

Issues of Power in Participatory Development

Samuel Schleipman

Capstone for a Degree of Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy

The Fletcher School, Tufts University

Written under the direction of Professor Elke Jahns-Harms

April 2019



Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>The Benefits and Limitations of Participatory Development</i>	8
A brief history of participatory development.....	8
The benefits of participation	9
The limitations of participatory development	13
<i>Issues of Power in Participatory Rural Appraisal</i>	14
Definition of a PRA.....	14
How a PRA should be regarded by development implementers	15
Participatory rural appraisal problems and paradoxes.....	16
PRA as a facade.....	16
Included and excluded voices in PRAs.....	17
Effects of the implementer-local power disparity	17
The incentives and effects of pernicious elite PRA involvement	18
The local knowledge paradox	20
<i>The Power of Development Actors in Participatory Programming</i>	20
Recognition of different knowledge systems.....	21
The paradox of imported participation	22
Development actor's power in partner choice.....	22
Perceptions of implementer's power	23
Delusions of superiority	24
The power of choice	24
Participation as ersatz validation	25
Reinforcing the status quo through 'participation'	26
Levels of participatory programming.....	27
<i>Confronting Local Power Structures and Elite Capture</i>	29
Sources of elite's power	29
Impediments to shifting power	31
Expectations of the marginalized	32
Supporting the powerless	32
Subtle capture and false partners.....	33
Gender considerations and tradeoffs	34

Trade-offs and tools in confronting local power systems	35
Program types and the resistance they incur	36
Benevolent capture.....	37
<i>Spoilers</i>	38
Supporters and spoilers	39
Spoiler Dimensions.....	41
Strategy formation	42
Strategies to address spoilers	42
Empathizing with spoilers	44
<i>Considerations when Building Local Governance and Capacity</i>	45
Reactions to local capacity building	46
Promoting local leaders	47
<i>Introduction to case studies</i>	47
<i>Case Study 1: The Indonesia Urban Poverty Project</i>	49
Differences in community development boards	49
Old elite dominance vs new elite benevolent capture	51
Types of participation in the UPP	52
Dimensions of rural deprivation addressed by the UPP	52
The importance of program support and democratic mechanisms	53
Shortcomings in empowerment	54
<i>Case Study 2: The PRAs of ActionAid’s Field Staff in The Gambia</i>	55
Field staff in AATG	56
Types of participation facilitated through PRAs	57
The shortcomings of AATG’s PRAs	58
PRAs within AATG	59
The discretion of field staff and problems of measurement.....	60
Perverse Incentive Structures	61
The effects of local power structures on PRAs.....	62
Analysis of elite influence on PRAs	63
Field staff mitigation strategies.....	64
The effects of field staff attributes	64
Recommendations for improving the PRAs of AATG	66
<i>Case Study 3. Participatory Development in REDD+ Programs in the DRC and Indonesia...</i>	68
Case Study 3.1 - Elite capture in the DRC.....	68

Mechanisms of capture.....	69
The effects of capture.....	70
Analysis of Capture.....	70
Attempts at REDD+ participatory programming in the DRC	71
Limited and palliative participation.....	72
The legacy of elite capture.....	73
The negative effects of limited participation	74
Case Study 3.2 - Manipulation and power delegation in Indonesia	75
The Mega-Rice catastrophe	75
Orangutans over people	76
Sharing information and livelihood opportunities.....	77
Limited accountability	79
Bifurcated power delegation	79
Participation at a means to an imposed end.....	81
<i>Case Study Lessons</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>83</i>
Respecting the rights of local participants.....	83
Choosing higher levels of participation.....	85
Guarding against elite capture	85
Fostering positive community relations	86
Modeling positive change	87
Limitations on structural change	88
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>92</i>

Executive Summary

Participatory development is centered upon communities having decision-making ability in the programs affecting their lives. However, this dissemination of power is greatly influenced by two major parties: local elites and development agencies themselves. Elites can capture programs to secure benefits intended to be enjoyed by the entire community or a specific disadvantaged subset of the population, or sabotage programs they fear might undermine their personal interests. The degree to which elites may attempt to manipulate development projects is closely tied to the type of problem the program is addressing; the greater the potential for a redistribution of power, the greater the opposition the program will encounter. Elites are more likely to support programs that offer universal benefits or the possibility of capture.

