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Methodological Issues in the Evaluation of International Community Participation Projects

Michael Bamberger

ABSTRACT

International donor agencies and governments of developing countries are seeking ways to increase the involvement of project beneficiaries in the design and management of development projects. However, very little systematic evidence is available on the potential costs and benefits of community participation (CP). The evaluation of CP is complicated by a division between advocates of efficiency and empowerment objectives. Achieving consensus on evaluation strategies is further complicated by the close association between empowerment objectives and qualitative evaluation methods on the one hand and efficiency objectives and quantitative evaluation methods on the other. A number of methodological issues are discussed with respect to the application of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies, case studies and participant observation in the evaluation of CP. A number of gender issues which affect the evaluation design also are discussed. The final section proposes a research agenda to improve our understanding of the potential contributions of community participation to the design, implementation and sustainability of development projects.

An earlier version of this paper (1988b) was presented at an American Evaluation Association annual meeting. The author is a senior sociologist at the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank.

Increasing Interest in the Role of Community Participation in International Development

International donor agencies are often criticized for adopting a “top down” approach where development projects—whether they be irrigation systems, roads, schools or health services—are selected, designed, implemented and evaluated by donors in consultation with national governments (Gran, 1983). The intended beneficiaries (such as small farmers, users of rural roads, or low-income urban families) typically have very little involvement in the selection or design of projects.¹

The 1980s have shown an increasing interest on the part of donor agencies and governments in the potential contribution of project beneficiaries in the planning and management of development projects. There is accumulating evidence that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local community groups can make significant contributions to the design and management of many kinds of projects, and that when this local expertise is not used there is a greater risk of projects being poorly designed.² Many donors are also seeking to channel resources through NGOs to reduce what they consider to be the inefficiency, and in some cases corruption, of many governments.

Where beneficiaries are not involved in the selection and design of projects they are much less willing to pay service charges or to accept responsibility for project maintenance.³ Many governments also promote community participation (CP) as part of decentralization policies intended to share the financial burden of development projects with local government and community organizations.

The growing interest in CP has revealed that while there is a considerable descriptive literature, and many strong assertions about the benefits of participatory approaches, there is very little solid data on the costs and benefits of CP. This paper discusses the methodological issues involved in any effort to improve the evaluation of CP in international development projects.

¹These criticisms are also reflected in recent donor agency publications (Cernea, 1985 and Salmen, 1987).

²See Uphoff (1989) for a review of this literature with respect to irrigation projects and Bamberger (1988a) for a more general review covering both urban and rural projects.

³Honadle and VanSant (1985) discuss sustainability issues in USAID Rural Development projects; Bamberger and Cheema (forthcoming) review sustainability experience in urban and rural projects in Asia; and Operations Evaluation Department (1985) reviews World Bank sustainability experience.

Is It Necessary to Evaluate Community Participation?

Community participation is a field in which there are major disagreements both on how to approach evaluation and on whether it is even appropriate or possible to evaluate. It is therefore necessary to begin by considering whether the impacts of CP should be evaluated. There are a number of potential problems in trying to evaluate CP. First, CP is an evolutionary process, the objectives of which are defined only gradually in discussions within the community and between the community and other stakeholders. Without clearly defined objectives at the start of the project, it is difficult to use conventional methods of impact evaluation.

Second, evaluation results are often used to make decisions about future resource allocation (Bamberger, 1988b). Many of the potential benefits of CP are difficult to measure or only become evident after a number of years, and consequently any pressures to provide early impact estimates could under-estimate the true benefits of CP and possibly contribute to CP components being eliminated from future programs. Many unsubstantiated claims have been made about the impacts of CP. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence, there have been very few studies which systematically compare the outcomes of projects which have and have not used CP. The demand for tangible proof of impacts may reduce CP to a series of quantitative indicators (such as the number of people attending meetings), forcing community workers to focus on numerical targets rather than on the gradual strengthening of community organizations. CP also can have costs—such as diversion of resources to politically or economically powerful groups (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, 1980), the paralysis or cancellation of projects and cost escalation due to delays, and the need to contract additional field staff—which must be weighed against the expected benefits of CP.

Despite these important considerations, we believe that more rigorous and comprehensive evaluation studies are required to (1) improve estimates of the likely benefits and costs from the use of CP; (2) better understand the factors determining the effectiveness of CP; and (3) assess the circumstances in which CP should become a major component of development projects.

Having said this, it is essential to stress the dangers of using inappropriate evaluation procedures, of trying to reduce complex, qualitative process to “hard” numerical indicators or of trying to draw premature conclusions to meet a research or policy deadline. The evaluation of CP is clearly a task requiring all the ingenuity and open-mindedness of which the evaluation community is capable.

Issues in Defining the Objectives of Community Participation

Practitioners disagree on CP objectives and before an evaluation is designed it is necessary to clarify how the evaluation’s sponsors respond to the following issues:

- a. Is the purpose of CP to improve the efficiency of project implementation or to contribute to the empowerment of politically and economically weaker communities or groups? Are efficiency and empowerment considered to be complementary or competing objectives?
- b. Should CP be studied at the level of the individual project or community, or at a broader sectoral or national level?
- c. Over what time horizon should the effectiveness of CP be studied?
- d. CP is an evolving process which can have significantly different outcomes in different communities and in different economic and political settings. How can the objectives of such an unstructured process be defined and evaluated?
- e. CP often has politically sensitive objectives such as helping communities defend themselves from outside pressures or to ensure an equitable share of public resources. Can, and should, such sensitive objectives be evaluated?

Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to the Evaluation of CP: Complementary Approaches or Conflicting Paradigms?

Despite extensive discussion of ways to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches (Cook and Reichhardt, 1979; Mark and Shotland, 1987), in practice it continues to be very difficult to combine quantitative and qualitative methods into an evaluation design. It is often argued that the two approaches represent different research paradigms with different philosophical assumptions about the nature of the phenomena being studied and about the role of the social sciences (Kuhn, 1970; Patton, 1978). The issue of research paradigms is particularly crucial for the present discussion as the empowerment advocates have a strong preference for qualitative evaluations; while the efficiency advocates tend to prefer quantitative methods. This can be summarized as follows:

| | | |
|---|--------|---|
| EMPOWERMENT OBJECTIVES EVALUATED WITH <u>QUALITATIVE</u> METHODS | VERSUS | EFFICIENCY OBJECTIVES EVALUATED WITH <u>QUANTITATIVE</u> METHODS |
|---|--------|---|

If there is a strong association between the definition of CP objectives and the choice of evaluation paradigms, the task of reaching broad agreement on what to evaluate and how to evaluate it becomes even more difficult.

Broadly speaking the quantitative (“positivist-behaviorist”) approach seeks to identify and explain regularities of observable behavior. Standardized categories of behavior (such as attendance at meetings and participation in community

projects) are identified and measured through sample surveys and other quantitative methods. The data is interpreted through statistical procedures such as multivariate analysis which "explain" variations in outcomes (changes in infant mortality or household income) in terms of a set of treatments or independent variables (project interventions, for example) and a set of socio-economic variables outside the control of the project (intervening variables). The interpretation is based entirely on the observed data and no attempt is made to study the meanings which the subjects attribute to the actions or events being studied. An important feature is the use of "proxy" variables to measure phenomena which are difficult to quantify. For example, rents may be used as a proxy to estimate the total benefits which have been generated by a project.

Qualitative methods, which have their roots in ethnographic research, have been described by Kirk and Miller (1986) as:

A particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms.

The emphasis is placed on understanding reality as it is construed by the community or persons being studied, becoming absorbed in the culture and understanding particular activities or beliefs within the context of this culture.

The upper part of Table 1 summarizes the objectives of the "empowerment" and "efficiency" approaches. The way in which the qualitative or quantitative evaluation methods may be associated with these approaches is shown in the lower part of the table. The lower section also presents the key elements of the qualitative and quantitative evaluation paradigms with respect to design, data collection, analysis and presentation. The table emphasizes the need for the evaluator and his/her clients to decide: (1) whether empowerment objectives with qualitative evaluation methods are complimentary or in competition with efficiency objectives using quantitative methods; (2) whether qualitative and quantitative evaluation represent different research paradigms based on different philosophical assumptions about the nature of social research; and (3) whether there is any necessary association between the empowerment and efficiency approaches to CP and the choice of evaluation paradigms.

Methodological Problems and Issues in Evaluating CP

Defining Objectives, Impacts and Indicators

We have seen there are different and possibly competing definitions of the objectives of CP. Before the evaluation begins it is essential either to reach consensus on the objectives being evaluated or to identify clearly the differences

Table 1
 A COMPARISON OF THE OBJECTIVES AND PROPOSED METHODS OF EVALUATION
 OF THE EFFICIENCY AND EMPOWERMENT APPROACHES TO CP

DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

| | TO ACHIEVE EMPOWERMENT | TO IMPROVE PROJECT EFFICIENCY |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| OBJECTIVES | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased community control over resources and decisions 2. Institution building 3. Increased political participation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project cost sharing 2. Increasing project efficiency 3. Increasing project effectiveness 4. Building beneficiary capacity 5. Improved maintenance and cost recovery |
| EVALUATION METHODS | | |
| | (QUALITATIVE) | (QUANTITATIVE) |
| DESIGN | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis of single community or only communities where CP operating 2. Continuous study 3. No clearly defined objective | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selection of control communities 2. Comparison of discrete points in time (before and after) 3. Assessment of precisely defined quantitative indicators |
| DATA COLLECTION | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participant observation questionnaire 2. Semi-structured surveys 3. Key informants 4. Group interviews | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sample surveys using structured instruments 2. Economic indicators (land prices, rent, etc.) 3. Direct observation (quality of construction and maintenance) 4. Secondary data (repayment rates) |
| DATA AND PRESENTATION | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Case studies 2. Narrative text 3. Reporting opinions of interviewees key informants 4. Opinions of researchers 5. Simple descriptive statistics | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cost-benefit analysis 2. Cost-effectiveness analysis 3. Multivariate analysis with impact estimated as regression coefficient 4. Quasi-experimental with impact estimation through T-Test and similar procedures |

of opinion. It is quite feasible to evaluate competing sets of objectives and this can help stakeholders to understand their areas of agreement and difference. Table 2 identifies some of the main kinds of CP impacts which might be studied at the project, community and wider levels.

