

Community Participation and Sustainability of Developmental Programmes in Pakistan

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Abstract

The present study presents the importance and needs of community participation in the sustainability of development programmes in Pakistan. This study by reviewing the existing literature on participatory development aims to investigate the factors hindering and promoting community participation in the sustainability of developmental programmes. The study also finds out the flexibility in the overall process of participation; financial incentives, material and non-material benefits and linkages with the community are the factors which can promote participation for the sustainability of developmental programmes. Traditional leaders, external, internal influences and co-option of participation as a fashion by developmental organizations are the important factors, which hinders community participation in the viability of developmental programmes. The study recommends that for ensuring sustainability, people of the target community has to be meaningfully involved at all the stages of development interventions i.e. decision making, planning, implementation and monitoring. In addition, at the policy level the government should implement laws for pooling the funding from the donors at the central or provincial level and disbursed to those organizations which are involving people in the real sense in all the decisions which affect them.

Keywords: Participation, Empowerment, Beneficiaries, Sustainability, Co-option

Introduction`

Participation is a key term in development and has been used in a very broad sense (Sinclair 2004, Vos 2005). There is no single explanation of the term ‘participation’ as it varies from area to area and is subject to cultural norms and interest of the organizations involved (Khanye, 2005). The phrase participation was used for the first time in 1945 in United Kingdom at the Ashbridge Conference in relation to the underdeveloped countries (Rafiq, 1987, Ali, 2005). While the relation of community development with people’s participation was first used officially in 1948

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in the developmental interventions at the Cambridge Summer Conference on African Administration; it came to be actively promoted by the British Colonial Office describing it as:

“A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation, and if possible on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and motivating it in order to protect its enthusiastic and active reaction to the movement” (Colonial Office, 1958:2).

During the last few decades, the developing countries including Pakistan have launched developmental programmes for the welfare of their masses (Waweru, 2015). These developmental programmes lacked sustainability mainly due to defective planning, lack of coordination between government departments, scarcity of financial resources and lack of participation of the target community (Khwaja, 2009). Likewise, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations indicates that the traditional top-down approach of many developed and developing nations failed to empower the rural communities (FAO, 1990; Shah & Baporikar, 2012). In addition, the international community in the world conference on Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development (WCARRD), held in Rome in 1979, acknowledged that developmental projects lack sustainability due to lack of meaningful participation of stakeholders in developmental interventions (FAO, 1991). As a substitute approach, the idea of participatory development grew in development and debate programmes (Shah, 2009).

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the need and importance of community participation in the sustainability of developmental programmes. In addition, the study also explores the role of community participation in empowering communities at the grassroots level. It also highlights the factors promoting and hampering participation of beneficiaries in the development process at the grassroots level.

Study Methodology

The study by reviewing the existing literature focuses on the significance and need of community participation for the sustainability of development programmes. For this purpose, a systematic review of literature was carried out with the help of relevant books, research papers and online sources.

Community Participation and Sustainable Development

The concept of participation was mainly promoted by NGOs since 1950s to the early 80s through developmental projects (Nour, 2011). In the past, developmental activities lacked sustainability due to proper monitoring of developmental programmes, implementation and lack of participation of beneficiaries in the planning (AWARD, 2008). The need and importance of community participation in sustainable development process was realised in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992. It was based on the Brundtland Commission's Report known as "Our Common Future" in 1987 (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The world leaders in this conference held that the goals of sustainable development cannot be attained unless the recipients are involved in the process at the local level. According to Warburton (2009), agenda 21 and 1.3 did not mean that government should be left with minimal role in the developmental process, but proposed a joint mechanism of the government and carried out by the local communities. Experts in the field of development like Reid (2000) and Lisk (1988) conclude that community participation led the communities to raise and utilize their resources in a judicious manner. In addition, participatory development leads to efficiency, cost effectiveness, self-help and sustained development (Barasa, & Jelagat, 2013). Contrary to this, UNDP (1997) report mentioned that participation is a time consuming process and requires more financial resources. In addition participation has no meaning for poor people as it can shift the whole burden to the poor, relinquishing the government from their duties to promote development (Shah & Baporikar, 2012).

Various factors can play vital role in the sustainability of developmental programmes which consists of careful planning, proper implementation and effective supervision (Shrimpton, 1989). Likewise, Khwaja, (2009) is of the view that since community participation creates a sense of ownership among the community members, it is thus more practical (World Bank, 2000). Moreover, the opinion above is further affirmed by research studies conducted in Indonesia and Philippines shows that a strong link exists between project sustainability and participation (Pollnac and Pfomeroy 2005). Concerning the issue that who are to be involved in the process of development, Rabinowitz (2013) reasons about the inclusion of all segments and at all levels of the developmental process. However, according to Karl (2000), participation is subject to socio-economic conditions of the community and on the nature of project. The people may contribute in cash and in kind in the form of free labour, material and non-technical assistance (Nampila, 2005). The proponents of participatory development opined that full time and meaningful participation of community is essential for

achieving the goal of sustainable development (Burns, Heywood, Taylor, Wild, and Wilson, 2004). Research study on development projects in Northern areas of Pakistan reveals that greater community participation in non technical decisions is associated with greater project outcomes (Wasilwa and Wasilwa, 2015). Similarly, results of research study conducted by Khwaja (2004) regarding community participation and project sustainability in Baltistan reveals that greater participation in the decision making is associated with project performance.