Development actors determine the parameters and extent to which their programs are participatory. The type of participation in which they engage is a range between full local control over projects, to the compelled validation of imposed programs. This choice of participation type, the degree to which it is supported, and the development actors' approach to handling local elites has a great effect on the experience of locals engaged in their programs, and the ultimate results of their combined efforts. These issues are explored through a theoretical framework focusing on the power of elites and implementers, and then examined in practice through multiple case studies.

From these studies, several key lessons are gleaned. It can be exceedingly difficult to prevent disproportionate elite involvement in development programs, but how elites influence a program can be mitigated and steered by the enforcement of democratic accountability mechanisms. Active oversight and project support from development agencies is critical not only in this area, but also in helping to ensure that agencies' own field staff fully implement participatory methods in their work. Though many actors only use token participation as a way to have communities validate preconceived programs, it is within the power of development agencies to choose the degree to which they engage in true participation.

Introduction

Development is not an end result bestowed upon passive recipient communities by implementing organizations. It is a process through which communities change and gain increased agency over their own circumstances in partnership with development actors. While development programs have been and still are imposed on communities without their input, over the past thirty years there has been widespread adoption of participatory development methods. Participatory development “is involvement by a local population...in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. [It is] built on a belief that citizens can be trusted to shape their own future,” and uses local knowledge and capabilities to realize development initiatives.¹ In this sense, an intrinsic part of participatory development is the intangible yet worthy goal of giving communities greater control over their own affairs and their environment, instead of solely focusing on “increasing [the] goods and services provided and consumed by” the community.²

Development programming in which local beneficiaries actively contribute their knowledge, determine project goals and participate in implementation faces its own set of challenges. Realizing participatory development requires overcoming inherent obstacles which are both internal and external to programs of this nature.³ Internal obstacles are those which exist within development programs and the communities in which they takes place. The largest of such challenges is the threat of local elites and existing powerful groups acting as spoilers or capturing the program to steer the benefits for their own gain to the detriment of the powerless

¹ Jennings, Ray, “Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism.”

² Saravia Matus et al., “Challenges To Participatory Development In A Rural Cross-Border Area Of The Western Balkans,” citing Shortall, S., Shucksmith, M. (1998): Integrated Rural Development: Issues Arising from the Scottish Experience, European Planning Studies, vol. 6 (1), pg. 73-88.

³ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

and marginalized in a community. External obstacles to fully achieving participatory development are those which stem from development actors themselves, and their unwillingness to cede a portion of their own power and decision-making authority to the people they are trying to assist.

Both of these obstacles to true participatory development center on issues of power. Elite groups and individuals in a community have an interest in preserving their position.

Development actors hold great power over their own programs, and many struggle with fully allowing locals to determine the high-level sectoral type and objectives of programs. It is with great reluctance and difficulty that both local elites and development actors give up their power. But for the genuine participation of the marginalized and powerless groups in a community to be achieved in development, there needs to be a change, for “community participation, as an ideal type, involves a shift of power from those who have had major decision-making roles to those who traditionally have not had such a role.”⁴

Participatory development expert Robert Chambers has identified four phases in participatory programming: 1) topic investigations, 2) participatory appraisal and planning, 3) participatory implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs, and 4) training and orientation.⁵ Each phase presents the opportunity for powerful elites to ‘capture’ a program, and for the marginalized to alter the local distribution of power. This paper however will focus primarily on the first two phases through the mechanism of participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), as the opening phases of the development process usually determine the relationship between implementers and locals, and is when elites are most likely to begin influencing programs. How

⁴ Tosun, “Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries.” quoting Willis, K. “Imposed Structures and Contested Meaning – Politics of Public Participation,” *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 30 (2): 211-227.

⁵ Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

development agencies handle power imbalances between themselves and locals, and the relations between the top and bottom strata of communities in which development programs are occurring, is a cardinal consideration of participatory development.⁶

The Benefits and Limitations of Participatory Development

A brief history of participatory development

While it may seem obvious that development agencies ought to have locals participate in the context analysis, design and implementation of programs in their own communities, this is only a relatively recent evolution in development methodology. The mainstreaming of participation required a change in the accepted paradigm of development: a movement away from large centrally planned programs towards a more local and human centered approach to development.⁷ An appreciation of locals' abilities, insights, and their active inclusion in the many steps of implementing development programs is at the heart of participatory development.