Table 2
THE MAIN CATEGORIES OF IMPACTS WHICH CAN BE STUDIED
IN THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- A. Impacts at the project level**
 - 1. The efficiency of project implementation:**
 - a. Effects on project costs
 - b. The speed of project implementation
 - c. The quality of infrastructure, goods and services
 - 2. Improving project effectiveness**
 - a. More equitable distribution of benefits
 - 3. Improved maintenance and cost recovery**
 - a. Condition of project infrastructure
 - b. Beneficiary involvement in the process of maintenance
 - c. Financial and labor contributions of beneficiaries to project maintenance
 - d. Beneficiary involvement in project management
 - 4. Building beneficiary capacity**
 - a. Creation and strengthening of community organizations which can manage the project
 - b. Initiation of new projects by the community
 - c. Beneficiary negotiation with outside organizations involved in the project
- B. Impacts at the community level**
 - 1. Increased community control over resources**
 - a. Increased resource mobilization in the community
 - b. Increased access to outside resources
 - c. Increased community involvement in project planning and in monitoring of the use of externally provided resources
 - 2. Institution building**
 - a. Increased participation in community political and cultural activities
 - b. Evolution of representative community organizations
 - c. Improved organization and administrative capacity of community organizations
 - 3. Increased political participation**
 - a. More active community participation in, and control over, the activities of local and national political organizations
 - b. More community involvement in labor, economic and cultural activities of the city or region
- C. Impacts beyond the community**
 - 1. Evolution of political, economic and cultural linkages between communities**
 - 2. Development of city or region wide organizations**
 - 3. Influence of grass roots organizations in regional and national politics**

The list includes indicators relating to both efficiency (e.g., improved maintenance and cost recovery) and empowerment (e.g., increased political participation) objectives. Some of these indicators lend themselves to quantitative measurement (the efficiency of project implementation and beneficiary contributions to project maintenance) while others can more appropriately be measured qualitatively (community control over the activities of political organizations and institution building). It should be possible for researchers to agree on a set of indicators which provide sufficient quantification and precision to permit comparative analysis between communities, or over time, while at the same time allowing in-depth qualitative description and analysis.

Studying Processes

CP is concerned as much with processes as with the production of specific impacts or outputs; and many processes are difficult to observe and measure. For example, in many cultures decision making does not take place in formal meetings and the outside observer may mistakenly interpret the passive community behavior during these meetings as indicating a low level of participatory decision making. However, the issues may be extensively discussed before or after the meeting in informal settings (such as houses or the mosque) which are more difficult for the outsider to observe.

Many community processes are difficult to define and have no neat beginning and end. It is difficult to identify all of the people who may be involved in the decision processes; there is no limit on where or when discussions may take place, nor to the forms which participation may take.

There are also problems of sampling bias, both in terms of the kinds of activities studied and the way in which each is sampled. At any given point in time there may be dozens of informal discussions on community projects taking place in homes, streets and on buses. The researcher will only be able to observe and record one of these discussions at any given point in time. What kinds of bias does the fortuitous (or the systematically selected) observation of only a small number of discussions cause?

Measurement Problems

The measurement of participation. In order to conduct statistical analysis, many evaluations reduce participation to a set of indicators such as: number of meetings; number of participants; how many people speak in meetings; is the respondent a member of a committee. The difficulty with this approach is that participation is largely a qualitative process. It is necessary to understand and assess what happens in meetings and projects. On the other hand, there are problems in relying exclusively on subjective assessments of the quality of meetings as this makes comparative analysis virtually impossible.

Many people would argue that participation must be studied as an integrated process and that it makes no sense to cut it up into a set of discrete indicators. According to this point of view there is a very limited role for comparative analysis as each situation is unique and must be understood within its own cultural, economic, political and historical context.

Measurement of impacts. Economic analysis often measures impacts through a "proxy" variable such as the increase in land values or housing rents. It is argued, for example, that in a competitive market rental changes will reflect the benefits received from living in a better community. Unfortunately, very few projects operate in a perfect market so that rents do not necessarily reflect benefits. Projects may also produce services (such as potable water) which families may not value highly and which may not be reflected in rental values. On the other hand, if each impact is measured separately it is difficult to estimate total project impact.

Some studies use participant opinions as an indicator of benefits. (For example: "Would you say that since entering this project the economic situation of your family has improved, is about the same or is worse?") It is often difficult to interpret these findings and to assess the relationship between what respondents say and the "objective" changes in their lives.

Problems in Comparative Analysis

Most evaluations try to make some form of comparison between groups or individuals who have, and have not, been exposed to the project. To what extent can comparative analysis be applied to the evaluation of community participation? Some would argue that community participation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which responds and adapts to the unique characteristics of each community, and that consequently, systematic comparison between communities is not possible.

On the other hand, behavioral positivists would argue that community participation can be broken down into a set of definable and quantifiable components, and that impacts can be quantified at least as ordinal or dichotomous variables. Assuming a sufficiently large sample of communities, the multivariate analysis would permit the following kind of statement to be made:

When all other variables are held constant, a unit increase in (the number of people attending community meetings; the number of projects organized by the community, etc.) is associated with an increase of (X pesos of household income; X meters of paved road; X number of children attending school, etc.).

It is possible to develop a composite index summarizing all of the community participation components to estimate the overall impact of CP on indicators of

community welfare (such as income, education, health). Esman and Uphoff (1984) developed a summary score of "performance" of local organizations which they were able to use as a dependent variable in regression analysis⁴. There are a number of methodological problems involved in the use of this approach,⁵ some of which include: validity of the indicators as measures of community participation or impacts; reliability and accuracy of the measurements; problems in combining indicators to develop a general index of the level of participation; and problems and costs of finding a large enough sample of communities. There are also a number of statistical problems relating to the treatment of interaction terms, the incorporation of qualitative variables and the estimation of changes over time when the two sets of observations are not independent of each other (multicollinearity).