Keeping the benefits of community participation in view; NGOs, as well as donors, have been preferring participatory approaches at every step—designing, execution supervision etc.—in implementation of developmental programmes. They consider it yielding more sustainable results because of the meaningful participation of the target community (Mohammad, 2010; Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). Likewise in Pakistan Rural Support Programmes like ‘National Rural Support Program’, ‘Agha Khan rural Support Program’ followed by ‘Sindh Rural Support program’, ‘Baluchistan Rural Support Program, followed by ‘Sindh Rural Support Program’ and ‘Punjab Rural Support Program’ have also adopted participatory development approach for involving stakeholders in the decision making and planning process at the grassroots level (Roomi, Rehman, and Newnham, 2000). Among these RSPs, National Rural Support Program is the leading rural support program which has established a network of community organizations to initiate developmental projects with the active and meaningful participation of target communities for the creation of sense of ownership and sustainability of physical infrastructure schemes (NRSP, 2014). NRSP is also working for the economic empowerment of the target communities and has initiated micro-finance schemes in the target areas (Rural Support Program Network, 2015).

Community Participation and Empowerment

Participatory development largely focuses on weaker sections of society with the belief that these people have the required resources and local knowledge to resolve their problems on self help basis (Chifamba 2013; Fraser and Lepofsky, 2004). In this connection, empowerment pertains to the enabling of poor, vulnerable and deprived section of the society for the resource utilization (Lyons, Smuts, and Stephen, 2001). Hence to make certain that the problems of these downtrodden people are solved, they are involved in those decisions which influence them (Potter, Binns, Elliott and Smith, 2004; Davids, 2009). Participatory development affords equal opportunities of self development and changes the social and economic structure so that the people can have more chances of participation in development planning, irrespective of their gender, race,

religion, political affiliation and economic standing (Chambers,1994;Chambers, 2008).

Participation of the target community in developmental interventions is indispensable component for empowerment of the powerless people (Kinyashi, 2006). Participation helps in improving the living condition of marginalized people and places the benefits in the hands of poor people who are the real stakeholders in the development process (Botes & Rensburg, 2000;Waweru,2015). According to Cornwall and Brock (2005)participation and empowerment are closely linked and without meaningful participation empowerment will remain an unfulfilled promise.

Since the 1990s, international donor organizations like World Bank stressed on purposeful participation of target communities for sustained development through community capacity building and empowerment (United Nations 2002). It is supposed that participation would lead to empowerment through trainings and skill development(Nikkhah & Redzuan 2010). The capacity building sessions will enable the target communities to be self sufficient and able to add to the sustainability of development projects (Hibbard and Tang, 2004).According to Ranjha, (2013) capacity building is the natural result of participatory development process as well as the community members are given equal opportunities to participate in identification of need and problems in decision making and planning.

Factors Promoting Participation

Community participation is a really complicated process and there is no single method for its promotion. Several countries adopted various procedures for the promotion of community participation in accordance with their socio-cultural conditions (Davids, 2009).

Flexibility in the Process of Participation and Local Knowledge

The process of participation should be adaptable so that it can be adjusted to the changing conditions (Bass, Dalal-Clayton & Pretty, 1995). In addition, such environment should be provided where every person irrespective of race, class and gender should take part in decision making process (Nampila, 2005). Kinyashi (2006) opined that possibilities of participation can be increased by equipping the people with the required knowledge and skills.According to Platteau (2004) for promoting participation in development activities, the community development worker should serve as facilitator, motivator and should cautiously listen to the community. In addition, as facilitator the community development worker should give worth to the local

knowledge and ensure minimum intervention in the affairs of the community (Rahman, 1993).

Financial,Material and Non-material Benefits

Participation in community development projects is subject to the provision of material and non material benefits to the target communities (Goodman et al., 1998). In addition Maraga, Kibwage, & Oindo, (2010) indicates that there is close relationship between participation and the benefits received from the development projects by the communities. Furthermore, Bowen (2007) stated that material incentives motivate communities to take part in developmental activities. According to Samah & Aref, (2009) non-material benefits includes insights, trust and the skills to solve the existing problems faced by the community and encourage people to participate in developmental activities.

Development Needs and Linkages of Implementing Agency with Target Communities

People participate in developmental project when they observe that the developmental projects are identified by them and are in accordance with their needs and aspirations (Masanyiwa and Kinyashi, 2008). In addition, the community participate in those activities which ensues in community empowerment through assets and capacity building (International Fund for Agriculture Development, 2009). Hence development needs, development interest and project needs are the contributing factors in promoting participation in development interventions (Samah & Aref, 2009). Similarly establishment of rapport or professional relationship with the target community or village organizations is of paramount importance for promoting community participation (Chambers, 1994). In addition, the executing agency should set up its field offices to live and work with them so that they may know about their problems and resources (Chambers, 1993).

