



## Reflections from the Participation Sourcebook\*

*Participation is a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings. For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, a practice; and for still others, an end in itself. All these interpretations have merit. "The World Bank Participation Sourcebook," however, follows the definition of participation adopted by the Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development:*

Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.

The *World Bank Participation Sourcebook* is a how-to guide to help Bank staff support participatory approaches in economic and social development. It is a collection of cases, told in the first person, by Task Managers in the Bank. Some readers who know the World Bank well will note that these examples differ from their notions of how the Bank normally goes about its work. In our opinion, this difference is not a matter of style, but rather the "stance" adopted by the sponsors and designers and the process used to organize and carry out their work. In the *Sourcebook* examples, the sponsors and designers demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively with the other key stakeholders in carrying out the steps required to prepare a project for World Bank financing. Specifically, they:

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and service and support systems; that is, *the stakeholders conduct the analysis and diagnosis collaboratively;*
- decide and articulate what is needed; that is, *the stakeholders collaboratively set objectives;*
- decide on pragmatic terms, directions, priorities, and institutional responsibilities; that is, *the stakeholders collaboratively create a strategy;* and
- develop or oversee development of project policies, specifications, blueprints, budgets, and technologies needed to move from the present to the future; that is, *the stakeholders collaboratively formulate project tactics.*

These steps are carried out for all Bank-financed projects, be they traditional projects or projects planned in what we call a "participatory" way. But the key characteristic of a participatory approach is that stakeholders influence and share control over the decisions that are made.

### External Expert Stance

Bank-supported projects have in the past usually been prepared in a different manner. We call this more traditional approach the "external expert stance" to distinguish it from what we are calling the "participatory stance." In the external expert stance, the same activities — setting objectives, diagnosis, and so on — are undertaken to prepare a project for financing. The difference is that in the external expert stance, the project sponsors and designers place themselves outside the local system they are investigating and about which they are making decisions — even if they happen to come from or live within the local system.

Usually, these externally positioned sponsors and designers are substantive experts in the subject matter they are investigating. They determine what the project will look like. They view other stakeholders mainly as sources of information and opinions. Their "expert role" includes collecting information and opinions from the other stakeholders, making sense out of what they collect, and converting all of it into a development strategy or project.

The external expert stance is not a World Bank innovation, but an inherent and deeply embedded part of

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our understanding of how to produce results and the role one plays in producing them.

## Listening and Consultation

Even when working in the external expert stance, Bank staff, their government colleagues, and the consultants they hire, consult with and listen to people in the local system. Admittedly, in the past, sponsors and designers may not have always listened to all the people or consulted the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society, but this is changing. Concerted efforts are now being made to consult and listen to all concerned stakeholders. The emphasis of the Bank's Africa Region on systematic client consultation is an example of the changes underway. The inclusion of beneficiary assessments in poverty assessments is another example.

We fully support and advocate consultation and listening — especially with the poor and disadvantaged. But we do not equate this with the process called “participation.” Instead, we recognize consultation and listening as essential prerequisites for participation, because, no matter how good the sponsors and designers are at consultation and listening, what is still missing is learning on the part of the people in the local system. A person who is being “listened to” or “consulted with” does not learn nearly as much as the person doing the listening and consulting.

By focusing attention on “who needs to learn what” in a project and revising our understanding of how learning occurs, we gain insights into the reasons why the behavioral change dimensions of Bank-financed projects have run into so many problems. We are also aided in our understanding of what is needed to enable social change.

## Social Learning

In the external expert stance, experts design strategies and projects that require behavior changes on the part of people within a given system. Then they turn these preset specifications over to people who are accustomed to behaving in a significantly different way and have not learned about how and why their behavior needs to change. The implementation challenge that arises in such situations hinges, as far as we can tell, on the issue of “learning.” Specifically, how can the people within a local system learn the value and rationale of new behaviors specified by an expert?

Behind the well-institutionalized practice of specifying new behaviors in reports and other texts is the belief that people learn by reading information about a reality external to them. Under this assumption, it is logical to think that presenting people with a plan is

enough to enable them to take new actions effectively. And if the actions taken turn out to be ineffective in practice, then we believe it is necessary to go back and reconstruct our strategy or project or plan.

