

Participatory approaches for influencing policies, processes and practices: Lessons from North and South

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INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

This paper provides a brief review of participatory approaches, and their strengths and weaknesses. The paper includes discussion on how policies can work for poor people and participatory processes for policy change.

At the dawn of the 21st century, approaches to ensure the active engagement of poor people in the development process have come of age. Participation in development has gained a new respectability and legitimacy, and with it the status of development orthodoxy. Progress with participatory approaches includes:

- Multiple points of innovation
- Widespread adoption and application
- Greater stress on developing human capacities than on developing infrastructure
- Greater focus on local knowledge, needs and priorities
- Multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to development operating at different scales
- Programmatic rather than project-based approach
- Greater emphasis on institutional and policy reform and governance issues

Origins

Participatory approaches in use today evolved from several intellectual traditions:

1. Participatory action research – enhance people’s awareness and empower them to take action
2. Agroecosystem analysis – analysis of the ecological systems across time and space
3. Applied anthropology – participant observation and emphasis on As & Bs
4. Farming systems research – farmers as knowledgeable and rational experimenters
5. Rapid rural appraisal – ‘Whose Knowledge Counts?’ – getting beyond the biases of ‘Rural Development Tourism’

Common principles and problems

The common principles of participatory approaches are as follows:

- A defined methodology and systematic learning process – interactive and semi-structured analysis
- Analysis of difference – a central objective is to seek diversity of ideas, opinions and options, rather than simplify complexity (gender, age, wealth, power)
- Group-based learning and interaction – joint analysis and reflection – ‘Two heads better than one.’
- Context specific – adapt to suit local conditions
- Facilitating outsiders and local experts – role reversals – ‘Who Holds the Stick?’
- Leading to change – Ultimate aim is to encourage critical analysis and reflection leading to action

For some, the widespread adoption of people-centred research and development approaches and the proliferation of the language of ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ within the mainstream is heralded as the realisation of a long-awaited *paradigm shift* in development thinking. For others, it is a cause for concern – since far too much of what is hailed as ‘participation’ is a mere *technical fix*, which leaves inequitable global and local relations of power unchallenged and the root causes of poverty untouched. Problems associated with participatory approaches include:

- Making a ‘fetish’ of tools and techniques

- Scaling up and institutionalising participatory approaches slow and complex process
- Attitudes and behaviour among professionals remain conservative – we don't always practice what we preach and seek to hold on to power
- The 'Tyranny of Participation'

Methods for participatory analysis

- *Dialogical Analysis* – interviews, group discussions, oral histories, narratives
- *Temporal Analysis* – historical, seasonal, daily patterns
- *Spatial Analysis* – maps, models, farm sketches
- *Systems Analysis* – causes and effects, impacts, flows
- *Institutional Analysis* – institutional arrangements and interactions
- *Well-being Analysis* – social difference within and between groups
- *Preference Analysis* – preferences, perceptions, priorities

A CASE STUDY: FARMER PARTICIPATION IN PEST MANAGEMENT

Since their introduction 60 years ago, synthetic pesticides have become the dominant response to pest problems resulting from the intensification of agricultural production. This has proven increasingly unsustainable and cost-ineffective due to the development of resistance to pesticides and the rising cost of pesticide use. Also, pesticide-induced outbreaks of insect pests have occurred and there are negative effects of pesticide use on human health and the environment.

Integrated pest management (IPM) is the careful integration of a number of available pest control techniques that discourage pest population development and keep pesticides and other interventions to levels that are economically justified and safe for human health and the environment. The approach emphasises the growth of healthy crops with the least disruption of agroecosystems, thereby encouraging natural pest control mechanisms.

Integrated pest management is farmer-focussed. It stresses the responsibility of farmers for diagnosing pest problems and participating in the development of solutions. Therefore, it uses a process of human resource development through which farmers' expertise is recognised and enhanced. Programmes involve farmers and field staff from national and local government agencies and NGOs, and aim to enhance ecological awareness, decision-making and other skills, farmer confidence and local organisations. Consequently, IPM has broad and long-lasting socio-economic benefits far beyond plant and animal protection.

