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# People's Participation and Rural Development: Nepal's Case

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## **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes the relationship between people's participation and rural development taking the case of Nepal. We use secondary data from publications and research reports. The paper concludes that in developing countries like Nepal involvement of people's participation is very important. People's participation in Nepal is limited only for elite people but not for people from deprived communities. Though people's participation has increased in Nepal over the last few decades but people from backward society are not participating to the same extent of high income group which creates conflicts in society. Now government, political leaders, civil societies, development workers should look towards bringing backward communities in mainstream development activities for the betterment of them and the nation.*

**Keywords:** *Decision making, participation, rural development, community, empowerment*

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## **Introduction**

The concept of participation has a long history, where especially in the 1960s and 1970s the debates about participation were present in a wide variety of societal fields. This has caused this concept to feature in a surprising variety of frameworks, which have been transformed through an almost infinite number of materializations. There are differing opinions as to the origins of participation theory. It has been suggested that the historical incident of community participation include: the legacy of western ideology, the influence of community development and the contribution of social work and community level thinking. The literature also suggests that the participation and participatory processes stem broadly from two major areas: political sciences and development theory. It suggests that participation is heavily influenced by theories of development and is therefore highly varied and complex due to different theoretical positions.

The dominance of the top-down approaches to development was largely a result of modernization theory which was dominant in the 1960s. This conception does not assume that there is an ideal level of participation to be achieved. The most effective form of participation varies, but over the long run sustainability will depend on minimizing transaction costs in horizontal and vertical interactions. Participation is viewed as a means to defined ends, not as an end in itself; the goal therefore is to optimize participation to achieve the desired project goals, not simply to maximize participation. The desired goals in rural water supply projects include achieving improved water supply systems and developing the human, organizational, and management capacity to solve problems as they arise in order to sustain the improvements.

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Participation means doing things together, exchanging ideas and experiences, consulting and considering all views, sharing in decision making, co-implementing, co-operating, sharing and learning, empowerment, democratic risk sharing, collective ideas and efforts, getting involved, sharing ideas, opinions and experiences, doing things together in work, analysis and decision making and consulting together all views in survey or interview and other activities. Examples of participation are workshops, farmer's group meeting or group training on the job training including on farm training, networking with other institutions, and monitoring and evaluation such as self evaluation. Participation also makes people to increase their reception and ability to respond. Participation is also encouraging a dialogue between the local people and project preparation/implementation, monitoring and evaluation in order to obtain information on the local context and on social impacts. People's participation keeps the problems of the community and ensure efficient and smooth implementation of the various plans and rural development programmes.

The way participation is defined largely depends upon the context and background in which participation is applied. The importance of people's participation in governance and development in recent years is highly recognized both by national and international organizations. Participation is a dynamic process. It is difficult to predict or even to quantify using a standard 'measurement'. Participation rather remains in the same situation and originates from individuals' experiences in participating. People cannot be forced to be 'participant' in projects which affects their lives but should be given the opportunity where possible. In general and macro context, participation is often understood as a mass approach based on an idea, such as rallying and demonstrating in public and using political means to express collective opinions. In certain instances, it could be part of development. It means the involvement of target groups at programme or project level in the development context, and the kind of involvement. People's participation in development means beneficiaries' involvement in all stages in the process of development which includes decision-making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and management of the development programmes. Participation has been used as a process for development.

After a couple decades this concept is still popular among the development professionals in developing countries. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) showed that 'the central issue of people's participation has to do with power exercised by some people over other people. Participation in this sense is not about how and where to begin, about intermediate and long term goals, about organization and continuing open-ended process, and as the most current jargon it has the objective of empowering people.

Participation does not happen in a vacuum. It is influenced and shaped by a range of societal and contextual factors. Participation means different things to different people in different settings. It can be viewed both as a means and an end in itself (Cornwall, 2008; Jaitli and Brown, 1999). As such, Jaitli and Brown (1999) contend that when focusing on participation as a means to an end, its importance to the goals of the project may be higher in projects that rely much on the dedication and involvement of the locals than in those projects in which important but scarce resources are in the hands of few grassroots actors at the local level. Participation is a multidimensional, dynamic process, which takes varying forms and changes during the project cycle and over time, based on interest and need. Participation can range from more nominal forms of engagement through empowerment and transformation. People's participation in decision making and local ownership results in effective and sustainable rural water systems. This belief

has played a central part in the shift in institutional strategies from supply-driven to demand-driven approaches, which respond to the felt needs and aspirations of users, especially the poor. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the relationships between people's participation and rural development.

## Theoretical Review

The concept people's participation has been defined differently by different scholars and organisations. For instance, the World Bank (1994, p. 1) defines participation as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them." On the other hand, IIED (1994:18) defines participation as "empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors, rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions, and control the activities that affect their lives." Brett (2003:5) defines participation as "an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources and assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon." Despite all the many different definitions, there seems to be a common denominator in the sense that they all seem to reduce participation to mean concepts like people's involvement or people's engagement.

According to International Labour Organization, participation involved active collective and organized/continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting the goals, pooling the resources together and taking actions which aim at improving their living conditions. Definitions of participation abound (Cohen and Uphoff 1977; Korten 1980; Paul 1987; and Ghai and Hewitt de Alacantara 1990). All of them include in some measure the notions of contributing, influencing, sharing, or redistributing power and of control, resources, benefits, knowledge, and skills to be gained through beneficiary involvement in decision making. There is also much debate among practitioners and in the literature about whether participation is a means or an end, or both (World Bank 1992; Picciotto 1992).