In the 1960s, 'Big Development' models were favored, which consisted of large-scale programs focusing on infrastructure orchestrated by a central authority.⁸ Communities were largely thought of as passive recipients of aid, and their participation in programs was frequently limited to selling their manual labor for food, cash or materials of some variety. There was a shift towards smaller-scale development in the 1970s which did not take deep root, and the 1980s saw a continued preponderance of top-down development models. "Disillusionment with the centralized approach" led in the 1990s to a much greater acceptance of participatory methods, and an increase in the funding which flowed to participatory projects; from 2003 to 2013, \$85

⁶ Kyamusugulwa, "Participatory Development and Reconstruction."

⁷ Jennings, Ray, "Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism."

⁸ Casey, Katherine, "Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work?"

billion was invested in participatory projects by the World Bank alone.⁹ Participatory development is the result of an increased recognition of the importance of the local human element in the process of development; change is created through and with people, rather than through macro programs to alter an economic or social system in which the locals are only reactive.

The benefits of participation

Participatory development has been found to be beneficial in many ways, increasing the agency and ownership of locals over programs affecting them. Not only are projects more effective and implementers held more accountable to their beneficiaries, inclusive decision-making respects the human dignity and knowledge of locals. Participants need to be consulted and included from the beginning of programs; as the first director of the Office of Transition Initiatives stated “if you are ever going to get a system of the people, by the people, and for the people, then you’d better engage the people as early as you can.”¹⁰ A community is more than a delineated geographic entity. It is comprised of people, and many dimensions of difference exist which can affect development programs, such as ethnicity, wealth disparities, religion and gender.¹¹ Learning the social and political landscape of a community is achieved most effectively by equitably involving locals and learning from them.

A cardinal aspect of participation is the exchange of information between development agencies and locals. Development professionals can at times fall into the trap of relating all development problems back to their own narrow sectoral area of specialty. There can be pervasive biases held by development actors who feel a superiority and unwillingness to learn from locals in underdeveloped and impoverished settings. This prevents locals from contributing

⁹ Casey, Katherine.

¹⁰ Jennings, Ray, “Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism.”

¹¹ “Community-Driven Development: Does It Build Social Cohesion or Infrastructure? A Mixed-Method Evidence Synthesis.”

their knowledge and insights towards their own development, and implementors from gaining the benefits of that knowledge for their programs.¹² An unwillingness to learn also precludes connecting with locals as equals.

Altering the directional flow of information necessitates a change in the power relationships between locals and development actors, which can be difficult as will be explored. Participation is necessary for learning both the intricacies of the local context and what locals consider to be their most pressing development needs. This makes development programs more targeted towards the actual instead of the assumed needs of the community, and more likely to succeed. Participatory development is a recognition of people's right to be involved in governing the institutions and policies which affecting their lives.¹³ Local's involvement in development programs can also serve to train and build local leaders and governance.

Increased accountability. The use of participatory methods increases the accountability of development agencies to their program beneficiaries through their direct involvement. It is natural for people to distrust programs affecting them in which they have no say, nor an understanding of the internal governing processes.¹⁴ Instead, by sharing power and having locals become actively involved in each step of the development process, locals become critical to those program's internal processes. Also, when locals are aware of a program's intended results they can more easily detect discrepancies in service delivery. These factors help to ensure that development agencies are more accountable to the communities in which they operate, and their governance more transparent. Delegating power to locals though can never be completely achieved; since power is ceded to locals by development agencies, it can be taken back. There are advantages to implementers retaining a portion of power. Direct participation of all

¹² Chambers, "Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last."

¹³ Pretty, "Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture."

¹⁴ Jennings, Ray, "Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism."

community members is difficult to achieve, and in many cases mechanisms for community representation provide an opportunity for elite capture. Development agencies can reserve the ability to act should local elites try to capture a program.

Participation as a human right. The intrinsic benefits of participation are tied to the human rights of the people in developing contexts to have a hand in guiding their own paths. “To believe in and promote participatory development is to believe in the intrinsic importance of self-determination,” that people should be able to determine their own futures, and have the responsibility to do so when they are able. Participation in development operationalizes this belief.¹⁵ The poorest usually have little agency and control over programs affecting them. As a community regains a portion of its agency, the ability to control its environment and future, it can become empowered as well. Empowerment is the confidence and energy which comes as individuals and communities gain increasing responsibility and control over their own welfare and direction. This can be an end unto itself in participatory development, especially as it can reduce the power disparity between those at the top and bottom of a community’s pyramid of power.¹⁶ Empowerment though cannot be expected to arise as an ancillary benefit to participatory development.

