

Concept Note

PARTICIPATION

People are actively involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Background

It is widely acknowledged that an important step on the road to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to realising the Millennium Declaration and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in our partner countries is that citizens can exercise active influence on the setting of priorities, on the distribution of resources and on access to public goods and services.

Participation is the underlying element common to all principles laid out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The principle of ownership in particular, the very foundation of legitimate, sustainable, results-based development cooperation, is the result of successfully involving all the relevant stakeholders.

For these reasons, participation is a cross-cutting issue that must be taken into account in all projects.

The Dimensions of Participation

To get an overview of the broad concept of participation, we differ between three dimensions of participation.



(i) Process Participation

Process participation refers to the involvement of stakeholders in the identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects and programmes, for example in participatory planning and steering of programmes. Participation in this case is related to a time-limited project and to a definable field of participating stakeholders.

Practice: Application of participatory approaches in the project/programme cycle management

(ii) Democratic Participation

Democratic participation enables citizens to participate in decision-making and steering processes in the political-geographic community at various levels, for example participation in consultations and elections in a municipality, province, etc. Participation is involvement

in a social steering process in which decisions are made on issues and on assignment of power (representation).

Practice: Promotion and facilitating of direct citizen participation

(iii) Institutionalised Participation

Institutionalised participation stands for the mainstreaming of participation in terms of making it an integral part of policies, standards and legislations.

Practice: Supporting the mainstreaming of participation at the institutional level

The Concept of Participation

Until the late 1990s participation was primarily understood in terms of either process participation in projects such as *community participation* which tended to be limited to development projects, or *political participation* which was generally conceived in conventional terms, concerned with forms of indirect representation through elections and legislative apparatus.

However in recent years, there has been a convergence of concern with citizen engagement in policy formation and implementation and with Good Governance, broadening political participation to include a search for new, more direct, ways through which citizens may influence governments and hold them accountable. Participation began to spill beyond the boundary of the project. Democratic participation and Good Governance agendas consequently merged.

The concept of participation has shifted and is now understood as something broader than being concerned with 'beneficiaries' and 'the excluded' to a concern with various forms of engagement by citizens in policy formulation and decision-making in key arenas which affect their lives. This includes also the negotiation and development of a conducive regulation framework for participation (= institutionalised participation).

Approaches to Participation

Linking citizen participation and accountability/responsiveness of the state

In the past there were two main approaches how to close the gap between citizens and state institutions:

- Strengthening the process of participation by supporting poor people to exercise their voice (new forms of inclusion and consultation, etc.)
- Strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of state institutions and policies through changes in institutional design and a focus on the enabling structures for good governance

Each of these perspectives has often perceived the other as inadequate. But it becomes increasingly obvious that it is important to work on both sides of the equation. As concerns about good governance and state responsiveness grow, questions about the capacity of citizens to engage and make demands to the state come to the fore.

There is growing consensus that the way forward is found in a focus in both, a more active and engaged civil society which can express demands on the citizenry and a more responsive and effective state which can secure the delivery of needed public services. There is a need to

develop both participatory democracy and responsive government as 'mutually reinforcing and supportive' (The Commonwealth Foundation, 1999).

Participation as a right

One concrete step for bridging the gap between citizen and the state are new approaches to social citizenship which recast citizenship as practiced rather than given. Focusing on inclusive participation as the very foundation of democratic practice, these approaches suggest a more active notion of citizenship. The agency of citizens is recognised as 'makers and shapers' rather than as 'users and choosers' of interventions or services designed by others (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000).

Building on this new thinking, DFID's strategy paper *Human Rights for Poor People* offers new directions for participation in development by casting participation as a human right in itself. The right to participate is situated as basic to the realisation of other human rights:

"Participation in decision-making is central to enabling people to claim their rights, Effective participation requires the voices and interests of the poor are taken into account when decisions are made and that the poor people are empowered to hold policy makers accountable" (DFID 2000)

New forms of citizenship participation

Such different thinking about citizenship, participation and rights raises the question of how to create new mechanisms, or spaces for citizen engagement. Some areas of innovation are: (Cornwall, Gaventa 2001)

- *Extension of the traditional spaces for citizen engagement* by lending new power and responsibilities to conventional spaces such as public meetings and committees: For example, the use of PRA for poverty and well-being assessments offers ways of taking the consultation process to citizens in their own spaces.
- *Opening of formerly closed-off decision-making processes* and creating new imperatives to consult and inform: In Bolivia and Brazil, for example, participatory municipal planning and budgeting have national and state backing.
- *Reconfiguring the boundaries between 'expertise' and 'experience'* by increased involvement of citizens (and their valuable experiences) in the kinds of decision that were once presented as technical rather than acknowledged as value-laden and political.
- *The use of citizens' juries* to promote a process in which views are voiced and defended, and debates can take place
- *Pressure placed on governments by civil society organisations* is another strategy that has forced open spaces through demand for responsiveness and accountability.

Resources

Commonwealth Foundation. (1999). *Then Way Forward: Citizens, Civil Society and Governance in the new Millenium*. London, Commonwealth Foundation.

Cornwall, A., and Gaventa, J. (2000). From users and choosers to makers and shapers: Repositioning participation in social policy. IDS Working Paper 127. www.ids.org.uk

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GTZ, Sector Project Mainstreaming Participation, Eschborn 2006

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<http://diversity.gwu.edu/center-civic-engagement-and-public-service>

<http://blogs.worldbank.org/category/tags/civic-participation>