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Have Participatory Approaches Increased Capabilities?

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June 2005

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

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Introduction

Since their introduction in the 1970s, participatory methods and techniques have become central tools for community development. These methods have been applied in a variety of contexts and sectors, including livestock management, village health promotion, watershed management, urban sanitation provision, impact assessments, gender awareness and building micro-credit organizations. Participatory approaches to development are promoted on the basis that they support effective project implementation and enhance the well-being of the poor.

Although the poor are becoming increasingly involved in the various stages of development, questions remain as to whether their inclusion constitutes genuine participation and whether people's capabilities have been increased in such a manner as to enable them to chart the course of their destinies in collaboration with the government, NGOs and the international community.

This paper seeks to address these broader issues within the specific context of participatory freedom. Its main goals are to:

- provide an overview of participatory approaches and techniques that can be used; and
- introduce key issues for consideration when assessing the degree to which specific participatory approaches may contribute to enhancing the capabilities of individuals and communities.

The paper is presented as follows. **Section 1** discusses the Capability Approach, the framework within which the participatory methods will be evaluated. **Section 2** is devoted to a discussion of what participation means and why it is important to development in general. **Section 3** discusses participatory approaches relevant to environmental sustainability. Five approaches are presented: (1) Rapid Rural Appraisal; (2) Participatory Rural Appraisal; (3) Participatory Poverty Assessment; (4) Participatory Action Research; and (5) Appreciative Inquiry. Each module provides an introduction to the approach, its theoretical underpinnings and guiding principles, relevant implementation techniques and potential limitations. **Section 4** reflects on the previous discussion to identify key issues for consideration when using participatory processes with the framework of the Capability Approach. It is intended to provide farmers, government, NGOs, international organizations and other stakeholders with an initial guide for assessing whether individuals capabilities are improved through the use of the five participatory approaches presented.

Section 1: The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach (CA) developed by Amartya Sen, is an approach that has helped development economists form an "intellectual foundation for human development and for including participation, human well-being and freedom as central features of development".[1] The core foundations of the Capability Approach may be identified as:

1. **Perceiving economic growth only as the "means" rather than the "ends" to human well-being.** The CA views development as a means of improving human well-being and agency, in contrast with the more traditional perspective which sees economic growth as the objective of development.
2. **Expanding people's capabilities or valuable freedoms.** Within the Capability Approach, economic, political, legal and other social arrangements are evaluated according to how they expand people's capabilities or their ability to achieve the things they have reason to value.

Box 1: How the poor measure progress.

"The poor measure their progress with yardsticks that are quite different from those used by academics and planners. Most of all, what the poor value most is human dignity, something which can be achieved only by relying on them as agents of change."

Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, p.13

The Capability Approach views people as participants and agents of development. It takes into account the diversity of values across individuals and groups. Furthermore, CA helps make researchers and other stakeholders aware of group disparities (such as those based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference and others), and capability disparities that exist between communities and nations.

Within the Capability Approach, participation is put at the centre of development. However, the type of participation used in addressing a problem such as sustainable environmental management (how people are engaged in this process) may or may not support an expansion of their capabilities. The effective involvement of people in their own development requires a clear understanding of the requirements for effective participation, and the potential limitations of this process.

[1] The Human Development and Capability Association (2004). The Capability Approach. http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~freedoms/capability_defined.html.

Section 2: Participatory Development

In the 1970s and early 1980s, a desire by decision-makers to more effectively incorporate the perspectives and priorities of the local people in decision-making, policy development and project implementation led to the emergence of a number of "participatory approaches" to development. This re-orientation towards greater participation in development by individuals was motivated by the development communities desire to move from an emphasis on top-down, technocratic and economic interventions towards greater attention to bottom-up, community-level interventions (Kanji and Greenwood 2001).

Participatory approaches to development quickly evolved throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s with the introduction of methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Action Research and, particularly, Participatory Rural Appraisal. Development of the latter approach spawned the emergence of a myriad of new tools and principles for implementing and understanding participatory development. Throughout this period, researchers and community organizers sought to improve their understanding of "insider/local knowledge as a balance to the dominance of outsider/western scientific knowledge" (Kanji and Greenwood 2001, 8).

By the 1990s, and continuing to the present, participation had become a mainstream, expected component of development. Engagement of local stakeholders, involvement of poor members of communities, responsiveness to the outcomes of consultations—these have become central tenets of development and (typically) conditions for funding. This is especially true for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

Box 2: Some definitions of participation.

Participation implies "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."

Cernia 1985

Participation is the process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services.

World Bank

The organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control.

Pearse and Stiefel, 1979

The growing adoption of a participatory approach to development reflects a continuing belief in a bottom-up approach in which participants becoming agents of change and decision-making. Participation is seen as providing a means through which to enable meaningful involvement of the poor and voiceless in the development process, allowing them to exert greater influence and have more control over the decisions and institutions that affect their lives.

2.1 Principles of Participation

The ability of participatory development to fulfil its promise rests in part on the manner in which it is undertaken. Effective participation needs to be undertaken in a manner that is cognizant of:

- the mode of participation;
- the participants to be involved and the manner in which they should be involved; and
- the institutional structure within which local people operate.

Furthermore, effective participation rests on respecting a number of key principles, such as those identified by Egger and Majeres (1998):

- ***Inclusion*** – of all people, or representatives of all groups who will be affected by the results of a decision or a process, such as a development project.
- ***Equal Partnership*** – recognizing that every person has skill, ability and initiative and has equal right to participate in the process regardless of their status.
- ***Transparency*** – all participants must help to create a climate conducive to open communication and building dialogue.
- ***Sharing Power*** – authority and power must be balanced evenly between all stakeholders to avoid the domination of one party.
- ***Sharing responsibility*** – similarly, all stakeholders have equal responsibility for decisions that are made, and each should have clear responsibilities within each process.
- ***Empowerment*** – participants with special skills should be encouraged to take responsibility for tasks within their specialty, but should also encourage others to also be involved to promote mutual learning and empowerment.
- ***Cooperation*** – cooperation is very important; sharing everybody's strength reduces everybody's weaknesses.

These principles for effective participation can be applied to all aspects of the development process or project.