There is clearly a world of difference between the participant observer who spends a year studying one community to understand how it responds to the introduction of a program and a quantitative study which covers perhaps 30 or 40 communities and which reduces programs to a set of scales and scores which are then compared with survey data on the socio-economic characteristics of families and communities. Can the strengths of these two approaches be combined so as to understand the complexities and uniqueness of each project while at the same time developing a systematic way to compare projects, to separate project effects from the many other socio-economic forces which are operating simultaneously, and to explain the causes and consequences of the statistically identified effects?

A number of comparative studies of the effects of CP in agricultural and rural development projects have been conducted. Esman and Uphoff (1984) studied a sample of local rural organizations to assess determinants of "performance," Honadle and VanSant (1985) studied a sample of USAID supported rural development projects and the Agricultural Project Service Centre (1980) compared the technical efficiency of small-scale irrigation projects in which local people participated, with those managed by government agencies.

Using published reports, Samuel Paul (1987) studied a sample of World Bank projects which had the potential for using community participation and a sample which had not used CP. Despite problems arising from an apparent under-reporting of the incidence of CP, the study produced some operationally

⁴Esman and Uphoff (1984) found, for example, that the average performance score for organizations created at the initiative of local residents was 153, compared with 138 for organizations created at the initiative of local leaders and only 16 when the organization was set up by government agencies. They stressed that the correlation between performance and its expected determinants such as literacy and political support were very low. With respect to many factors such as political support, the kind of support was more important than *whether* support was given.

⁵The applications and limitations of multivariate analysis in the evaluation of urban development programs is discussed in Bamberger and Hewitt (1986), Annex F (196-215).

useful results on the circumstances under which CP is used and can contribute to the achievement of project objectives.

The above studies illustrate the practical and methodological problems in defining and measuring CP but also illustrate the operationally useful findings which can result from these kinds of comparative research. Some of the methodological issues include: defining CP in a sufficiently precise way to permit comparative analysis while reflecting its complexity and holistic nature; defining participatory approaches at the sectoral as well as the project level; compensating for biases and under-reporting in secondary data; and combining quantitative and qualitative approaches so as to validate the quality of the observations and to interpret the meaning of the observed relationships between participation and socio-economic and political changes.

Problems in the Use of Longitudinal Designs

The two main ways to assess impacts of community participation are cross-sectional analysis in which a relatively large number of groups or subjects are observed at one point in time and longitudinal analysis in which one or a number of groups are observed over a period of time.

In the cross-sectional analysis the project group is compared with a control group when the project is already operational. With the longitudinal analysis, the project and control groups are compared before the project begins and again after the project is operational. The longitudinal design is methodologically the most powerful design for the evaluation of project impacts, but often cannot be used for financial or operational reasons.

Longitudinal analysis faces a number of additional problems. The fact that most projects do not have a neat beginning and end makes it difficult to use conventional quasi-experimental designs which compare the situation "before" the project begins and "after" it is completed. For example, the implementation of a typical project lasts around 5 years, with a gradual start-up period and with activities being most intense during years 2 and 3 and then gradually declining. Project impacts may start to occur in year 2 and may be at their highest in years 3 and 4 and then gradually decline. Depending on the choice of years for the before and after studies, the project could have been estimated to have had a large positive impact, a small positive impact, no impact, or a small negative impact.

It is difficult to maintain a clear separation between the project and control communities throughout a longitudinal study. Other agencies may promote CP activities in either the control or experimental communities making it extremely difficult to isolate the effect of the project CP inputs from all of the related activities which are taking place simultaneously. Project management also may decide to change the communities in which CP approaches are applied, with the result that some of the original experimental areas must be eliminated from the sample.

Finally, the researcher will be faced with the problem of how to control or interpret major political, economic or cultural events which dramatically effect both the process of CP and the social and economic conditions which CP is intended to effect. An economic recession, drought, presidential election, opening of new sources of employment and land invasions can all affect the internal organization of the community and its socio-economic conditions. Given all of these factors, how can the researcher assess to what extent changes have been caused by the CP program and to what extent they are due to completely unrelated factors?

The Analysis and Interpretation of Research Findings

Issues in the use of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis. Financing agencies use analytical procedures to select those projects which will produce the the highest economic return to scarce financial and human resources. Cost-effectiveness analysis is used to select the project or approach which will deliver services at the lowest cost (Levin, 1984). This method requires that all of the costs of delivering a unit of a particular service or output (agricultural credits authorized, houses built or number of points improvement on a test of reading ability) are identified and monetized. If there are alternative delivery systems the costs will be calculated for each one. The costs of delivering a unit of service or output are estimated and a cost-effectiveness ratio is calculated.

Cost-benefit analysis is used to select from among alternative options the project which offers the highest "economic rate of return" on the investment (Thompson, 1980; Gittinger, 1982). Both costs and benefits are monetized. The difference between costs and benefits for each year produces a "net benefit stream" which is then discounted to compute an internal economic rate of return or a net present value. Many projects produce a number of different benefits (such as improved health, income, more stable employment, better drinking water and lower rates of out-migration). Sometimes separate monetary values will be computed for each benefit while in other cases a proxy variable, such as land or house rent, will be used to estimate the sum of all benefits.

