

**Peter Oakley et al.** *Projects with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*. Geneva: International Labour Office. 1991. xv+294 pp. Price: Swiss Francs 32.50.

Round about the mid-1970s it came to be realised that the fruits of development were not being distributed widely. In fact, in a growing number of instances, the benefits of development were being limited to the elites in the developing countries – the vast majority of the population was being side-stepped. As a consequence of this happening, questions began to be raised: Why had such a situation developed? One possible and quite plausible answer was that the development process had ignored people's participation. This, then, became the keyword. Two strands of thinking developed from the use of this word: the first highlighted the inclusion of human resources in the process of development; the second was more political in nature because poor people have very little say in the matters that influence their earning ability. To surmount this situation requires a structural change by which the poor can be directly included in the development process, so that they will gain some control over the resources, which would then enable them to have a higher standard of living.

The book under review is the outcome of a study undertaken with the financial support of four United Nations specialised agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and the World Health Organisation. The book discusses the experience of participation in rural development projects in developing countries. In particular, the focus of discussion in the book revolves round the issues of practice and methodology and the manner in which development projects can assist the process of promoting participation of the people. This focus, however, is not restricted to a single sector but spread across all sectors so that the experience gained has greater validity to it. This would not have been the case if a single sector had been analysed and the findings then extrapolated for implications across sectors. Following such a strategy would be methodologically unsound, as the experiences in one sector may not necessarily be the same in other sectors of the rural economy.

The book comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the concept of participation, highlighting the arguments for participation in development as well as the obstacles to such participation. It also discusses issues concerning participation; for example, who participates, and the expectations and incentives of the process. Chapter 2 discusses participation from a sectoral perspective. Specifically, it examines the process of participation in projects relating to agricultural extension; agricultural credit and input programmes; resource conservation; forestry development; health development; and irrigation and water-supply – the major sectors that deal

with rural development. Chapter 3 presents case-studies in the practice of participation. These studies are spread across a wide range of countries: Ghana, Tanzania, Lesotho, the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia.

Chapter 4 examines the major elements that are basic in promoting people's participation through development projects. These elements include external agencies, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, project groups, the educational process, and the economic base. Participation as a strategy for development does not only mean the provision of the necessary financial resources but also how these resources are utilised. Thus, this chapter brings to the fore the distinctions between conventional development projects and those projects that are participatory in nature. Needless to say, the former type of project is the antithesis of the latter type of project.

Chapter 5 looks at the emerging methodologies of participation; this includes a discussion of the issues, stages, and instruments of the methodology of participation. Again, as in the previous chapter, distinctions are brought out between the conventional project methodology and the participatory project methodology. The latter is more flexible when compared with the former. However, the author warns that the methodology of participation is a dynamic process evolved to meet the requirements of particular situations as they arise. Hence, a methodology that may work in one country might not work in another as cultural values, lifestyles, etc., may be different. Even within the same country, and between sectors, it may be necessary to evolve different methodologies of participation. Thus Chapters 4 and 5 form the main case of this book.

Chapter 6 evaluates participation in rural development projects. Indicators of participation, both quantitative and qualitative, are discussed. Related issues like the collection and interpretation of data are raised in this chapter. The chapter concludes by stating that the evaluation of participation is a crucial matter and has to be related to the entire project process from the beginning to the completion; also, both quantitative and qualitative indicators are important in assessing participation. This would require an additional effort and resources beyond those needed in the conventional development projects. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions, emphasising that despite progress in participatory development, much remains to be done to universalise the experience.

The book brings together divergent experiences in the practice of participation in rural development through the case-study approach, and is a timely addition to the vast literature in this area. One special virtue of the book is that it is not too academic in style; the approach is practical and to-the-point. It is economically written, with a clarity of exposition, and would be accessible to a wide audience. It is likely to be of great value to development practitioners as it sets out a new strategy with respect to people's participation in development in the true sense. There is

also an extensive bibliography on the subject for further reference by those who intend to think or plan for rural development along the new lines.

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