2.2 Degrees of Participation

Today there are a variety of understandings of what is meant by the term "participation" and its purpose within the context of promoting development (as reflected in Box 2). Two broad perspectives on the rationale and objective of engaging in participatory processes emerge:

- ***Functional or Passive Perspective*** – participation is seen as a means of accessing information from a variety of stakeholders so as to support more effective implementation of a project, policy or program.
- ***Rights-based or Proactive Perspective*** – view participation as a means of enabling and empowering less powerful groups in society to engage in decision-making and exercise their democratic rights. The objective of participatory development is

viewed as being to transform society and achieve more equitable access to and distribution of resources (Kanji and Greenwood, 2001).

These perspectives are reflected in the various degrees of participation in the development process identified in Box 3, ranging from manipulation to self-mobilization. The processes presented in Box 3 illustrate a gradient of shifting control over information, decision-making, analysis and implementation awareness from a central, external agent towards those groups that have traditionally been marginalized and excluded from active participation in the development process. Participation thus involves a shift in power over the process of development away from those who have traditionally defined the nature of the problem and how it may be addressed (governments, outside donors) to the people immediately impacted by the issue. At its pinnacle, participation involves a transformation of the traditional development approach (Sandström, 1994) towards the enhancement of the capabilities of the local people and communities to define and address their own needs and aspirations (Sen, 2000).

Participation recognizes the importance of involving all stakeholders, including the poor and voiceless, in the development process. How effective participatory processes are in bringing these voices into development processes, and whether doing so is effective in increasing the capacity of people to chart the course of their destinies in collaboration with the government, NGOs and international community, depends on the approach chosen and the manner by which it is implemented.

Box 3: Degrees of participation.

(Adapted from Arnstein 1971; Pimbert and Pretty 1994; Wilcox 1994; Lane 1995; Pretty et al. 1995; UNDP 1997; Jeffrey and Vitra (eds) 2001).

1. Manipulation

Participation is undertaken in a manner contrived by those who hold power to convince the public that a pre-defined project or program is best.

2. Passive participation

Participation by the local people is by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is based on information provided, shared and assessed by external "experts." Therefore, the information being shared belongs only to external experts.

3. Participation in information giving

This is a one-way approach to participation whereby participation is by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. Participants are informed of their rights, responsibilities and options, but are not given the opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.

4. Participation by consultation

This is a two-way way flow of information in which local people participate by being consulted and external agents listen to their views. Although participants have the opportunity to provide suggestions and express concerns, their input may or may not be used at all or as originally intended. The external agents define problems and solutions, both of which may be modified in light of information provided by the participants. Such a consultations process does not concede any share in decision-making and professionals are under no obligation to take on people's view.

5. Participation for material incentives

People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash, or other material incentives. Much on-farm research falls into this category, as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in experimentation or the process of learning. In this type of participation people have no stake in prolonging activities once the incentives end.

6. Functional participation

People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the initiative. Local people's involvement however occurs after major decisions have been made rather than at an early stage in the project cycle. The established groups are dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but over time may become more self-sufficient.

7. Interactive participation

People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives, and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. As local people take control over the decision-making process, they gain a greater stake in maintaining the structures and practices they have established. A common drawback is that vulnerable individuals and groups tend to remain silent or passively acquiesce.

8. Partnership

Through negotiation, power is redistributed between local people and power holders in an equitable manner. Decision-making takes place through an exchange between equally respected participants who are working towards a common goal and seeking to optimize the well-being of all concerned. There is mutual responsibility and risk-sharing in the planning and decision-making process.

9. Self-mobilization/active participation

People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice that they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective action may or may not challenge existing inequitable distribution of wealth or power.

Section 3: Participatory Approaches

Over the years, a large number of participatory approaches have been developed to meet the needs of different disciplines, settings and objectives. For the purpose of this document, five approaches deemed useful in ensuring environmental sustainability are presented:

- **Rapid Rural Appraisal** – used to obtain information in a timely, cost-effective, accurate and insightful manner as a basis for development planning and action.
- **Participatory Rural Appraisal** – a series of exercises that emphasizes local knowledge for rural planning.
- **Participatory Poverty Assessments** – used to understand poverty from the perspective of a range of stakeholders, particularly the poor.
- **Participatory Action Research** – used to empower participants and enhance collaboration and expedites knowledge acquisition and social change.
- **Appreciative Inquiry** – a philosophy that the past successes of individuals, communities, organizations are the basis for future success.

In the remainder of this section, each of these participatory approaches is described in greater detail, highlighting their origin, theoretical underpinnings, implementation techniques and potential barriers.

3.1 Rapid Rural Appraisal

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) is a qualitative survey methodology in which a multi-disciplinary team is used to formulate problems for agricultural research and development.[2] The approach emerged in the 1970s as a more efficient and cost-effective way for outsiders to learn about communities, and particularly about agricultural systems, than through classical techniques such as large-scale social surveys or brief rural visits by urban professionals. RRA consists of a series of techniques for "quick and dirty" research undertaken in the belief that the results generated, while of less apparent precision, will have greater evidential value than classic quantitative survey techniques. The method does not need to be exclusively rural nor rapid, but it is economical of an outsider researcher's time.

3.1.1 Theoretical Background and Guiding Principles

Rapid Rural Appraisal is guided by a refined set of principles that require knowledge and skill to apply:

- **Optimizing trade-offs** – researchers are expected to carefully balance the quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness of the information acquired, as well as optimize actual use of the data collected.

[2] Adapted from Conway (1987) and Ison and Ampt (1992).

- **Triangulation** – researcher use more than one technique/source of information to cross-check answers and undertake research as part of multi-disciplinary teams so as to increase the range of information collected.
- **Learning rapidly and progressively** – although research is undertaken rapidly in comparison to classical survey methods, RRA should be conducted in a relaxed manner that emphasizes creativity, curiosity, and conscious exploration. RRA should be undertaken on an iterative basis through the flexible use of methods, be open to improvisation, take advantage of opportunities as they arise and cross-check findings.
- **Learning from and with local people** – this means learning directly, on-site, and face-to-face, gaining from indigenous physical, technical and social knowledge. Farmers' perceptions and understanding of resource situations and problems are important to learn and comprehend because solutions must be viable and acceptable in the local context, and because local inhabitants possess extensive knowledge about their resource setting.