Many of the problems in using these techniques to evaluate projects with a large CP component relate to the estimation of benefits. How can we place a monetary value on the strengthening of community institutions, improved communication between residents or greater participation in the political life of the city? Even benefits such as improved health can be difficult to quantify. Often only the easily quantifiable benefits (income or increased value of the house) are included in the analysis while other less tangible (but perhaps equally important) benefits are ignored. On the other hand, the costs of participation (for example, the contracting of additional community workers or the cost of delays in project start-up) are easier to quantify. If all costs are computed but only

certain benefits, then the benefit/cost ratio of CP projects is likely to appear quite low. Some of the potential costs of conventional, non-participatory approaches which are commonly overlooked include: community conflict when projects are imposed from outside (in some cases this can lead to violence and destruction of property or even the cancellation of a project); dissatisfaction with the project design or the kinds of services offered; exclusion of certain groups (squatters, female-headed households or religious minorities) from the project; and delays in project implementation. Ignoring these costs artificially raises the rate of return or cost-effectiveness ratio of the non-participatory approaches—thus making them appear more attractive than participatory approaches.

The use of case studies. There are many different ways in which case studies can be used (Yin, 1984). In the evaluation of CP, cases often involve in-depth analysis of one, or a sample of individuals, groups or communities. These cases describe the organization and implementation processes of projects or community activities, and sometimes how a particular individual or family was affected. Case studies are particularly useful in the evaluation of CP as they can describe a process which continues over a long period of time and which involves a number of different actors and groups. When larger numbers of cases are used it is possible to make statistical comparisons (Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Paul, 1987).

An important methodological issue relates to how the cases were selected. Anyone familiar with field work knows that informants or communities will often be unrepresentative. In a hostile or unreceptive community the researcher may have to accept whoever is willing to be interviewed, and in almost any community the researcher will feel more comfortable talking to some kinds of people than to others. Communities also may be selected because the researchers have contacts there or because people seemed less hostile or more responsive on a first visit. The research report should document the selection procedures so that the reader knows how to interpret the findings.

Similar sampling problems occur with respect to the kinds of observations. Were respondents interviewed in their home, at work or in the street? Were they alone when interviewed or were other people present? Were all people interviewed in the same situation? Which community activities were observed? Did the researcher go to all meetings? If only to some, how were they selected? Did she/he observe informal interactions between leaders and the community or only formal meetings? What important activities were not observed? Usually the report gives little information on these matters.

These are, of course, difficult questions as one of the merits of the case study is its flexibility and the fact that the researcher does not impose a rigid interview format. An issue for this and similar qualitative methods is how to maintain the flexibility and innovation while at the same time being able to

document the research process so that both the researcher and the reader can interpret the findings and assess any biases.

Gender Issues in the Evaluation of Community Participation

There are a number of gender issues which may require special attention in the design and analysis of CP evaluation studies. The evaluation should be based on the premise that there will be clear gender differentiation in many community activities and that the mechanisms for decision making, communication and participation will vary for men and women.

Most information about community activities is typically obtained from male community leaders and other male informants, who consistently underestimate the roles which women play in household decision making and in community affairs. When women are interviewed by male researchers they often will acknowledge (or not challenge) this perception (Abbott, 1976). However, direct observation or the use of female interviewers will frequently reveal that women have a much greater role in household management, economic activities and in community affairs (Heyzer, 1987). Studies in Asia have shown that the lack of understanding of women's traditional economic activities in agriculture has meant that many of the negative impacts of agricultural modernization on the economic position of women have been under-estimated (Heyzer, 1987).

The social and economic priorities of women receive less attention in the design and management of projects. It is assumed that the male "household head" is "speaking for the whole family" when he says (for example) that the distance from the house to the water pump, or the time spent collecting firewood, are not serious problems. Ensuring that the views of women are given equal weight to those of men requires not only talking to women but doing so in a context in which they are able to speak freely. Gender issues can also be important in the application of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis. The fact that household tasks are frequently undervalued in economic analysis means that the "opportunity cost" of female participation in project implementation is often assessed lower than that of males who are "economically active." Consequently there is a danger that participatory approaches which involve female labor will be selected because they appear more economical.

A Research Agenda

Reconciling Research Paradigms

Can "efficiency" and "empowerment" objectives be reconciled and can quantitative and qualitative methods be integrated into a unified evaluation strategy?

The debate on the relationship between “efficiency” (functionalist or developmentalist) and “empowerment” (conflict) approaches to development, is as old as the social sciences and shows no prospects of being resolved. It may be possible, however, to achieve a certain degree of reconciliation with respect to an acceptable evaluation paradigm. Some of the potential areas of reconciliation with respect to the evaluation paradigm are the following:

1. Agreement of the potential costs and benefits of using CP to achieve both project objectives and broader developmental goals. This would include every kind of cost and benefit, not only those which can be easily quantified. It is not essential to agree on the importance of each cost and benefit and it is possible for different analysts to attach different values to each cost and benefit.

2. Agreement on the appropriate indicators for each cost and benefit and on the ways in which each one can be measured. An important issue is to seek agreement on which indicators can appropriately be monetized for inclusion in conventional economic analysis.

3. Agreement on the appropriate methods of project analysis to take into account all of the above indicators. A key issue is whether conventional methods of economic and financial analysis can be adapted to reflect the full range of costs and benefits or whether alternative methods must be developed.