A popular and most used definition of participation was given by Sherry Arnstein in which she equates participation to the concept of power. In a nutshell, power simply means the ability to influence decisions. It is what gives ability to influence development outcomes. According to Arnstein (1969) participation is about redistribution of power in which the have-nots of our society who are presently excluded from the political and economic processes are given power to have control and influence over matters that affect their lives. It is about the have-nots taking part in how information is shared, how goals and policies are arrived at, as well as determining how benefits are shared in various development projects and programmes. In this sense, she describes participation as citizens' power. In providing clear understanding of participation as power, Arnstein came up with an eight staged framework which she calls 'a ladder of citizen participation'. The ladder has eight levels of achievements and is illustrated as follows; Level (from the top) Type of participation (8) Citizen's control, (7) Delegated power, (6) Partnership (5) Placation, (4) Consultation, (3) Informing (2) Therapy (1) Manipulation (Adopted and modified from Arnstein, 1969). This ladder shows how much power is best example in each level of achievement, denoting the amount of power citizens have in influencing development outcomes.

The higher one moves on the ladder, the more power citizens have in terms of influencing development outcomes. Stage eight which is citizen's control implies the highest level of participation. In here, citizens have absolute power to influence development outcomes. On the conflict level one which is Manipulation entails fake participation in which there is no power at all. Citizens are just deceived as if they are involved, when in actual sense; development outcomes are influenced and determined by the power holders. This is nothing but a window dressing ceremony in which there is no participation at all.

## Methodology

The study is based on secondary data, especially data from library and demonstrated materials, secondary information sources and other documents published by different organizations.

## Findings and Discussions

Since, rural development is a people's programme, it is essential that people should take active part in rural development activities. For the success of any development programme, people's participation is most important. Without people's participation success of rural development programmes cannot be ensured but the people's participation has caused a serious problem in the successful implementation of rural development programmes. People's participation in rural development is also important especially when the government, aimed at providing the basic needs of the people. The basic needs are more important for the local people than anything else. People's participation and involvement is an important factor for the successful implementation of any rural development activities. Specially, in decision making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and sharing the benefits of the development programmes, people's participation and involvement is necessary. In the context of Nepal people's participation takes place officially only after 2007 B.S. There was the great involvement of people's participation in against the Rana regime which finally resulted as elimination of Rana regimes in Nepal. It was the people's participation for rights to citizens. Afterwards many people's participation sare occurring. In 2017 B.S. Panchayat system was introduced.

There were different Organizations like Nepal youth organization, Nepal labour organization etc. These organizations were established for the promoting people's participation in Nepal. Back to village national camp (2024) which mainly promotes the people's participation of people especially for rural people of Nepal. People's movement of 2036 B.S, 2046 B.S, 2062-2063 programs which promotes and the good examples of People's participation. nowadays a government, is to create an environment that permits the local people to seek their best interest freely. Every programme which is financially depends on the government invariably have a short life unless citizens participate in them actively and continuously. Popular participation is being used in number of contexts such as selfhelp, community development, particular institutional arrangements, social mobilization system, socially equitable distribution of development benefits and popular movements. Conceptualization of participation has ranged from contributions by the people to Public Programme to the involvement of people in the entire decision making process (Meenai, 2008). Participation is seen through two perspectives: i) Participation as a process - If seen as a process in development Programme, there is involvement of local people in

implementation of externally designed initiative. There is collaboration along with external agency and local population whereby externally designed development activities are implemented in a participatory manner. Thus, participation is a means or instrument to implement a programme to achieve desired goals. ii) Participation as an end - Participation as a goal of a policy initiative entails empowering people in terms of their acquiring skills, knowledge and experience to take greater responsibility for their development. People are provided access to power and resources to create opportunities which are self sustaining.

The four different thematic variations in the concept of participation are first, participation is employed as a simple means of getting unpaid, labour from the people. It serves the purpose of creating a sense of belonging among the public about the public utilities created. Second, participation is interpreted as an attempt to provide self reliance. Third, participation approach is resorted as a technique to create ideal villages. Finally, participation is resorted as a method of Project Management. Emphasizing the role of people's participation in governance and development, But it is little more than a display, and does not result in change. Instrumental participation sees community participation being used as a means towards a stated end – often the efficient use of the skills and knowledge of community members in project implementation.

Representative participation involves giving community members a voice in the decision-making and implementation process of projects or policies that affect them. However, knowledge about the costs and benefits of participation remains limited; little guidance about budget allocations appropriateness to induce participation is available to those planning large-scale projects. Nevertheless, from an agency perspective people's participation (as an input or an independent variable) can contribute to the achievement of four main objectives: effectiveness; efficiency; empowerment; and equity.

Participation occurs at global, national, subnational, community, and household levels. The primary focus of this study is on the participation of beneficiaries, those who are meant to benefit. The characteristics of these users (individuals and groups) are important because they influence the type of participation that occurs. Participation may improve communication and cooperation; workers communicate with each other instead of requiring all communications to flow through management, thus saving management time. Whereas people's active participation in rural development activities has gained much popularity and interest to the researcher of social sciences. They came to the conclusion that people should take active part in the rural development activities. Other objectives of the new development strategy to be fulfilled when people start to participate in all aspects of the development process, namely decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and benefit sharing. Also as a result of people's participation, the rural people will be in a better position to assess their own rights and responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Developing countries like Nepal involvement of people's participation is very important. People's participation in Nepal is limited only for elite people but not for backward people. Though people's participation has occurred in Nepal but also people from backward society are not getting chances in people's participation which creates conflicts in the society. Now government, political leaders, civil societies, development workers should look towards backward

people how they can be brought to mainstream level of people's participation for the betterment of the nation.

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