3.1.2 Techniques for Rapid Rural Appraisal

As with all participatory approaches, there is no one recipe by which RRA may be applied. Rather, RRA responds to the different contexts in which it is used, enabling researchers to take a systematic rather than a standardized approach to understanding problems and identifying opportunities for improvement.

A common design for a RRA, however, may be identified. Often implementation of this approach involves moving through the following series of activities:

1. Selection of a multi-disciplinary research team;
2. Training of research team members in the techniques to be used as part of the research—this step is essential for achieving a consistent set of approaches to data collection;
3. Development of a checklist of issues to serve as the basis for questions;
4. Random selection of interviewees from various households/farmers and key informants;
5. Recording data in a form that will be useful to subsequent surveys over the longer term;
6. Discussing and analyzing data with team members in order to reach a consensus on what has been learned and what remains unclear; and
7. Rapid report writing in the field, as any delay may result in loss of valuable information and insight.

In undertaking these steps, researchers may select from a variety of tools (described in Section 5), including:

- Review of secondary sources, such as aerial photos;
- Direct observation, foot transects, familiarization, participation in activities;
- Interviews with key informants, group interviews, workshops;

- Mapping, diagramming, brief aerial observation;
- Biographies, local histories, case studies;
- Ranking and scoring, as a quick means of finding out an individual's or a group's list of preferences and priorities, identifying wealth distribution and understanding seasonal changes;
- Time lines; and
- Short simple questionnaires, towards the end of the process.

In undertaking RRA, as with other participatory and research processes, it is essential that the researcher works to minimize the influence of his/her own biases on the information collected and the conclusions drawn. To offset these biases, individuals undertaking a RRA should seek to undertake this work in a relaxed manner, and focus on listening to the information being provided by participants as opposed to lecturing. Researchers are encouraged to probe issues raised by participants instead of passing to the next topic, and to ensure that they seek out poorer and less powerful people to identify their concerns and ideas.

3.1.3 Advantages

RRA provides researchers with a quick, efficient and cost-effective approach for quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation that helps to cope with the complexity, diversity and interdependency of factors influencing various development issues. As an iterative process, it provides researchers with an opportunity to ask relevant questions as an interview progresses. As well, the use of triangulation allow researchers to: use a variety of tools and techniques to understand a common issue; integrate different disciplines within the same team; and draw information from a range of people representing different segments of a population.

3.1.4 Dangers and Drawbacks

The range of techniques used as part of a RRA can be effective in collecting timely and relevant information, but fundamentally this remains an extractive, externally-driven process. The information collected is retained, assessed and used by the outsiders rather than by the individuals and communities involved in the research.

It is important to recognize as well that many researchers who use standard RRA methods claim that they are using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), when the "participation" is restricted to provision of information to the researcher by the community. The simple test is to examine what value added participation is providing and who owns the product. If the community draws a map because you ask them to, it's RRA. If they realize that the map belongs to them, and want to keep it for their own use, then it's PRA.

3.2 Participatory Rural Appraisal

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) emerged in the 1980s and involves the direct participation of community members in rural planning using different techniques such as diagrams and maps. PRA builds on Rapid Rural Appraisal, but moves much further towards a more holistic approach to participatory development, adding some more radical, activist perspectives. Its more comprehensive approach reflects PRA's original developed in East Africa and South Asia. The approach has been successfully applied in a variety of contexts, including environmental management.

3.2.1 Definition

PRA has been defined as a family of approaches, methods and tools designed to enable local people to formulate and analyze their situation in order to plan, act, monitor and evaluate their actions (Chambers 1994: 953). The underlying concept is that local people are capable of analyzing their own realities and that the outsiders "do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn…they do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning action and evaluation" (Chambers 1997:103). In other words, external experts are "mere" facilitators of the development process.

3.2.2 Theoretical Background and Guiding Principles

The following principles guide the implementation of Participatory Rural Appraisal (Narayan, 1996: 9-10):

- **Capacity building** – by empowering the local community.
- **Utilization of results** – collected data is useless unless it is utilized.
- **Short-cut methods** – short-cut methods may yield reliable and relevant information under time and financial constraints.
- **Multiple methods** – inclusion of different perspectives and various methods can help ensure that the collected information is complete and reliable.
- **The expertise of the non-expert** – usually local people are more knowledgeable about their environment than the external experts. Their interest, abilities, preference and knowledge needs to be acknowledged and used accordingly during the entire life cycle of the project.

These principles reflect PRA's fundamental focus on a recognition that knowledge is power, and emphasize on ensuring that knowledge arising from a participatory intervention is shared with and owned by local people. The validity of local knowledge is reinforced and the monopoly on information being held by outsiders is broken. The PRA process transforms researchers into learners and listeners, respecting local intellectual and analytical capabilities.

PRA focusses to large degree on the process through which research and/or a development intervention occurs. A properly implemented PRA gives enhanced attention to the inclusion of marginal and vulnerable groups–women, children, aged and destitute–and ensuring their

effective participation in development planning and implementation. It also relies upon extensive and creative use of local materials and representations so as to encourage visual sharing and avoiding the imposition of external representational conventions.

3.2.3 Techniques for Participatory Rural Appraisal

PRA uses various systematic methods to enable people to express and share information, stimulate discussion and analysis, and assist participants to organize and initiate changes to a particular problem. The choice of methods or techniques used depends on the issue being examined and the context in which the PRA is taking place; there is to prescribed method for conducting a PRA. Box 4 provides a sample of the methods that can be used when conducting a PRA, divided into four classes of activities:

- group and team dynamics methods;
- sampling methods;
- interviewing and dialogue methods; and
- visualization and diagramming methods.

Descriptions of some of these tools are provided in Section 5.