Factors Hindering Community Participation

It is established fact that community participation aims to empower those people who are excluded from the main stream development process. However, this approach has been criticised as well.

Participation and Co-option: Adopted by Developmental Organizations as a “Fashion”

The concept of participation received criticism from development practitioners and academicians from time to time (Cooke and Kothari 2001). In this connection, Cornwall (2002) argued that making community self reliant through participation is risky. According to Cooke & Kothari (2001), participation is usually by ‘invitation’ merely for imposing the pre-conceived projects on the community

without their consent. In addition the donors and implementing agencies do not give any heed to the needs and problems of community; rather they fulfil the hidden agenda of the donors. According to Puri, Byrne, Nhampossa, and Quraishi, (2004), the word 'participation' has become a 'fashion' for NGOs – because of co-option under the neo-liberal agenda – and has lost much of its value. Moreover, Participatory development does not have sustainability as a bottom-up approach in rural development (Edwards, 1993). Similarly Kothari bemoaned that participatory development theory has lost its usage and their critical edge over modernization and dependency theories since its co-option (Nerfin, 1977). Ali (2005) study on Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) in Khyber Pakhtukhwa Pakistan also concludes that NGOs have adopted participation merely as a 'fashion' for getting funds from the donors.

Powerful Segments

In rural areas of Pakistan, the traditional leaders i.e. Khan, Malak, Chaudry or Wadera play an important role in all the decisions of the community (Khan, 2006). They have a say in the affair of the village and the people give weightage to their opinion because of their socio-economic and political status (Kuponiya, 2008). According to Nazneen (2004) participation of the poor and marginalized has not increased significantly because the powerful segment of society creates hurdles in the way of people participation (Afsar, 1999). Sometimes the traditional leaders got control of these developmental activities for their personal benefit. In this regard, development experts argued that monopolization of developmental activities by traditional leaders or elite groups may adversely affect the results of the developmental activities (Fernando and Devine, 2003). Research studies also confirm that traditional leaders and other vested interest groups restrain participation of beneficiaries in the developmental interventions (Gaventa, 2004).

External and Internal Influences

Apart from monopolization of developmental interventions by the traditional leaders, environment inside the implementing agency also plays important role participatory development feasibility (Cernea, 1991). The environment inside the implementing agency is one of the important factor for providing conducive environment to participation (Bagadion and Korton, Ros 2010). Similarly the norm, processes, policies and attitudes in development organizations can also contribute to improving the lot of the poor communities. Furthermore, the staffing, and working condition inside the organization and they style of running the organization is of significance for participatory development practicability (Schneider and Libercier, 1995). Without considering these

factors in planning, the aim of sustainability and empowerment is difficult to be achieved(Nefjees, 2000).

Who Participates? Theory and Practice

Involvement of people in development activities is not very clear, that is, who to involve in the interventions. Majority are of the view to include the helpless and needy at every stage of development, to bring them at par with the privileged class(Rifkin,1990).But still, a confusion about the degree and level of their involvement remains there (McGee,2002; Cleaver, 2001).In the context of NGOs working in Pakistan, research study conducted by Ali (2005) concludes that participatory development was supposed to empower the weaker the society but results of the study reveals that participatory approach failed to empower them.

Conclusion

The study concludes that participation is essential for the sustainability of developmental programmes. Those developmental programmes which ignored inclusion of people in planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring of developmental programmes lacked sustainability. The study summarises that for promoting communal participation, there should be no hard and fast rule for contributing in cash or in kind in any development intervention. Development of positive linkages or rapport between community and implementing agency is need of the hour for ensuring community participation in developmental interventions.

There are various factors which hinder community participation in the development process.

Powerful segments i.e. the traditional leaders at the local level hamper the process of participation and try to monopolize the process for personal benefit instead of communal welfare. The environment of the implementing agency also plays a vital role in the feasibility of participatory development. Lack of amiable atmosphere inside the agency also hampers the feasibility of community participation in the process of development. The study concludes that participatory development could not sustain because of being co-opted under the neo-liberalism by the funding agencies or by modernization approach. Hence participatory development theory has lost its significance over modernization and dependency theories because of its co-option.

Recommendations

The study recommends that developmental organizations should involve the target communities in planning, decision making, monitoring and implementation of development activities. The process of participation should be made flexible and instead of adopting the target oriented approach, the developmental organizations should adopt process oriented approach for involving the target communities in the project cycle.

To ensure purposeful and maximum participation in development process at the grassroot levels, the implementing agencies should develop linkages with the target communities by living and working with them. In this way the implementing agency will be able to know the needs and resources of the communities.

At the policy level, the government should enact laws for pooling the funds received from the donors at the federal or provincial level and then disbursed to those organizations which are working according to the principles of participatory development. In this way the NGOs/INGOs will be made accountable to the government.

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