefing their representatives. Spokeswomen were chosen on a meeting by meeting basis for their knowledge of the particular issue being discussed and their eloquence, and were constantly briefed and prompted by other women (Cleaver and Kaare, 1998).

To strengthen work with institutions in participatory development, a much better understanding is needed of local norms of decision making and representation, of how these change and are negotiated, of how people may indirectly affect outcomes without direct participation (Cleaver (ed.), 1998). How far do the participatory forums that are promoted through development accommodate such complexities? There is a danger that unless they are taken into account the formal manifestations of community based approaches to development become mere empty shells, with meaningful decision making, interaction and collective action taking place elsewhere.

Socially embedded institutions are not necessarily 'better' than formal/organizational ones as they may uphold and reproduce locally specific configurations of inequity and exclusion. However, the mere setting up of formal organizations and the specification of their membership does not necessarily overcome exclusion, subordination or vulnerability. It does not do so because the wider structural factors which shape such conditions and relations are often left untouched. Codifying the rights of the vulnerable must surely involve far more wide reaching measures than the requirement that they sit on committees, or individually speak at meetings?

3.2 Myths of Community

The 'community' in participatory approaches to development is often conceptualized as some kind of natural, desirable social entity imbued with all sorts of desirable values and the simple manifestation of this in organizational form. This is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons.

The unitary community

There is strong assumption in development that there is one identifiable community in any location and that there is a co-terminosity between natural (resource), social and administrative boundaries. The very definition of community in development projects involves defining those who are 'included' in rights, activities, benefits and those who are excluded because they do not belong to the defined entity. The assumed self evidence of 'community' persists in our participatory approaches despite considerable evidence of the overlapping, shifting and subjective nature of 'communities' and the permeability of boundaries (Peters, 1987; IASCP, 1998). A concentration on boundaries highlights the need in development for clear administrative arrangements, more to do with the delivery of goods and facilities than a reflection of any social arrangement. Researching community based water resource management in Zimbabwe it became clear that the idea of an administratively defined community little reflected the wealth and complexity of local networks of resource use, decision making and social interaction. Thus whilst domestic water resources were largely managed at waterpoint and at village level, decisions about grazing land and water for cattle use involved a wider group of people from three villages. Cultural ceremonies such as rain making (an occasion for the reinforcing of 'community' norms and resource use regulations) involved a wider and more diverse constituency than that of the village. Moreover individual households were connected through complex relationships of kin and associational activities (such as church membership) to networks of wider and overlapping 'communities', often physically distant from the household location (Cleaver, 1998a; 1998c).

Power and process

Project approaches to community, where they recognize power, tend to adopt oversimplified approaches to it, little recognizing processes of conflict avoidance negotiation and accommodation between people. A number of writers have illustrated the shifting, historically and socially located nature of community institutions, the power dimensions of public manifestations of collective action (Mosse, 1997; Peters, 1987; Goebbel, 1998). However, the 'solidarity' models of community, upon which much

development intervention is based, find difficulty in reconciling evidence of social stratification and conflict with project goals. There is a strong sense in which, for development policy purposes, the existence of a definable 'community' is desirable, preferably one whose shape is coterminous with administrative boundaries, and for it to be characterized by consensual co-operation (Li, 1996). For example, field workers on a community based water and sanitation programme in Tanzania were reluctant to publicly refer to, or even admit socio-economic differences within the communities with which they worked. They had dropped wealth ranking from their PRA exercises, fearing that this highlighted inequalities and saw the public acknowledgement of difference as incompatible with the desirable model of solidarity necessary for the smooth functioning of the project (Cleaver and Kaare, 1998).

More realistically, we may see the community as the site of both solidarity and conflict, shifting alliances, power and social structures. Much recent work on common property resource management, for example, recognizes the role of communities in managing internal conflicts (IASCP, 1998) and conflict and opposition can be re-conceptualized in certain circumstances as evidence of the exercise of individual agency (Allen, 1997).

The resourceful community?

Development practitioners excel in perpetuating the myth that communities are capable of anything, that all that is required is sufficient mobilization and the latent and unlimited capacities of the community will be unleashed in the interests of development. The evidence does little to support such claims. Rather there is significant evidence of very real structural and resource constraints operational on communities, most severely impacting on those which may need development the most. Even where a community appears well motivated, dynamic and well organized, severe limitations are presented by an inadequacy of material resources. The people of one village studied in Zimbabwe were notable for their self reliance and positive sense of community. They had built their own school, established a variety of income generating clubs, and had high levels of associational activity. In response to severe water shortages they had established a community fund from household contributions for the purchase of a windmill pump. However, due to drought and low agricultural incomes, the fund was insufficient to buy a windmill. The villagers, constrained by their remote location, were unsuccessful in lobbying the district council and donor agencies for assistance and several years after the first visit they still lacked adequate water supplies and were forced to travel 10 km to access water from another village (Cleaver, 1996).