In determining the techniques to use to assist participants to organize and initiate changes to

Box 4: Methods for PRA

Group and team dynamics methods	Sampling methods	Interviewing and dialogue	Visualization and diagramming methods
▪ Team contracts ▪ Team reviews and discussions ▪ Interview guides and checklists ▪ Rapid report writing ▪ Energizers ▪ Work sharing (taking part in local activities) ▪ Villager and shared presentations ▪ Process notes and personal diaries	▪ Transect walks ▪ Wealth ranking and well-being ranking ▪ Social Maps ▪ Interview maps	▪ Semi-structured interviewing ▪ Direct observation ▪ Focus groups ▪ Key informants ▪ Ethno histories and biographies ▪ Oral histories ▪ Local stories, portraits and case studies	▪ Mapping and modelling ▪ Social maps and wealth rankings ▪ Transects ▪ Mobility maps ▪ Seasonal calendars ▪ Daily routines and activity profiles ▪ Historical profiles ▪ Trend analyses and time lines ▪ Matrix scoring ▪ Preference or pairwise ranking ▪ Venn diagrams ▪ Network diagrams ▪ Systems diagrams ▪ Flow diagrams ▪ Pie diagrams
Source: Pretty, 1993, as adapted from IIED 1994: 100.			

a given problem, a researcher or facilitator should seek methods that:

- have specific and positive impacts—techniques that energize, empower and mobilize the relevant people;
- optimize cost and time, while also providing ample opportunity for analysis;
- emphasize teamwork, bringing together a mix of outsiders and insiders, women and men, and experts from various disciplines;
- are systematic, to help ensure validity and reliability (such as through partly stratified sampling and cross-checking); and
- enable facilitators to measure and evaluate the impacts of the techniques applied using quantitative, qualitative and participatory methods.

Although the process of a PRA varies with the context, the steps below provide a guide that may be used when applying this approach (adapted from Brown and Wyckoff-Baird 1992 as quoted in IIED, 1994):

1. Select a site and gain approval from local administrative officials and community leaders;
2. Conduct a preliminary site visit (steps 1 and 2 could include a community review and a planning meeting to share the purpose and objectives of the PRA and initiate dialogue between all parties as well as full participation);
3. Collect both secondary and field data (spatial, time-related, social, technical), and share information with selected communities. In this stage, facilitators may:
    - start with a mapping exercise to stimulate discussion and raise enthusiasm and interest, providing an overview of the area/community, and helping to deal with non-controversial information;
    - undertake transect walks and seasonal and historical diagramming exercises;
    - engage in preference ranking, which can be used to focus the intervention and as an ice-breaker for groups interviews; and
    - undertake wealth ranking once participants are confident with the process.
4. Synthesise and analyze data;
5. Identify problems and opportunities to resolve them;
6. Rank opportunities and prepare land maps and resource management plans (a basic work plan for all members of the community);
7. Adopt and implement the plan; and
8. Follow-up, evaluate and disseminate any findings.

3.2.4 Advantages

PRA allows researchers and development workers to learn about a community and develop appropriate interventions through the use of an approach that is flexible and highly responsive to individual difference, situational changes and emerging information. The

techniques employed, particularly visual tools such as mapping and calendars, are effective in encouraging participation by quieter individuals, members of minority groups (e.g., women), and those unable to read. They also enable researchers to collect a large amount of information in a relatively short period of time.

3.2.5 Dangers and Drawbacks

The primary challenge of PRA is that the approach alone does not provide communities with decision-making authority or input into project management. Although PRA has been put forward a means of empowering people to take control of their own knowledge and use it in a manner that will provide them with benefits, the approach can (and is) be used in manner that:

- is externally driven, with the PRA being undertaken to justify intervention plans determined by outside project managers, agencies, NGOs and government officials;
- is formulaic and not responsive to or respectful of the specific context in which the PRA is being undertaken;
- raises expectations that something will be done to address a problem, which, if no follow-up occurs, can lead to local communities seeing PRA as a transient, externally-driven development process; and
- does not respond to the potential threat to less powerful members of communities resulting from a PRA that challenges local vested interests through the social analysis conducted.

3.3 Participatory Poverty Assessment

Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) is "an iterative participatory research process that seeks to understand poverty from the perspective of a range of stakeholders, especially the poor" (Narayan, 1996). PPA provides an instrument for including poor people's views in the analysis of poverty so as to improve the effectiveness of public policy related to poverty reduction strategies.

3.3.1 Theoretical Background and Guiding Principles

The approach is rooted in a belief that the development and implementation of a given poverty reduction strategy will be more effective if the views of poor people are taken into consideration. Doing so should help ensure that initiatives address issues that the poor themselves consider important and are implemented through institutional channels that they value. More specifically, PPA is viewed as a means to:

- **Enhance conceptualization and understanding** of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and its causes. This requires not only a strong presence and participation of the poor but also an understanding of what the causes of poverty and deprivation are from the perspective of poor people;
- **Improve participation**, providing for wider ownership and for a broader cross-section of society (and particularly the poor) to influence policies and programs that would benefit them in the long-run;

- **Enhance policy effectiveness**. The effectiveness of poverty reduction policies are more likely to be enhanced with the inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders, particularly the poor and voiceless, and also if such policies address the issues that the poor value most; and
- **Increased local capacity** as the process enables previously disenfranchised people to directly engage in analysis and monitoring of poverty and policy impacts.

Ultimately, PPA is promoted as a mechanism for expressing the aspirations of people, especially for those who are excluded, voiceless and marginalized, so as to enhance their empowerment and autonomy, and the effectiveness of policies intended to support these aspirations.

3.3.2 Techniques

The methods used within a PPA have varied depending on time constraints, availability of funds, local research capacity and level of government interest in poverty issues. However, the basic elements of the design of a Participatory Poverty Appraisal may be identified as:

1. **Select technical assistance.** Project implementers need to identify the technical assistance required throughout the life of a PPA and identify the individual able to provide this assistance in a responsive and consistent manner.
2. **Identify implementation partners.** Given the diversity of activities involved in a PPA, including financing, policy influence and analysis, technical skills in design and analysis, training, dissemination, and logistics and field management, the involvement of a variety of partners is often required. These partners may come from various levels of government, NGOs (local, national and/or international), research institutions and the private sector.
3. **Identify objectives and the research agenda.** Together, all partners engaged in a PPA should work to determine the fundamental objectives of the assessment and its key elements of implementation. Involving all partners in this process helps ensure greater long-term commitment to the exercise.
4. **Identify members for the field team.** These individuals may be drawn from key partner institutions or from consultants.
5. **Identify sources of financial support.** Potential sources include donors, governments and participating NGOs.
6. **Select field research sites and participants.** Various approaches may be used to identify these locations, including selection of candidate locations that fit identified criteria and random sample selection guided by certain criteria. Whichever method is used, it is important to ensure that the criteria for selection are consistent with the objective of the PPAs.
7. **Develop a methodology for research, synthesis and analysis.** PPA designers may develop a methodology that reflects a chosen conceptual framework, such as the Capability Approach. It is advisable that the methodology selected incorporate

tools and approaches already known within the country and that a clear plan for documenting the research findings and process at all stages be generated.