Farmer empowerment is the main route to IPM. Innovative, participatory training methods are the key to IPM application and IPM needs to build on people's understanding of local agroecosystems to be successful. IPM training builds community-based ownership of science and technology, without which it cannot be socially sustained. The key innovation has been the establishment of Farmers' Field Schools.

IPM Farmer Field Schools

IPM Farmer Field Schools (FFS) were first used in Indonesia, and later extended to other countries. FFS give farmers practical experience in agroecosystem analysis, providing the tools they need to practice IPM in their own fields. FFS also provide a natural starting point for farmer innovation covering the whole range of issues relating to crop management, from insect balance to plant health, from soils to water control and from weed management to varietal selection.

A FFS is a group of about 25 farmers who agree to meet once a week for an entire crop season (12-16 weekly meetings of at least half a day each). They work in small field teams making observations, counting population densities of different species, assessing crop conditions and recording observations. Each team then assembles outside the field and discusses, analyses and interprets its data. The interpreted data are then summarised, often in an agroecosystem diagram, and presented to the entire field school for discussion. The basic format of the FFS consists of three activities:

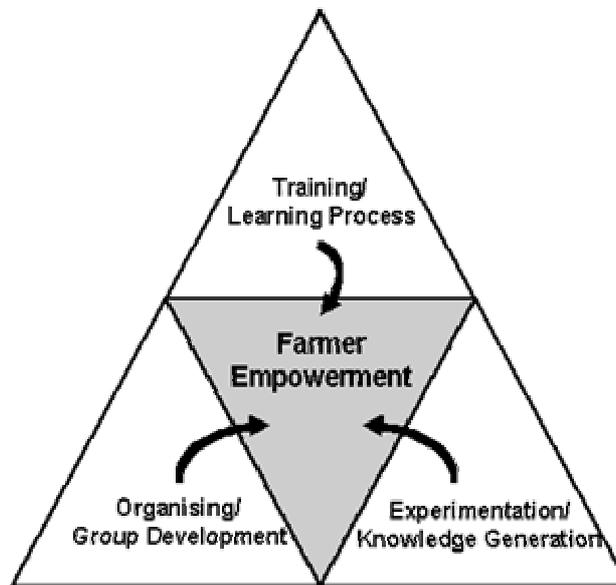
1. Agroecosystem Analysis and presentation of results
2. A 'Special Topic'
3. A 'Group Dynamics' activity

Agroecosystem analysis is the Field School's core activity, and other activities are designed to support it.

FFS and C-IPM activities are forums for community action where farmers and trainers discuss and debate key issues related to their farming systems. They apply their knowledge to solve complex problems in their own

fields. Results of the meetings are management decisions on what actions to take. - Thus, IPM is a dynamic process that is practised and controlled by farmers. IPM training assists farmers to transform their observations to create a more scientific understanding of their food systems.

Farmer Field Schools leading to Community Integrated Pest Management



The impact of IPM

Most early IPM work focused on improving pest management in rice systems (particularly in Asia). In Indonesia, for example, pesticide use for rice has been reduced 65% since the adoption of IPM, while rice yields have increased by 12%. As a result, the Indonesian government was able to eliminate more than \$20 million in pesticide subsidies to farmers. These impressive results have led other Asian countries to adopt similar rice IPM programmes

Today, IPM, with Farmer Field Schools, is being used in a diverse range of production systems. Many EU countries, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands, have now adopted effective IPM to reduce pesticide use by 50-75% for a wide variety of crops. In the US, it is estimated that pesticide use can be reduced by as much as 50% at an estimated savings of at least \$500 million per year.