Research Designs for Comparative Analysis

There is a need for comparative analysis to understand the factors affecting the success of CP and to identify the kinds of projects in which CP can have a major impact. One promising approach, which builds on the previously mentioned studies by Esman and Uphoff (1984) and Paul (1987) is the following:

1. Select one project or several related types of projects in which CP has been widely applied.

2. Prepare a comprehensive list of projects—in selected sectors—which have been implemented in a particular country or region.

3. Each project should be rated by several judges to assess (a) how successfully it achieved its objectives, (b) the extent to which CP was used and (c) the success of the CP components.

4. A sample of projects (ideally around 20-40) should be selected for more intensive study. The sample should include projects with different levels of CP and which vary in terms of their perceived success in achieving their objectives.

5. Guidelines should be prepared for the assessment (quantitative or qualitative) of each stage of the CP and project implementation processes and for the evaluation of outcomes and impacts.

6. The information on each project will be obtained through: review of existing reports and project records, interviews with a broad spectrum of community

leaders, project field staff, project management and other government agencies; sample survey of community residents; direct observation to assess the quality of infrastructure and the utilization of project services; participation in community meetings and other activities and meetings with community organizations.

7. The above project-focused methods should be complemented by ethnographic techniques whereby the researcher becomes immersed in the community and tries to understand the project as it is perceived and experienced by the community (Salmen, 1987; Peattie, 1969; Gans, 1967).

8. The analysis and evaluation report should address the following issues:

- a. indicators of the success of implementation for each project studied
- b. variations in project performance and assessment of the main factors affecting performance
- c. variations in the extent and efficiency with which CP is used
- d. analysis of the relationship between project performance and CP
- e. the potential impacts of CP and factors affecting the magnitude and direction of impacts
- f. factors affecting the efficiency of CP
- g. the cost-effectiveness of CP
- h. assessment of the conditions under which the use of CP is justified.
- i. guidelines as to when and how CP can be used
- j. case studies should be included to document the processes of CP and project implementation.

Incorporating Social Analysis into Project Design

Many international agencies adopt rigorous economic, financial and technical procedures of project analysis, but very little attention is paid to the "social soundness" of the project. If CP is to become a major project component it will be necessary to develop methods for the economic and social evaluation of the CP component which are compatible with existing project analysis procedures. The social analysis procedures must include:

- "social soundness" indicators
- procedures for data collection and analysis
- guidelines to help planners and project managers to assess the potential risks of employing CP in a given project.

A key issue is whether criteria of social soundness can be incorporated into conventional economic and financial analysis or whether separate analytical methods are required.

Monitoring the Processes of Community Participation

Procedures for monitoring CP components must be incorporated into the regular project monitoring and evaluation system.

Documenting the costs and benefits of participation

Efforts must be made to compile data on the costs and benefits of CP. Much of these data can be obtained during the normal project monitoring, but some additional studies may be required.

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Are International Private Voluntary Organizations Preaching What They Practice?

G. David Miller

ABSTRACT

The concept of community development organizations providing assistance to communities in furthering the goals of community participation and self-help is conflictive. Providing institutionalized assistance often fosters dependency rather than advancing participation and self-help. The author examines goal statements of twenty leading American private voluntary organizations (PVOs) carrying out international community development. Eighteen of the twenty espouse self-help, yet concentrate more on delivering assistance than promoting empowerment. Their idea of self-help consists of supporting community level administration of resources rather than advocating actual community control. Most PVOs are donor-driven and transfer that dependency to the communities they serve. This raises the question of who is the client of the PVO, the donor or the community? An alternative model is proposed in which development organizations compete in a free market. In this way, communities can select services according to their needs.

Participation, or empowerment, is part of the process and definition of development (Bryant and White, 1982:205).

The practice of community development has traditionally maintained a delicate balance between the interests of the practitioner and those of the

community. One side seeks opportunities for intervention and assistance. The other works toward self-help and independence. Often problems arise when the interests of the two sides become less than complementary. This occurs when efforts of intervention and assistance on the part of the practitioner become intrusive and patronizing; or when the desire for self-help and independence of the community becomes rejecting and uncooperative.

Community level "participation" and "self-help," as well as "reaching out" and "helping others" are the warp and woof of the Made-in-America fabric of community development. A brochure recently arrived on my desk advertising a graduate program in community development asks, "Do you *want* to *assist* people develop more *self-reliant* communities . . . ? (italics added). The qualities of assistance and self-reliance are two traditions that are equally ingrained in American society and yet they might not always be compatible. For that reason, "assisting self-reliance" can become problematic. Often the self-reliance side of the equation may be an inadequate match for the onslaught of assistance coming from the other side.

If assisting self-reliance is the interventionist strategy of choice of the community developer, it must be serving a want or need of the interventionist. Yet what, we may ask, is it doing for the client? Theorists agree that "the core of the community development movement and method is to help people help themselves . . ." (Schwartz, 1978:237). But what does this really mean? What kind of services can the community development profession offer a community seeking meaningful participation in its own development?

Goodell (1984:273) points out that "the most common approach to building local capacity for economic development simply takes out to the poor the amenities we know they need." This conveyor belt approach to development merely contributes to the concomitant sense of helplessness in the local people.

Such an approach does more for the empowerment of the local professionals, planners and third world elites than it does for the community. It keeps community development professionals, together with their grassroots surrogates, holding a firm grip on the development process. Some administrative decisions may be relinquished and some responsibility relegated to the local level. Still this is not the same as recognizing that the community holds political power and maintains control over its resources. Participation, once the philosophical cornerstone of the liberal campaign for empowerment of the poor and enfranchisement of the dispossessed, now serves as the rationale for the conservative call for eliminating centralized assistance programs or, at least, reducing their cost.