Implementation of the PPA can be undertaken through a number of different activities, including:

- gathering of existing secondary information for context, background and triangulation of findings;
- a review of existing analysis and research carried out in poor communities using participatory approaches;
- field research in poor communities involving travelling research teams engaged in participatory research at the community level. Tools used by these research teams may include:
    - unstructured and semi-structured interviewing of individuals and groups;
    - facilitated thematic group discussions;
    - direct observation;
    - case studies and biographies; and
    - structured, task-based analytical exercises carried out by research participants individually or, more commonly, in groups, and illustrating their priorities, judgments, understandings, analysis or experiences.
- policy analysis using inputs from PPAs and other sources of information and analysis to influence policy development;
- training of NGOs, research institutes, central/local level government staff in methods and approaches for engaging with people in poor communities for research, consultation, planning and action; and
- creating new networks and relationships within the processes of policy formulation and poverty assessment.

3.3.3 Dangers and Drawbacks

Researchers have identified a number of potential dangers in designing and implementing a Participatory Poverty Assessment. These potential drawbacks also may be applied to other participatory processes, and include:

1. *The reliability of the information generated and the policy inferences drawn.* There is a risk that the conclusions reached may be biased by the researchers own views and by participants responding to an inquiry so as to reflect what they think the researcher wants to hear or to derive some potential advantage from the anticipated outcome of the assessment. To overcome these concerns, it is important to be transparent about the materials presented in the PPA and the process used to reach the assessment's conclusions.
2. *Ethical issues in participatory research for policy change.* The ethical dilemmas affecting PPA include placing demands on participants' time (many of whom can not afford to take time away from livelihood activities), raising expectations within a community that change will occur as a result of the assessment, and stirring up divisions within a community if a PPA affects tensions within a community. A variety of strategies have

been adopted in PPAs to counter-act the dangers outlined above, including the following:

- Only engaging in communities where a follow-up capacity exists to facilitate further action.
- Emphasizing carefully and regularly the limits of the exercise. This entails being aware that transparency does not mean just negotiating access with community leaders and officials but ensuring that all participants have a chance to discuss and understand the context of the PPA and the purposes for which they are giving up their time.
- "Rewarding" participation, either directly to individuals, or via some form of gift at the level of a collective group (e.g., educational materials for the school).
- Structuring the research process so that activities take place at good times for the participants—rather than at the convenience of the researchers.
- Ensuring that groups that participate in a PPA remain engaged in the process through feedback on the results of the research at local, regional and national levels. The form of involvement can be weak (e.g., reporting back) or strong (e.g., inviting participants to regional or national meetings to discuss results and conclusions).

3. *The filtering of messages*. Power and authority in a PPA process rests with the external researchers. The poor who participate in this process are provided with the opportunity to communicate information, undertake analysis and influence outcomes, but are not offered any form of direct decision-making control or authority. PPAs are most likely to have influence on policies when the approach becomes embedded in the policy formation process.

3.4 Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been defined in various ways depending on the situation under investigation (see Box 5). In essence, PAR involves bringing people from various social and political contexts and backgrounds to identify, investigate and take appropriate action on conditions that affect them as community members. PAR is a continuous cycle in which insiders and outsiders together decide what needs to be researched, design the research to be undertaken (what will be measured and how) and collect the necessary information. This information is then put into practical applications or used to identify new research ideas.

Box 5: Definitions of action research

- a "systemic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical and undertaken by participants in the inquiry" (McCutcheon and Jung, 1990:148).
- "a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (Kemmis and McTaggert, 1990:5).

PAR seeks to alter the traditional top-down approach to research by collaboratively engaging those experiencing a problematic situation in deciding what information is needed, in collecting and analyzing information, and in taking action to manage, improve or contribute to a just and sustainable society. PAR acknowledges that participants have knowledge and expertise to share with trained researchers, including their opinions about how the research ought to be undertaken (Park, 1993). As outside researchers and community members actively collaborative on all aspects of a research process in ways designed to benefit both, PAR is an effective approach for empowering the local community, or its representatives, to manipulate higher level power structures.

3.4.1 Theoretical Background and Guiding Principles

PAR is distinguished from all other modes of action research by its adherence to four principles (Grundy, 1982; Masters, 1995):

- empowerment of participants;
- collaboration through participation;
- acquisition of knowledge; and
- social change.

It "embraces principles of participation and reflection, and empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation" (Seymour-Rolls and Hughes, 2002, 1). The approach involves creating critical consciousness and giving participants the skills needed to become "self-sufficient learners" (Stoeker 1997).

Its primary objective is to empower disenfranchised populations through knowledge development, and thereby confront and overcome entrenched or dominant elites. The approach is based on at least two theoretical assumptions:

- the social construction or relativistic nature of reality; and
- the accumulation of power by those who control the mechanisms of knowledge creation.

PAR observes that elite groups disproportionately control the mechanisms of knowledge development, and often use this power (knowledge) to exploit or oppress certain groups. PAR aims to give disenfranchised groups the ability to generate knowledge and power through research activities. This use of the research process as an empowerment tool has the added benefit of developing within disenfranchised groups the skills they need to independently sustain their actions and work toward the realization of their legitimate causes.