In Africa, it is particularly noteworthy that the principles of FFS are now being extended:

- from rice to other crops such as vegetables, rootcrops, cotton and coffee and the control of livestock diseases (ie., Integrated Vector Management - IVM)
- from Integrated Pest Management to Integrated Nutrient (soil fertility) Management, plant breeding, participatory health monitoring and the management of natural resources, and
- *from technical domains to broader engagement with policy issues, advocacy and local governance*

Lessons from IPM

The complex ecological and social context of IPM argues for a sustained effort combining elements of technological development, adult education, local organisation, alliance building and lobbying. Scientific excellence and adherence to ecological principles provide a strong technical basis for IPM. The application of participatory methods represents a real advance over other extension models based on information dissemination and the delivery of simple messages. *But these in themselves are not enough - the long-term development of a sustainable agriculture also requires strong farmer groups and the linkages between these groups and the wider community.*

PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES FOR POLICY CHANGE

The emergence of participatory initiatives beyond the domain of the 'project' has led to the realisation that participation is not simply about micro-level interventions, but has macro-level implications. Moreover, the increasingly contested nature of environment-development problems, and the importance of building trust around decision processes, means that there is a clear need to engage local people in policy decisions that have a

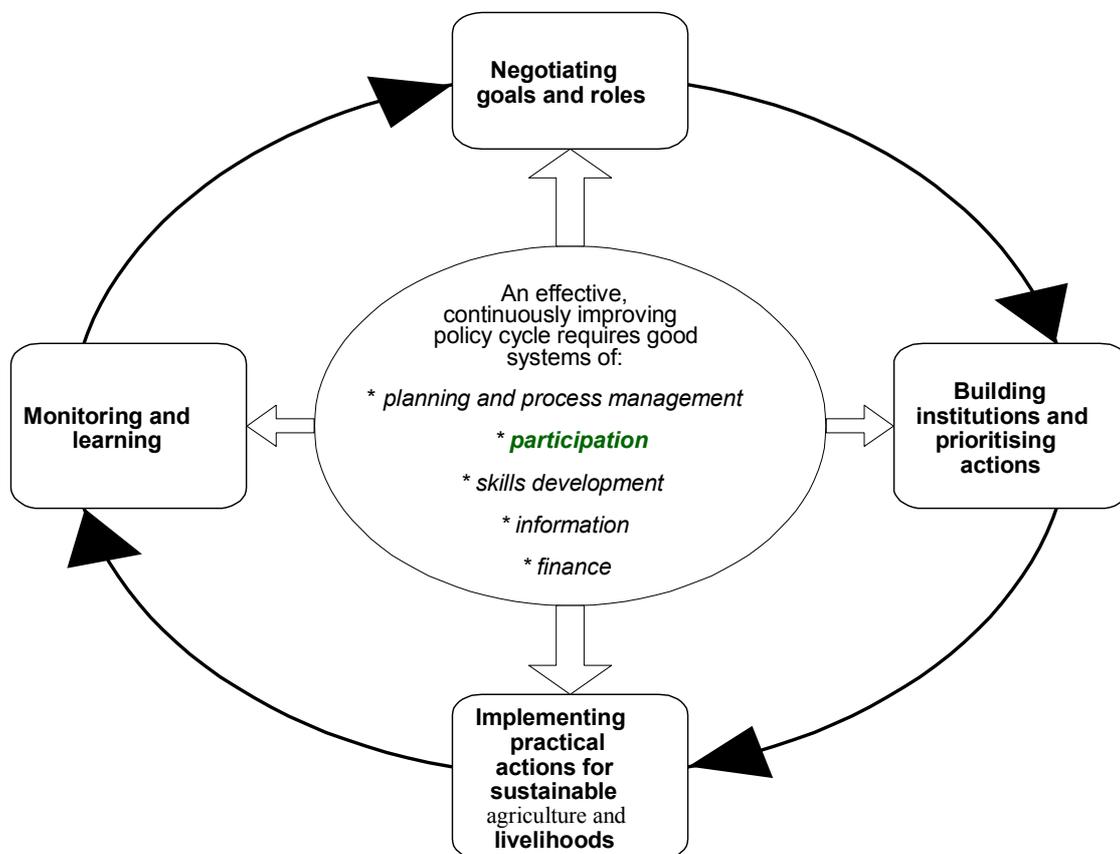
direct bearing on their lives. But how can this citizen engagement in policy-making arenas be achieved? - *by developing participatory processes to inform and influence policy from below.*

Making policy work for poor people and the environment remains a great challenge – participation in the policy process can help – the question is how to make it happen? In recent years, a number of international efforts have been undertaken to involve poor people in policy processes:

- Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)
- National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSSDs)
- Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs)

A key point is recognition that ‘Policy is what organisations do’. This means that civil and private organisations, not just government, should be involved in policy. Also, new policy has to be linked to actual implementation and outcomes.