Culture and foundationalism

Contradictory ideas about the nature of 'culture' feature prominently in development discourses about community. Culture is variously perceived as a constraint (for example, restricting the participation of women), the 'glue' which keeps the community together (particularly through the cultural inheritance of habits of solidarity and co-operation from some past golden age) and a resource to be tapped in development (in terms of using the 'authority' of 'traditional' leaders to legitimize development interventions). It has already been seen how institutions are at once supposed to develop from weak 'traditional' forms to strong modern forms whilst at the same time remaining culturally embedded (Cleaver, 1998c).

Positive views of culture tend towards a profound foundationalism about local communities and their inhabitants (Sayer and Storper, 1997). For example, in the writings of Robert Chambers a moral value is attributed to the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the poor; the task of development being to release their potential to live these out (Chambers, 1997). How are situations dealt with where appeals to 'tradition' run contrary to the modernizing impulses of development projects, or where local 'culture' is oppressive to certain people? Why is so little debate about these tensions seen in the development literature? Is it that development practitioners fear criticizing local practices and being seen as the professionals so roundly condemned in Chambers' work? Is there not a danger of swinging from one untenable position ('we know best') to an equally untenable and damaging one ('they know best')?

4 MODEL OF INDIVIDUALS

Participatory approaches can further be criticized for their inadequate model of individuals and the links between these and social structure. Despite the strong assumption of the links between individual participation and responsibility, there is little recognition of the varying livelihoods, motivations and impacts of development on individuals over time. Indeed project approaches which focus strongly on institutions as a development tool often see people as 'inputs'; as the 'human resource' (see, for example, Khan and Begum, 1997). Social difference is recognized only through the categorization of general social or occupational roles; 'women', 'farmers', 'leaders' and 'the poor'.

Paradoxically, models of individual motivation and action implicit in participatory approaches swing between the under- and over-socialized (Granovetter, 1992). The concept of the 'rational economic man' is so deeply embedded in development thinking that its influence is strongly felt even where development efforts are concerned with activities which are not directly productive; with community, social action, citizenship. However, there is often a simultaneous and rather vague assumption of the 'social being' whose better nature can be drawn upon in the interests of community and development. In both abstractions the complex positions of real individuals and real groups is lost.

Incentives, Rationality and Participation

Whilst the participatory literature is often rather vague on the incentives which will persuade people to participate, it is infected by the pervasive functionalism and economism of development thinking. Participation is supposed to depend on a mobilization process, upon the realization amongst participants that high levels of involvement are for their own good. It is assumed that people will calculate that it is sensible to participate; due to the assurance of individual benefits to ensue (particularly in relation to 'productive' projects) or, to a much lesser extent, because this is socially responsible and in the interests of community development as a whole (particularly in relation to public goods projects). Interestingly many policy approaches make significant efforts to link participation with social responsibility, to characterize non-participation as irresponsible, and at the same time to define

benefits which may in fact be long term, cumulative and community wide as of immediate productive advantage to the individual. Such positions are well illustrated in the literature on women's participation in water projects, on the advantages of time savings to be obtained through improved supplies and the supposed economic benefits to individual women of paying for water (see Cleaver and Lomas, 1996, for a critique).

In explaining motivations to participate, social norms are seen to occupy a secondary place to economic rationality. Social relations and participation, while supported by norms of responsibility and community service, are seen ultimately to serve the ends of economic development. Such perceptions allow little place for personal psychological motivations, for the needs of individuals for recognition, respect or purpose, which may be independent of other material benefits. Accounts of the motivations of young men involved in community activities in Zimbabwe and St Vincent illustrate this point (Cleaver (ed.), 1998; Jobes, 1998). Nor are the complexities of long term and diffuse relationships of reciprocity occurring over lifetimes adequately recognized as shaping participation (Adams *et al.*, 1997; Cleaver, 1998c).