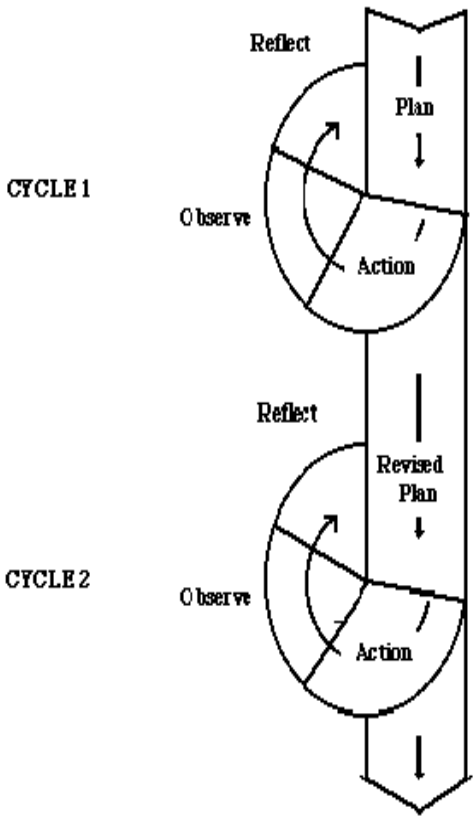
PAR thus seeks to simultaneously (a) address the practical concerns of people by solving an immediate problem and (b) be a tool for education and the development of a critical analysis of social and economic conditions. It has a dual commitment to both studying a system and simultaneously working with participants to change the system so that it will move in a mutually desired direction.

3.4.2 Techniques

As Figure 1 shows, there are basically four steps to designing Participatory Action Research (Zuber-Skerrit, 1991:2 as quoted in Masters, 1995):

1. **Planning** – a constructive process that arises during discussions among the participants (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 5). The completed plan must be for critically examined action by each of the participants and include evaluation of the change.
2. **Acting** – occurs when the plan is put into place and the hoped for improvement to the social situation happens. This action will be deliberate and strategic (Grundy, 1986: 28). It is here PAR differs from other research methods in that the action or change is happening in reality and not as an experiment 'just to see if it works'.
3. **Observing** – this is the "research" portion of PAR where the changes as outlined in the plan are observed for its effects and the context of the situation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 13). In this moment research tools, such as questionnaires, can be utilized to ensure proper scientific methods are followed and results have meaning. Observation and Action often occur simultaneously.
4. **Reflecting** – that moment where the research participants examine and construct, then evaluate and reconstruct their concerns (Grundy, 1986: 28). Reflection includes the pre-emptive discussion of participants where they identify a shared concern or problem.

Figure 1: Graphical illustration of the different steps in Action Research (MacIssac, 1995, as quoted from O'Brien, 1998).



Reflecting its holistic nature, PAR utilizes a variety of tools to assist with implementing each project. These methods, which are commonly used in qualitative research, include:

- keeping a research journal;
- document collection and analysis;
- participant observation recordings;
- questionnaire surveys;
- structured and unstructured interviews; and
- case studies.

3.4.3 Advantages

Participatory Action Research is a more holistic approach to problem-solving, rather than a single method for collecting and analyzing data. It thus allows several different research tools to be used as a project is implemented.

3.4.4 Dangers and Drawbacks

PAR works well if implemented by a facilitator who understands the local power structure and local issues. It is best reserved for situations where the external agent is aware of the potential for damage, both to themselves and, more importantly, to the disempowered in the community that could result from implementation of the research project. It also works best where the external agency has clear status and relationship with the community and can command resources for a long-term commitment.

3.5 Appreciative Inquiry

Most development projects are designed and delivered using a combination of participatory techniques—including Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participatory Learning and Action, and various workshop methods—to uncover local problems, resource constraints, deficiencies and unmet basic needs. These approaches encourage participation, emphasize the importance of local knowledge and address real problems, but they often fail to sustain community participation after the implementing organization withdraws.

Developed in the early 1990s by David Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve University, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) turns the problem-solving approach on its head by focussing on a community's achievements instead of its deficits, as described in Box 6. Widely used in the corporate sector, AI has been successfully adapted as an approach to community development. AI lets practitioners move beyond traditional problem-centred methods—like participatory problem and needs assessment—to identify and build on past achievements and existing strengths within a community, establish consensus around a shared vision of the future, and construct strategies and partnerships to achieve that vision. AI is rooted in a philosophical belief that the past successes of individuals, communities, and organizations are the basis for future success. Its philosophical approach can be applied to the application of participatory processes such as PRA as well as to daily life.

Box 6: Two paradigms for organizational change (adapted from Cooperrider *et al.,*2003: 15).

Paradigm 1: Deficit Based Problem Solving	**Paradigm 2: Appreciative Inquiry**
"Felt Need" Identification of Problem ⇩ Analysis of Causes ⇩ Analysis of Possible Solutions ⇩ Action Planning (treatment)	Appreciating "Valuing the Best of What Is" ⇩ Envisioning "What Might Be" ⇩ Dialoguing "What Should Be" ⇩ Innovating "What Will Be"
Organizing is a problem to be solved	Organizing is a mystery (infinite capacity) to be embraced.

3.5.1 Definition

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational and social change that identifies peak moments within a community and reinforces the conditions that make past achievements possible (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). AI has been described as:

> … the cooperative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves the discovery of what gives life to a living system when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. The inquiry is mobilized through the crafting of the 'unconditional positive question' often involving hundreds or thousands of people. AI interventions focus on the speed of imagination and innovation-instead of the negative, critical, and spiralling diagnoses commonly used in organizations. The discovery, dream, design, and destiny model links the energy of the positive core to changes never thought possible.
> (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros 2003:3)

3.5.2 Theoretical Background and Guiding Principles

Practitioners of appreciative inquiry believe this approach is true to human nature because it integrates different ways of knowing. Appreciative inquiry allows room for emotional response as well as intellectual analysis, room for imagination as well as rational thought. The application of six principles helps to explain the power behind the appreciative approach (IISD, nd; Mohr and Watkins, 2001):

1. **The Constructionist Principle** – reflects an understanding that what we believe to be the real world is created through social discourse—that words create worlds. Through social interactions, societies define their understanding of the world, acceptable behaviour, and what is accepted as "reality." Reflecting this perspective, AI views the words used to describe a situation as critical to conceiving and constructing its current and future state.
2. **The Principle of Simultaneity** – recognizes that inquiry and change are not separate moments, but occur together such that inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change—the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the first questions asked. For AI practitioners, this implies that the questions (positive or negative) asked set the stage for what is found, and what is discovered becomes the stories out of which the future will be conceived and constructed.
3. **The Poetic Principle** – states that human organizations, including communities, are an open book that is constantly being co-authored. Its past, present and future are an endless source of learning, inspiration and interpretation. Reflecting this principle, AI puts storytelling at the centre of its implementation. Story-telling is valued as a way of gathering holistic information that includes not only facts but also feelings. As well, through stories, it is possible to inquire into anything as no limits are placed on the language used.