Policies that work



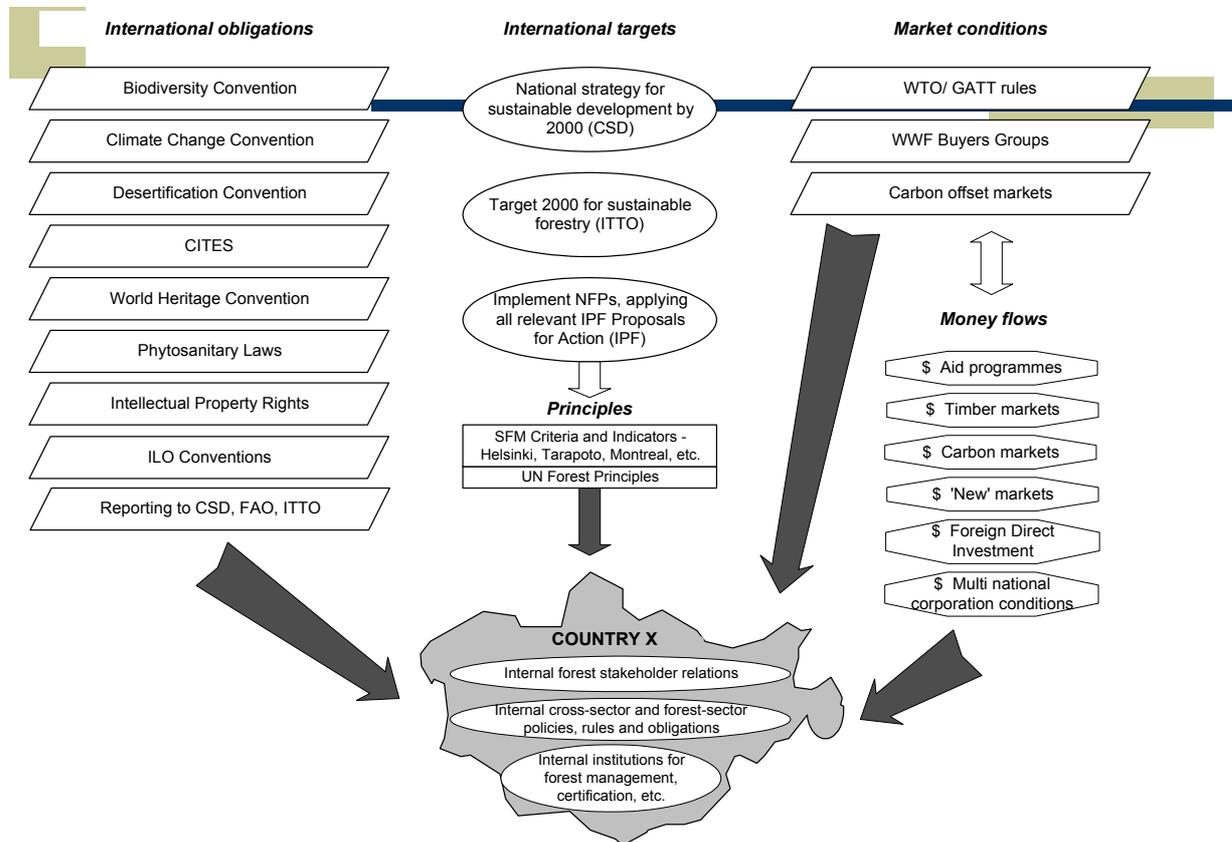
Common policy problems

Creation of new policies that assist poor people is not straightforward. Some common problems are:

- *Perceptions of ‘crisis’* leading to imposition of layers of formal control
- *Pro-commodity emphasis* concentrates wealth, retards development of democratic institutions and externalises costs
- *Policy inflation* at same time as capacity collapse leads to confusion
- *Policies from outside the sectors (e.g. trade)* have more influence than sectoral policy

In addition, the policy environment can be complicated and involve multiple players. An example from the forestry sector is illustrated below.