Decentralization of assistance is supposed to reduce the dependency of the periphery upon the center, thereby fostering independence. Decentralization is also supposed to eliminate the burdensome overlay of top-heavy administration, thereby reducing cost. For this reason, the monolithic development assistance

organizations such as USAID and World Bank are encouraging the growth of local community development initiatives. They look to a growing cadre of expatriate and local private voluntary organizations (PVOs) to support these initiatives. This is carried out in the name of decentralization.

Once these PVOs have been tapped by the donor agencies to be their surrogates, they are donor driven. As Stanton (1970) asserts, there is a motivation to package their product to serve the donor. In order to remain alive and grow, they must continually marshal resources from the donor community. Yet, without greater local control over the use of resources, this process merely shifts the administrative burden from the donor community to the local community with none of the benefits.

Participation can easily turn into a cliché for those administering development; it is all too easy to affirm its value, while doing little to make it a reality. Traditionally those concerned with participation have emphasized the political process. Now there is an increasing tendency to look to administrative processes as the arena within which people can be more effective and more easily involved (Bryant and White, 1982:224).

As the PVOs channel resources down to the lowest level of the dependence chain, they encourage local participation in the administration and distribution of these resources. Although this helps reduce cost and builds an appearance of local control, it does little to build local empowerment and break the client/patron relationship.

Many PVOs portray themselves as community development organizations yet fail to make the distinction between local administrative participation and local empowerment. They would prefer to “. . . conceive of their role as long-term conduits of external resources to mobilized villagers . . . ” (Gran, 1982:146). Local people are given the administrative responsibility of distributing these resources, but little else. It is easier for PVOs to fundraise among their traditional supporters in the United States for the purposes of “helping” and “assisting” local projects rather than for the less tangible and more risky tasks of promoting, advocating, or encouraging local empowerment.

In the former role, the PVO serves as benefactor or donor, perpetuating an unequal relationship. The community remains a beneficiary or recipient. In the latter role, the PVO becomes an intermediary in the sense of a wholesaler or jobber of ideas and services. As intermediaries, the PVOs then become advocates, “. . . defenders against assaults by elites; idea brokers and catalysts on matters of social mobilization; trainers of local group organizers; and advisors on the social implications of technology choices, market information, legal and political empowerment and credit mechanisms” (Gran, 1982:146). The

community then becomes a consumer, with the choice and power of a consumer in a free market economy. With local empowerment, a consultant-consumer relationship evolves where the PVOs and communities become equal players.

I decided to look at a number of leading American-based community development PVOs in order to determine which of these roles they have selected for themselves—benefactor, intermediary, or perhaps some form of hybrid. I wanted to look at how they envision their particular roles by examining how they communicate those roles to their public. Each of these organizations has a mission statement. By studying their mission statements we can gain a sense of how they choose to present themselves. The decision to look at the mission statements is based upon the following assumptions:

1. A mission statement is the product of considerable study, analysis and decision making on the part of the organization's leadership.
2. The language used is selected after careful deliberation with the purpose of communicating to funders, staff and clients what it is that sets them apart, in a highly competitive field, from the other organizations in the business of development.
3. Mission statements must contain an action statement, a descriptor of the object(s) of this action and some indication as to who is carrying out this action.
4. Mission statements are addressing an audience important to the organization.

I selected the PVOs according to the information provided by the TAICH Directory of Development Assistance Abroad (1983) as the most comprehensive listing of American PVOs operating overseas. It was compiled by the Technical Assistance Information Clearing House (TAICH)¹ operated by the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, Inc. under contract with the United States Agency for International Development. I reviewed the program descriptions of the 189 PVOs among the 497 non-profit organizations listed. Using the following criteria, I identified 20 organizations whose mission statements I examined:

1. The organization fits the TAICH definition of a voluntary agency: "a non-profit organization established by a group of private citizens for a stated philanthropic purpose, and supported by voluntary contributions

¹TAICH no longer exists.

from individuals concerned with the realization of its purposes'' (TAICH:vii).

2. Community development is listed as a major program activity.
3. The PVO operates on an annual budget of over \$1,000,000.
4. There is no stated religious focus.
5. It operates in more than one region of the world.

According to the language in the mission statements, I classified them as either benefactors or intermediaries. In the first (benefactor) category are organizations which provide a direct resource transfer. They deliver goods and services. Although they often make reference to local involvement in the process at some level, involvement is qualified. The second group makes a firm statement about local people playing a decisive role as equal partners in the implementation process.

Goal statements in the first category begin with such phrases as: to assist, to generate, to support, to provide, or to improve. They connote a unidirectional provision of resources from the benefactor to the beneficiary. They suggest less than parity in the relationship.

Goal statements in the second category use the words "encourage," "advocate" or "promote." This suggests an equal partnership as earlier described by Gran (1982) in which the PVO serves as catalyst, advisor, ideas broker, trainer and defender against assaults by elites.

An example of a category one goal statement is:

To assist in the human and economic development of African countries by the development of water resources, increased food production, delivery of basic health services, and emergency assistance to refugees.

This PVO could carry out its mandate even if there were no one home in Africa.