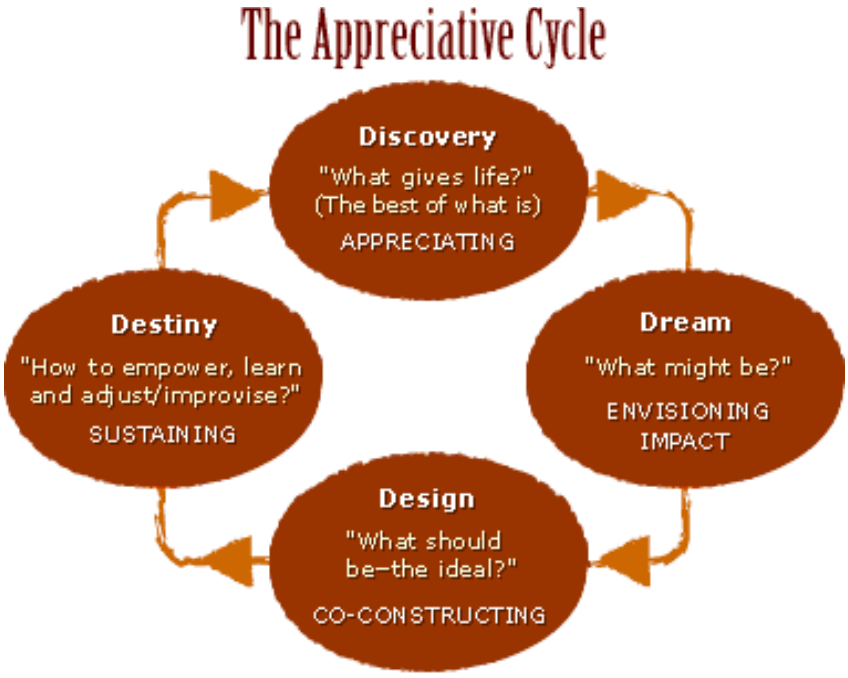
4. **The Anticipatory Principle** – postulates that current behaviour is guided by images of the future. People project a horizon of expectation ahead of themselves that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. For deep change to occur, often an alteration of the active images of the future is required.
5. **The Positive Principle** – reflects a belief that momentum for change requires positive thinking and social bonding—qualities like hope, inspiration and joy in creating with one another. People and communities move in the direction of their questions, and are more likely to be inspired and energized by a positive image of the future than by constant discussion of difficulties. Thus, if development practitioners use positive, provocative questions to guide community development, more long-lasting and effective changes will occur.
6. **The Principle of Wholeness** – reflects a belief that for an appreciative inquiry to be successful, it needs to be fully collaborative, involving everyone in a community.

Fundamentally, Appreciative Inquiry is founded in a belief that we can choose to study moments of creativity and innovation, or choose to focus on moments of stress and failure. AI practitioners choose to focus on the positive aspects of communities.

3.5.3 Techniques

The basic process of Appreciative Inquiry is to begin with a grounded observation of the "best of what is," then through vision and logic collaboratively articulate "what might be," ensuring the consent of those in the system to "what should be" and collectively experimenting with "what can be." An appreciative inquiry usually proceeds through four stages: discovery, dream, design and delivery, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The four stages of Appreciative Inquiry.



1. Discovery

The first stage of the appreciative cycle focusses on discovering periods of excellence and achievement. Through interviews and story telling, participants discover and explore times when their organization or community was at its best. They identify and analyze the unique factors—such as leadership, relationships, technologies, core processes, structures, values, learning processes, external relations or planning methods—that contributed to peak experiences in their individual lives or in their community.

Various steps and techniques are used to encourage participants to tell stories as richly as possible and help the researcher and the community locate, illuminate and understand what makes the community alive. The key steps in the discovery data collection phase are:

- Identify stakeholders: who are the stakeholders and which stakeholders should be involved?;
- Formulate a list of appreciative questions and develop an appreciative interview guide;
- Conduct individual and group interviews using various participatory methods, asking probing questions to reveal underlying values, strengths and factors that led to success;
- Document the stories, accepting all for what they are; and
- Analyze the stories to identify strengths and enabling conditions.

2. Dream

In stage 2, individuals, groups and/or communities dream the ideal community. Based on the values, strengths and hopes discovered through the storytelling and analysis activities, a vision of a desired future is created. This aspect of Appreciative Inquiry is different from other visioning or planning methodologies because the images of the community's future that emerge are grounded in history.

The vision of the future emerging from an appreciative inquiry is captured by a single, compelling statement or provocative proposition. This statement should fully capture what the community wants to achieve. Examples of provocative propositions include:

- "Our farmer organization will develop sustainable environment management plans for each of our members by this time next year," or
- "This community will do whatever is necessary to build a long-term care facility for community members infected with HIV/AIDS within the next two years.".

The Dream provocative proposition should be achievable because it is based on past periods of excellence, but also represent a challenge and require the participants to do something beyond "business-as-usual."

The Dream phase is usually run as a large group conference or workshop in which participants are encouraged to envision their group or community as if the peak moments discovered in the "discovery" stage were the norm rather than the exceptional.

3. Design

In the third stage, Design, the new structures and processes required to achieve the Dream are determined. Planning takes place at three levels: action planning on short-term objectives; discussion on long-term strategies to achieve more challenging goals; and consideration of structural changes. Through further inquiry and discussion, participants write "micro" provocative propositions that make explicit the qualities, behaviours, organizational structures and steps required for a group or community to achieve the "macro" vision identified during the Dream stage.

To implement this stage, a small team of the participants is typically trained and empowered to design ways of creating the community's dreamed future. In practice, the Dream and Design stages often take place at the same time.

4. Delivery

Stage 4 involves delivering the dream, and beginning the cycle of inquiry again. In this stage, people act on their provocative propositions, establishing roles and responsibilities, developing strategies, forging institutional linkages and mobilizing resources to achieve their dream. Continuous learning and adjustment take place as new information, perspectives and community strengths are discovered thereby renewing the appreciative cycle.