The complexity of changing policy on sustainable forestry



Policy processes that work

Experience from participatory policy change from various sectors points us towards a number of key factors for success:

- **A forum and participation process**, to understand **multiple perspectives** and cut ‘deals’
- **National definition** of, and **goals** for, sustainable forest management and/or sustainable agriculture
- Agreement on **ways to set priorities**: in terms of equity, efficiency and sustainability
- Engagement with **extra-sectoral influences**
- **Create the right environment for fair trade** between smallholders and business, and democratic control over markets
 - effective organisation
 - risk management
 - government/legal oversight

The involvement of multiple stakeholders is crucial. Conflicts of interest around the choice of development strategy cannot be minimised, but nor can one go towards a situation where difficult policy decisions are not open to debate, because they are politically difficult.

Feedback systems are required to ensure flexible policy - moving from policy research to policy dialogue. Local government, NGOs and farmers organisations must work together; from isolation to interdependence. Multi-stakeholder institutions can be an important element in creating the inclusive policy environment that can

foster change, presenting a **unified voice from rural sector to inform and lobby government**. The existence of these forums enables stakeholders to learn about policy, participate in decision making and cross-fertilise perspectives as well as ensuring all voices are heard. In many cases the government plays a facilitating role, while the mechanisms include donors, agri-business, and other trans-national actors alongside grassroots players.

Multi-stakeholder participation in setting agriculture and rural development policy can be very different experiences, planned or growing out of the withdrawal of the state. The level of participation also varies: from seats at the table to devolution of some elements of planning and decision-making (DSC).

Poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs)

The World Bank and IMF endorsed the development of PRSPs for countries seeking to benefit from the enhanced HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) initiative. The processes to produce PRSPs present opportunities for people to be involved directly in policy-making for national development, but experience to date suggests that active citizen participation in the PRS process has been patchy at best.

In the context of democratisation and decentralisation processes, numerous governments have engaged in some form of participatory processes to develop their PRSPs, including:

Malawi – mistrust between civil society and the state and little government experience with participatory policy-making meant participation in the PRS process was limited

Bolivia – a law passed in 2001 created the legal framework for continued public-government dialogue on policy-making. A strong civil society countered the government's attempts to narrow the political space

Rwanda – the government had little direct experience with participatory policy-making, but it created broad space for participation and the PRS process was quite inclusive

The case studies indicate that an active, engaged civil society is helpful to creating a participatory PRS process, but it is by no means a determining factor. Prior experience with participation does not appear to be heavily influencing the PRS process. *The single most important factor in opening up space for participation in the PRS process is political will.*

AN ENABLING INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

To meet some of the challenges of institutionalising participation, many agencies have moved towards a *more flexible and open-ended approach* in recent years. Longer time frames, a greater degree of consultation, 'open orientation' phases, increased inter-institutional collaboration between key actors and an increasing focus on sectoral investment have helped promote a *more enabling institutional environment for participation*.

While both community-based participation and participatory processes for policy change have opened up spaces for popular engagement in the development process, *the challenge ahead lies in recognising that poverty and exclusion cannot be tackled simply by enlisting participants in projects, programmes or processes.*

From participation to governance and rights

During the late 1990s, debates on scaling up, mainstreaming and institutionalising participation bordered ever closer to the 'good governance' agenda and the recent turn to a rights-based approach to development. At the same time, the 'good governance' agenda and the moves towards decentralisation that began to take shape through the 1990s opened up a series of points of intersection.

Enhancing accountability

As participation spills beyond the boundaries of the 'project', the divisions between the 'participation' and 'good governance' agendas are disappearing. There is growing pressure for institutional reform to make government service delivery more responsive to poor people's needs and priorities is meeting with attempts to enable poor people to have more of a say in the policy process.

To achieve the aims of active citizen participation and good governance, greater attention will need to be paid both to enabling people to make and shape their own spaces for engagement and to processes to enhance the accountability of local and global institutions that affect their lives.