But, over time, development experience has shown that when external experts alone acquire, analyze, and process information and then present this information in reports, social change usually does not take place; whereas the kind of “social learning” that stakeholders generate and internalize during the participatory planning and/or implementation of a development activity *does* enable social change.

As indicated in the *Sourcebook* examples, Bank Task Managers are increasingly supporting processes in which the stakeholders themselves generate, share, and analyze information, establish priorities, specify objectives, and develop tactics. The stakeholders contribute their experience and expertise — for instance, the experience of what it is to be poor or female, or the expertise to develop specifications for a new road or educational program. The stakeholders learn and develop a joint purpose together.

## Social Invention

This social learning is followed by “social invention.” The stakeholders determine the new practices and institutional arrangements they are willing to adopt. In the process, they individually and collectively develop insight and understanding of the new behaviors required to attain the objectives they set. Having all stakeholders work, learn, and invent together reduces the need for the transfer of expert learning from one group of stakeholders to another.

Our Task Managers say that local people often create the most important parts of the projects. These Task Managers make a point of distinguishing between what seem to outsiders to be good ideas and what the local stakeholders invent as practical and expedient ways to get things of value done. The implication is that experts standing outside of the local system often miss possibilities and opportunities that come naturally to its members. The Chad Education project Task Manager, for example, points out that he had never thought about parent education as an important means of improving child education until the parents proposed it first.

## Commitment

The absence of “commitment” in many of the projects the Bank finances comes, we believe, mainly from the external expert stance, in which small groups of experts ask the other stakeholders to commit themselves to a project the experts have designed. Even if

these stakeholders do so, they often have not learned enough to understand fully the commitment they are being asked to make. Nor have they learned enough to judge their ability to fulfill their commitments. Commitments made under such circumstances cannot be relied on.

Through the participatory process, however, people can make informed commitments, and by observing the participatory process, assessments can be made by Bank and government staff, among others, about the presence or absence of the commitment necessary to ensure sustainability.

For example, in the Benin Health project, a strong network of local health committees was formed during the initial design phase to set the objectives and strategies of the project. This network was able to keep the project going as officials continually changed – with four new health ministers in fourteen months and four different notions about what would be good for the people. This is because the process that produced the project was inclusive from the start, gaining broad-based support from all concerned.

Of course, more than commitment is needed. Economic, financial, and technical arrangements must be in place to deliver on these commitments. But if these arrangements exist only on paper or in agreements made without the understanding of those stakeholders who must implement and sustain the project, little will be accomplished.

## Popular Versus Stakeholder Participation

When we began preparing the *Sourcebook*, we assumed we would be writing about ‘popular’ participation, that is, participation of the poor and others who are disadvantaged in terms of wealth, education, ethnicity, or gender. It seemed obvious to focus on the participation of poor and disadvantaged groups because, although often the intended beneficiaries, they are usually without voice in the development process.

But, as we started documenting the examples, we noted that apart from poor and disadvantaged people who were directly affected, a range of other stakeholders for Bank-supported operations existed. These stakeholders could affect the outcome of a proposed Bank intervention or be affected by it; and because of this, their participation is critical. In addition to those directly affected by the project, these stakeholders include:

- *Borrowers*, that is, elected officials, line agency staff, local government officials, and so on.
- *Indirectly affected groups*, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector organizations, and so forth with an interest in outcomes.

- *The Bank*, that is, Bank management, staff, and shareholders.

We also noted that, in our examples, sponsors and designers of development activities had to work with and through powerful stakeholders to serve the needs of the poorest people. Attempts to bypass powerful stakeholders often resulted in opposition from them; and this opposition usually compounded the problem of getting anything useful accomplished.

For these reasons, we shifted our focus from popular participation to *stakeholder* participation – the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the development process. This is a decision that we have made consciously, and one that has potentially important implications for the way the Bank works.