3.5.4 Advantages

The strength of AI is in its ability to assist groups and communities to understand their capabilities and develop positive visions for their future. By identifying and reinforcing positive, constructive actions, relationships and visions within a given community, Appreciative Inquiry encourages local ownership in activities that contributes to quality of life.

3.5.5 Dangers and Drawbacks

The success of an Appreciative Inquiry depends in large part on the skills of the facilitator, who must be able to engage participants in positive thinking and focus on strengths. The facilitator typically needs to internalize a belief in focussing on the positive and bringing an appreciative approach to all of their interactions with the group or community with which they are working.

Section 4: Assessing Participation's Contribution to Capabilities Enhancement

Box 7. "There are no blueprints…"

"Due to the complexity of community dynamics as a human process there are no blueprints, nor ready made recipes of participatory processes that can be applied to promote participatory development."

Botes and van Rensburg 2000: 53

The field of environmental management and sustainability is quite complex. Equally complex are the dynamics of communities. Consequently, developing criteria for participatory processes that support a Capability Approach to development is problematic. Moreover, a static, standardized approach to participation contradicts the original aims of flexibility and context-specific involvement of local people. When participation is approached in a technical as opposed to an empowerment-oriented approach, it no longer is consistent with a Capability Approach.

Participation is consistent with a Capability Approach when it engages and enables people to be involved in the identification, assessment and addressing of the problems that challenge their ability to achieve the economic, social, political and ecological freedoms that define "development." Interactive participation, partnership and self-mobilization/active

Box 8: Assessment of various participatory approaches' degree of participant involvement.

	Participatory Approaches				
Degrees of Participation	Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)	Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)	Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA)	Participatory Action Research (PAR)	Appreciative Inquiry (AI)
Manipulation					
Passive participation					
Participation in information giving					
Participation by consultation					
Participation for material incentives					
Functional participation					
Interactive participation					
Partnership					
Self-mobilization/ active participation					

participation are forms of participation that are consistent with the Capability Approach. As described in Box 8, the participatory approaches described in Section 3 that are most consistent with achieving these degrees of participation, and hence with the Capability Approach, are Participatory Poverty Assessment, Participatory Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry.

As highlighted at various times in Section 3, however, the extent to which any participatory approach to development is able to fulfil its theoretical benefits depends on the manner in which it is applied. It is critical to recognize and be cognizant of the various challenges to effective participation so as to design and implement participatory projects and collaborative research efforts as consistent with enhancing capabilities as possible.

4.1 Challenges for Effective Participation

Botes and van Rensburg (2000: 42-51) have identified a number of obstacles to community participation, namely:

- Inhibiting and prescriptive role of state;
- Paternalistic role of development professionals;
- Over-reporting of development successes;
- Selective participation;
- Hard-issue bias;
- Conflicting interest groups within end-beneficiary communities;
- Gate-keeping by local elites;
- Excessive pressures for immediate results: the accentuation of product at the expense of process; and
- Lack of public interest in becoming involved.

Fundamentally, it is important to acknowledge the unequal power relations and potential conflicts at the centre of any participatory process. Outsiders initiating a participatory exercise, for whatever purpose, inherently have more power than the community members with whom they are to work. As well, there are power inequalities in any community where an intervention takes place. For participation to enhance the capabilities of the poor, both of these factors need to be recognized and their potential negative impacts minimized.

Box 9. Applying Participatory Methods.

Participatory methods "were no more empowering for the villagers than the chosen survey methods. This is the result of applying participatory methods to a predetermined research agenda, for which local input has little effect on the course of research."
Chung et al., p.2, quoted in Sharp, Kay (2001: 21)

4.2 Ways to Ensure Effective Participation

As an outside researcher, there are several guidelines that may be followed to increase the effectiveness of a participatory development process. Researchers should (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000: 53-54):

- "Demonstrate an awareness of [your] status as outsiders to the beneficiary community and the potential impact of [your] involvement;
- Respect the community's indigenous contribution as manifested in their knowledge, skills and potential;
- Become good facilitators and catalysts of development that assist and stimulate community-based initiatives and realize their own ideals;
- Promote co-decision-making in defining needs, goal-setting and formulating policies and plans in the implement of these decisions;
- Communicate both programme/project successes and failure as sometimes failures can be more informative;
- Believe in the spirit in solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity;
- Listen to community members, especially the more vulnerable, less vocal and marginalized groups;
- Guard against the domination of some interest groups. Involve a cross-section of interest groups to collaborate as partners in jointly defining development needs and goals, and designing appropriate processes to reach these goals;
- Acknowledge that process-related soft issues are as important as product related hard issues;
- Aim at releasing the energy within a community without exploiting or exhausting them; and
- Empower communities to share equitably in the fruits of development through active processes whereby beneficiaries influence the direction of development initiatives rather than merely receive a share of benefits in a passive manner."

These suggestions serve as mere guidelines for community participation. They are provided to help re-orient the thinking of development experts from being implementers to facilitators. As facilitators, development experts and researchers should foster the principle of minimum intervention and respect the indigenous knowledge of the disadvantaged groups in the community (Rahman, 1993; O'Gorman, 1995; and Rowlands, 1995, as quoted in Botes and van Rensburg, 2000).

Section 5: Conclusion

It can be seen that there are a multitude of levels and types of participation. It is difficult and maybe not possible to conclude if one type of participation is better than another. Each has a necessary role and it is also dependent on the context within which participation is practised. For example, education and information is necessary if active participation is to be encouraged. However, if literacy levels are low or if there is limited information, then participation can be misused by some groups for personal gains at the expense of the disadvantaged.

However, there is no doubt that the introduction of participatory approaches to development over the past three decades has effectively demonstrated the capacity of men and women from poor communities to participate actively in research, project design and policy analysis. Experience with these methods has also demonstrated that the manner in which these individuals are included in a process sets the context for the results ultimately generated.

As in other forms of inductive research, a professional approach is required that emphasizes prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and cross-checking as methodological tools for ensuring credibility.

As in all research processes, the potential for researcher bias exists. Due to the power imbalances inherent in participatory development, and the often sensitive and critical nature of the issues being addressed through participatory research, care and attention must be taken to ensure that these processes provide benefits and enhance the capabilities and freedoms of the poor.

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E-mail: blds.eldis@sussex.ac.uk
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