The fragility of a conceptual model which directly relates individual motivation and participation to receipt of benefits can be illustrated with the following example. It is commonly asserted that women should participate more fully in the upgrading and management of water supplies as they are the primary carriers and users of domestic water. It is claimed that because of this role they have great incentives to participate and that the outcomes of such participation (greater sense of ownership and responsibility leading to improved supplies, time savings and economic gains) will directly benefit them. However, analysis of actual water use and decision making leads us to question such assumptions. Women in a position to do so commonly delegate water fetching to other women and men (often to poorer relatives, kin, hired workers) and to children (Cleaver and Kaare, 1998). Moreover old women may not fetch water themselves but be dependent on others to do so for them. The water carrier, decision maker, manager and beneficiary are not always then manifest in one individual. Do children and young people participate in public decision making about water supply improvement or management? Are those to whom water work is delegated represented institutionally? Do they have strong interests in reducing water fetching times and improving supplies? Perhaps they supplement their livelihoods through water work, perhaps it is part of a complex web of reciprocal exchange upon which they depend. Are old women not to be included in participatory decision making processes regarding water supply improvements because they no longer fetch the water directly themselves?

Located Identities, Differential Costs and Benefits

Functional project approaches to participation little recognize that in examining motivation it is helpful to see a person positioned in *multiple* ways with social relations conferred by *specific* social identities (Giddens, 1984) and that in Long's words; individuals are only ever partly enrolled in the projects of others (Long, 1992).

According to Giddens the actions of human agents should be seen as a process rather than as an aggregate of separate intentions, reasons, motives and acts and much of our day-to-day contact is not directly motivated. In querying the modelling of action as individual acts, Giddens draws attention to the difference between much

routinized day-to-day activity which forms part of 'practical consciousness' and that about which actors may be discursively conscious and can analyse and reflect upon. Critical to such alternative interpretations of motivation and participation is the role of agency in processing experience and shaping action, and the role of structure in both enabling and constraining such choices.

The individual in participatory approaches is usually defined in terms of the functional nature of the project. Little recognition is made of the changing social position of individuals over life-courses, of the variable costs and benefits of participation to differently placed people, of contending and complementary concerns with production and reproduction. In other papers I have tried to illustrate the intersection of age, gender and class and individual agency in shaping people's perceptions about the desirability of participation. For example poor young women with small children commonly find it difficult to publicly participate in development projects due to their burden of productive and reproductive activities. However, some individual women actively find ways of participating through engagement with NGOs and new associational activities whilst others meet their needs in differing ways, for example by drawing on kinship relationships for assistance with agricultural activities, educational expenses and basic needs (Cleaver, 1998a).

Contrary to the ubiquitous optimistic assertions about the benefits of public participation, there are numerous documented examples of situations where individuals find it easier, more beneficial, or habitually familiar not to participate (Adams *et al.*, 1997; Zwartveen and Neupane, 1996). Non-participation and non-compliance may be both a 'rational' strategy and an unconscious practice embedded in routine, social norms and the acceptance of the status quo. A fascinating study of irrigation management in Nepal shows how some women, constrained by prevailing ideas about proper gender roles, *did not participate* in the irrigation association but secured their water partly through the participation of male members of their own household, and through other kin and neighbour networks and partly through stealing and cheating. Their absence from the formal user association made it far easier for them to do this without detection or censure (Zwartveen and Neupane, 1996).

There have recently been calls to recognize both the costs and benefits of participation for individuals (Mayoux, 1995) and yet these are little pursued, the conventional wisdom being that participation is 'a good thing'. If it is accepted that costs and benefits fall differentially and are mediated and perceived by people in differing ways, what does this imply, for example, in terms of policies which target the participation in development of 'the poor' or of 'women'? Also how is the evaluation of such costs and benefits linked with a model of choice and voluntarism? It seems that where poor people are concerned their choices may be seriously limited, the scope for variation of action narrow. They may lack the resources for effective participation (Cleaver (ed.), 1998) and yet remain vulnerable in their livelihood strategies based on kin and existing social structures. Participation in water supply projects, where water is scarce and it is difficult to procure enough for basic needs, is less a matter of choice (an expression of agency), and more a matter of necessity imposed by constraint.

Negotiation, Inclusion and Exclusion

A recognition that community participation may be negotiated and mediated at the household and community and shaped by prevailing social norms and structures

raises a critical question about whether participation can be empowering to individuals involved. The example of women irrigators in Nepal (Zwarteveen and Neupane, 1996, cited above) illustrates this. Some women chose not to participate because they saw that in so doing they would be bound by rules and the norms of the Irrigators Association, dominated by prominent men. However, in (consciously and unconsciously) drawing on ideas about the proper role of women as confined to the domestic arena to justify their non-participation were they exercising agency and some degree of freedom, or simply reinforcing their gendered subordination, or both? Research reveals doubts amongst many individuals about the merits of being included in development projects, suggesting a sophisticated analysis amongst people of the structural instruments of their subordination and a blindness amongst development agencies to this (Long, 1992; Scott, 1985).

