



Participatory Development Is Not Only About the Poor: A Case Study of Egypt

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Abstract

As an alternative to traditional approaches to development, participatory development programs have been earning increasing attention and funding since its emergence in the 1970s. In the case of Egypt, the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas (PDP) has been adopted under the argument of boosting economy through the enhancement of people's freedoms. Previous literature has focused on studying the performance of PDP's first phase (Piffero, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, and Ibrahim, 2012), hence this paper analyzes the second phase through the cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis elements of Freire's *dialogical theory of action* (1970, 2005). After identifying persistent challenges, the present research argues that focusing solely on the development of the poor is not enough to promote consistent participatory development practices.



The PDP started in 2004 and is constituted of four main components: Institutionalization, Climate Change Adaptation and Urban Resilience, Solid Waste Management, and the Fund for Upgrading of Informal Areas. It was implemented in the districts of Boulaq El Dakrou, in Giza, and Manshiet Nasser and Helwan, in the Cairo Governorate, as well as three different areas in Alexandria.



The Dialogical Theory of Action stands for dialogue between leaders, organizations and oppressed communities as an effective strategy in order to assure sustainable results, based on the following elements:

- 1) Cooperation, derived from communication among active Subjects;
- 2) Unity, as micro cultures outgrow previous divided ideologies;
- 3) Organization with the people, learning with them how to name their world; and
- 4) Cultural synthesis, by comprehending what aspects of a culture must be adjusted/preserved to augment freedom as well as support the agents of transformation.

Power Relations Dichotomy

- A strong top-bottom approach could be perceived in the Climate Change and Urban Resilience, the Solid Waste Management, and the Fund for Upgrading Informal Areas components;
- Dialogical practices were promoted among official organizations, including local stakeholders solely as information or instruction recipients.

Contradictions during Implementation Phase

- The Participatory Needs Assessment was conducted in four different informal areas within the Cairo and Giza Governorates in 2013, for roughly 10 days with men, women and youth between the ages of 18 to 35;
- Regarding all major implemented projects, none was implemented in areas where local communities expressed them as one of their main needs or interests.

Lack of Transparency in Methods and Results

- Throughout the years, there were two publications, *Participatory Upgrading of Informal Areas: A Decision-makers' Guide for Action (2010)*, and *Maximising Use Value – Action Guide for Informal Areas (2013)*;
- Data concerning results, procedures, and even legal documents were scarce and sometimes contradictory.

Lack of Governmental Support

- Giza's governor expressed high interest and support, nonetheless there were no further advancements;
- Cairo's Governor's response was "that there should not be any interventions related to infrastructure or service provision without prior discussion with the governorate, since the governorate is already working on developing these aspects, including the hospital" (PNA 2013-Cairo, p.7);
- Disparity between the government's (hidden) purposes and PDP's expected outcomes (Ibrahim, 2012).

Conclusions

In consideration of the government's (hidden) purpose of supporting the PDP, the Egypt's main participatory development program becomes a victim of current national practices of bad governance. Hence, this paper understands the lack of governmental support as the main reason for the partial achievement of the programme's stated participatory development goals.

Focusing on educating the poor for the purpose of empowerment is a powerful insight. Nonetheless, if projects are not successful, it leads to the common counterproductive phenomenon of reinforcing the imperialist myth that the poor are unable to self-manage and that poverty is a consequence of such. Equally important, state actors also need to be educated, specially to comprehend the complex and globalized political system of which they are part. A suggestion would be the negotiation with governmental organizations through fact-based explanation of how bad governance harms their primary interests, both politically and economically, since dissatisfaction with governmental practices may lead to political revolt, as Egypt has taught nations worldwide over the course of the last 3 years.

References

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