Although we argue that all stakeholders must work collaboratively to advance development projects, we recognize that different stakeholders have different levels of power, different interests, and different resources. For these reasons, we also recognize that arrangements are needed to level the playing field and enable different stakeholders to interact on an equitable and genuinely collaborative basis. The *Sourcebook* describes many methods and tools that can be used for these purposes.

Achieving consensus and reconciling key stakeholder differences is not always easy: it may entail risks, such as generating or aggravating conflicts among groups with competing interests and priorities. Dealing with conflict often requires an understanding of the underlying societal interests inhibiting consensus and putting into place mechanisms for dispute resolution and negotiation.

## Reaching the Poor

As the *Sourcebook* examples illustrate, the poor face many barriers on a number of different levels that prevent them from having a real stake in development activities. Reaching and engaging the poor requires special arrangements and efforts by the sponsors and designers that go beyond those used to involve government officials and other relatively powerful stakeholders in participatory processes.

### Who are the Poor?

The poor include people in remote and impoverished areas. Women and children make up a large proportion of the very poor, which also include people marginalized by virtue of their race and ethnicity as well as those disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control, such as disabilities and natural or man-made disasters. Some of the poorest people live in countries characterized by weak governments and civil strife.

Because the poor are generally less educated and less organized than other more powerful stakeholders, because they are more difficult to reach, and because the institutions that serve them are often weak, interventions targeting the poor must often be small, context-specific, and resource-intensive.

### **Learning from the Poor**

Task Managers are learning a great deal about reaching the poor and engaging them in their own development. Understanding how to do this calls in part for “bottom-up” approaches that begin by involving the poor and learning from them about their needs and priorities.

When we take a look at the types of methods and approaches that work best at the field level for engaging and enabling the poor to participate, we see that these are quite different from the set of techniques used when relatively educated and powerful stakeholders are involved. Stakeholder workshops and other planning methods, such as Objectives-Oriented Project Planning (ZOPP) and Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC) tend to work well when the objective is to gain ownership and commitment on the part of stakeholders such as government officials and staff of international agencies. Workshops can be structured to include the views of the poor, but this requires conscious and careful planning.

But, when the primary objective is to learn from and collaborate with the poor, a different kind of dynamic is involved, one that calls for a different approach to facilitating participation. Methods used should engage poor people and build their confidence, knowledge base, and capacity for action. Visual methods that are carried out in the local setting using local materials and calling on local knowledge and expertise as inputs into project design are often used to good effect.

### **Building Capacity to Act**

Getting the participation of the poor involves more than finding the right technique. It requires strengthening the organizational and financial capacities of the poor so that they can act for themselves. In searching for ways to build local capacity, we found it useful to think of a continuum along which the poor are progressively empowered.

On one end of this continuum, the poor are viewed as beneficiaries — recipients of services, resources, and development interventions. In this context, community organizing, training, and one-way flows of resources through grant mechanisms are often appropriate. Although much good work has been done in this mode, the provision of benefits delivered to people in this way may not be sustainable in the long term and may not improve the ability of people to act for themselves.

As the capacity of poor people is strengthened and their voices begin to be heard, they become “clients” who are capable of demanding and paying for goods and services from government and private sector agencies. Under these changed circumstances, the mechanisms to satisfy their needs changes. In this context, it becomes necessary to move away from welfare-oriented approaches and focus rather on such things as building sustainable, market-based financial systems, decentralizing authority and resources, and strengthening local institutions.

We reach the far end of the continuum when these clients become the owners and managers of their assets and activities. This stage ranks highest in terms of the intensity of participation involved. A question we asked ourselves while preparing the Sourcebook was, how can we support and prepare poor people to own and manage assets and activities in a sustainable manner? In part, we found out that the more poor people are involved upstream in the planning and decisionmaking process, the more likely they are to own a development intervention, contribute to it, and sustain it. This alone, however, is not sufficient.

Constraints exist at the policy level that impinge on the rights of people to organize, access information, engage in contracts, own and manage assets, and participate fully as members of civil society. Efforts are needed, therefore, to create an enabling policy environment that allows all stakeholders — especially poor and disadvantaged ones — to be part of the definition we noted at the outset. They too must be enabled to:

*"...influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them."*