The participatory literature is very unclear on the links between inclusion and subordination: largely because it consistently omits an analysis of the structural and political. In development policy and practice it is essential to examine issues of empowerment and subordination more critically, recognizing that they are not necessarily diametrically opposed conditions (Jackson, 1998). Lessons can be sought from literature about participation and inclusion outside the development field (Willis, 1976; Allen, 1997; Croft and Beresford, 1996). It is salutary also to remember that 'community' may be used as a definition of exclusion as well as inclusion, that associating concepts of responsibility, ownership and social cohesion with local entities (which may draw on religious, ethnic, locational differences in definition) is not necessarily compatible with the universalizing of quality. Exclusionary tendencies may be increased in locally based participatory development. The introduction of concepts of 'ownership' of water sources through development efforts in Zimbabwe resulted in restrictions on access which most adversely affect the poorest residents who had not made cash or labour contributions and who were therefore not seen as part of the 'rightful' user community (Cleaver, 1996).

5 COMMUNITY, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE STATE

There is a need for a radical reassessment of the desirability, practicality and efficacy of development efforts based on community participation. This involves not just rethinking the relationship between differently placed individuals and historically and spatially specific social structures, but also the role of individuals, households, communities, development agencies and the state.

'Participation' has been translated into a managerial exercise based on 'toolboxes' of procedures and techniques, it has been 'domesticated' away from its radical roots; we talk of problem solving, participation and poverty rather than problematization, critical engagement and/or class (Brown, n.d.). With the emerging reconsideration of the role of the state in development the time is ripe for a critical analysis of 'participation' (several studies now link meaningful social change to state action prompted by powerful social movements for change, see for example, Deere and Leon, 1998, on women's land rights in Latin America). This is required both conceptually and in terms of a detailed collection of empirical evidence, which despite nearly two decades of the implementation of participatory approaches is still surprisingly lacking.

The focus needs to be expanded away from the nuts and bolts of implementing participatory development projects in order to consider the wider dynamics of economic and social change. A more dynamic vision is needed of 'community' and 'institutions' that incorporates social networks and recognizes dispersed and contingent power relations, and the exclusionary as well as inclusionary nature of participation. It is also necessary to develop a more complex modelling of livelihood concerns over life-courses, of the negotiated nature of participation and a more honest assessment of the costs and benefits to individuals of becoming involved in agency and state directed development processes.

A number of specific areas for further work can be identified from this discussion which may contribute to resolving some of the paradoxes of participation.

1. An analysis of the resources which people need in order to be able to participate in development efforts, and in particular an analysis of which participatory approaches are low cost and high benefit to poor people.
2. An analysis of whether and *how* the structures of participatory projects include/protect/secure the interests of poor people.
3. More data on participatory 'partnerships' which are claimed to work. In particular what is the role of better, more responsive bureaucracy in such partnerships (Jarman and Johnson, 1997; Thompson, 1995).
4. Analyses of 'competent' communities and 'successful' participatory projects that focus on process, on power dynamics, on patterns of inclusion and exclusion. This would involve more process documentation and analysis of conflict, consensus building and decision making within communities; not just those activities related to the particular development project in hand.

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ARE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS WORKING IN DEVELOPMENT A TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY?

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Abstract: At the end of this millennium, poor people in low-income economies have lived through a series of extraordinary changes. The latest has been the rise of the *transnational community of workers in NGOs* (non-governmental 'development' organizations), a community expressing shared values, language and practices which differ from those of local everyday life, from Orissa to Oxfordshire. NGOs are not new but have burgeoned beyond recognition. For a Mexican peasant, NGOs may be a more relevant, more immediate reality than NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Area). One thread of ideas in the community treats of women's self-empowerment. Very similar discussions of 'autonomy' have been witnessed among speakers of Mixe in Mexico and Telegu in India. How may we understand a community of ideas which produces such strikingly parallel local talk in such distant and dissimilar locales? More important, how may these very speakers best understand it? This paper will set what we, as academics, know about the community against selected, positive, rice-roots responses to one feminist thread within it. Copyright © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I shall argue that non-governmental organizations working in development, or NGOs (Fowler, 1997), have grown into a transnational community or TnC, quite as transnational as Exxon or the transnational business community. Within the TnC of NGOs, new cultures are created through meetings, mergings and struggle. Arturo Escobar (1995) has called for the study of such new cultures as one academic contribution to building a better world. (We talk of 'hybrid' cultures, but must remember that this is not some meeting of 'pure', 'traditional', 'homogeneous'

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