Here is another example of category one:

To improve the quality of life and defend the rights of children; to help needy communities develop the skills and institutions necessary to insure a secure future for their children. Focus is on community self-help through community organization, training and technical assistance.

Even though we all are for the defense of children and helping and organizing needy communities, it might be better if this PVO were less intrusive. At whose behest are they defending the rights of children? Who decides what community is needy? Who decides what skills are needed? And who organizes

the community? It appears that this PVO seeks communities in which to administer a rather set agenda. It might be better if they would be straightforward about offering the training and technical assistance without the rest of the rhetorical baggage.

An example of category two is:

To promote the full participation of women in the social, economic and political life of their countries.

There is little room for equivocation in this statement. It should be noted that, except for its switchboard operator, this PVO is run entirely by women, its constituent group.

Of the twenty PVOs examined, only two were strongly category two. In the other eighteen, the message of category one was predominant. Among these eighteen, three showed some ambiguity as to whether they wanted to promote and encourage development or provide assistance. An example of this type is:

To encourage and assist the development of human productivity; to generate greater income and employment in underdeveloped areas.

Perhaps the cloudiness in the language represents a deeper dilemma as to the purpose of this organization. This organization, in fact, recently underwent a period of reassessing its mission.

Many of the PVOs, particularly the child sponsorship agencies, find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. They are caught between a donor community at home which looks closely at how much of their contribution ends up in the hands of a beneficiary group on the one hand and communities abroad who want to play a greater role in managing those resources on the other. What happens is that program departments of PVOs must follow the lead of their fundraising departments by channeling monies in ways that will assure more future revenue. "As everyone knows, the first rule of organizational behavior is survival" (Lackey, 1987:39).

This often leads to playing it safe by supporting community development activities already underway, contributing to them and then putting the organization's logo on them. It appears that many of the community development PVOs serve as multi-service organizations. Sometimes they provide disaster assistance, reconstruction and rehabilitation when needed. Other times they provide what they call "integrated development."

Integrated development is really a one-stop development supermarket. It offers everything a community will need in the line of development from revolving loan funds to maternal/child health care. Such services are often accompanied by some funding. Access to this outside funding is no small

consideration for village leadership which must make difficult program choices. When Willie Sutton, a notorious American bank robber was asked why he robbed banks, he was reputed to answer, "Why, that's where the money is!" Often programmatic directions lead toward where the money is.

Moreover, PVOs offering this supermarket of services must keep their large technical staffs fully occupied in order to justify their high cost. Therefore, a variety of incentives and subtle pressures are applied to local elites to encourage their cooperation. Such an approach contributes to an ongoing client/patron relationship and an actual disincentive to local communities to take steps necessary for their own empowerment.

Alternative models can be found in the specialist organizations which offer clearly defined, discrete, state-of-the-art technologies. Such organizations advertise their capabilities and compete for the patronage of development communities. Each organization offers a specialization, whether it be skills training in financial management, marketing, or implementing a project such as setting up a desk-top communications network, revolving loan fund, or capital development project. Such an approach requires political participation on the part of the community in making decisions, setting goals, and identifying resources. Skills training is the predominant resource being sought by a community taking control. Having access to state-of-the-art skills is the key to empowerment. If communities in the periphery can have the same level of technology as those in the center, then they can interact as equals; they can compete for resources and they can compete in the marketplace. There are already catalogues of development organizations which offer skills training.² Individuals and community groups can select the training program which best fits their needs. Just like any other educational organization, these training programs can fundraise and seek support according to a track record of how well they are filling the needs of their constituency. These institutions are consumer-driven, rather than donor-driven.

There are a variety of these specialist institutions—management consulting firms, training institutes, communication networks, professional associations, advocacy groups—all ready to market their services in creative ways to an increasingly sophisticated and growing consumer market. One example from a growing literature of consumer guides in this field is the Ford Foundation funded study (Range, 1988) which looked at over five hundred educational and training institutions within the United States. The study identified nine institutions that it recommends for short-term management training programs for women from developing countries.

²Two examples that I draw upon often are Robertson (1987) and Korsmeyer (1989).

If PVOs expect to compete in this marketplace, they have to look closely at their mission statements and ask themselves, "Who is the client, the donor or the community?" They must ask if their statement of purpose accurately reflects the way they see themselves, the way they wish to be seen by others, and, most importantly, the way they actually do business. When it comes time to seek grants or loans to carry out a particular development project, it is the community itself that must apply directly to the funder. As this begins to happen, the PVO will have to change its mission to one of intermediary.

As funding organizations evaluate the current directions of development assistance and reset their development goals, then the Willie Sutton syndrome will put the PVOs into the dilemma of being dynamic or being dinosaurs. One example of such an evolution taking place is among the child sponsorship agencies. Originally functioning as check-to-child programs, they now describe themselves primarily as community development organizations. Although they are now allocating most of their program funds to community development activities, they are faced with the problem of not alienating the thousands of individual sponsors who like to feel that their money goes directly to support a particular child. These organizations are actively trying to change attitudes among their sponsorship from wanting a cash transfer program to one supporting development assistance. Although many of these same organizations are moving from behaving as benefactors to serving as intermediaries, they must constantly look behind them in order not to move too far out front of their funders. As donor organizations reassess the goals of community development, as prevailing attitudes about development assistance change in the general public, and as PVOs are able to demonstrate the usefulness of an intermediary strategy, these organizations will eventually feel more comfortable about preaching what they practice.

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