Participation in development is also a matter of respecting the basic human dignity of locals. A development agency’s willingness to cede power to communities is a signaling of trust, and a recognition of that dignity. Development programs can become a venue which promotes equality and inclusiveness in ways that are locally novel and unorthodox, and give the marginalized a place where they can be heard. Women, minorities and those excluded from the established local decision-making structures can have their dignity respected by development

¹⁵ Hage, Leroy and Peterson, “Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Knowledge Production.”

¹⁶ Kyamusugulwa, “Participatory Development and Reconstruction.”

actors in a way that can begin to change and challenge local norms.¹⁷ This is a responsibility that development agencies themselves must recognize, by showing their program participants “that they value their input and that it will result in affirmative action.”¹⁸

Increased program efficacy. The benefits of participatory methods in development, the inclusion of marginalized community members, increased local involvement and the improved accountability of development actors, combine to quite simply make participatory programs more effective in achieving their intended results. This is because participatory programs, especially those commencing with a participatory rural appraisal (PRA), more accurately reflect the needs and wants of the local population and are better tailored to the local context. It is nearly impossible for development programs conducted in a top-down, cookie-cutter and external ‘expert’ driven manner to have the same level of support from locals and program beneficiaries as programs conceived and designed with locals and the benefit of their knowledge. For communities which have an expectation of being told how to develop, participation has the “potential to enhance legitimacy and quality of decision-making processes, especially under conditions of uncertainty.”¹⁹

Legitimacy engenders the support of locals for development projects, which in turn can mobilize local resources, especially the knowledge, labor and energy of the community.²⁰ This makes programs more cost effective. Independent reviews conducted by the World Bank found that participatory programs have a lower cost than comparable “programs that do not rely on local capacities,” despite greater up-front costs of ~15% on staff training and operations.²¹ An

¹⁷ Parpart et al., *Rethinking Empowerment*.

¹⁸ Doody, DG et al., “Evaluation of the Q-Method as a Method of Public Participation in the Selection of Sustainable Development Indicators.”

¹⁹ Hage, Leroy and Peterson, “Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Knowledge Production.”

²⁰ Winters, “Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness.”

²¹ Jennings, Ray, “Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism.”

involved community can also serve as a monitoring watchdog, preventing the capture of program resources by local elites and increasing the development agencies accountability. More effective programs in which locals are involved are more sustainable, and “participation [is] the most important factor in determining program longevity when” compared to non-participatory programs.²² Locals involvement in one program can set a precedent which causes them to demand the right to participate in future programs affecting their community.

The limitations of participatory development

Participatory development is not a panacea for the problems facing development agencies; there are shortcomings inherent in the nature of the methodologies. While the practices and principles of participation can be applied in any development setting, local knowledge used to tailor programs for a given community is naturally highly context specific and cannot be transplanted. Nor is there a cast-iron way to do participation properly; implementers must be continuously adapting as individual programs and the localities in which they work change.²³ This context specificity is especially true in the methods which development actors must use to enable women and marginalized groups to voice their perspectives and effectively incorporate them into programming.²⁴

Participating in development programs carries costs for locals. The time requirements have an opportunity cost, and participation can in this sense be thought of as a highly regressive tax on the poorest members of a community.²⁵ Unless a development agency is prepared to compensate all participants for their time, a degree of altruism in locals is required, which can be hard to muster when making ends meet is a challenge. Participation can also be risky for

²² Pretty, “Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture.”

²³ Hage, Leroy and Peterson, “Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Knowledge Production.”

²⁴ Winters, “Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness.”

²⁵ Casey, Katherine, “Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work?”

program participants, especially if they are speaking out against conservative social norms or challenging an established power structure. Depending on the nature of programs, participants are usually visible, so iconoclasts who have not previously have a venue in which to speak out can be identified through their association with a program. There are inherent limitations to participation which development actors must be recognize, but these should not prevent implementors from taking the steps to realize the benefits of participation for their programs and the communities in which they operate.

Issues of Power in Participatory Rural Appraisal

Definition of a PRA

Learning is vital before action. The critical first step in a development program which aims to be participatory is a participatory rural appraisal (PRA). As the beginning of the participatory development process, the integrity and spirit of the PRA most often determines the level of participation throughout the subsequent development process steps, including program implementation and monitoring and evaluation. A PRA is not a *prix fixe* menu of activities, rather “a family of methods that enables communities to assemble with formal service providers, identify and analyze critical elements of their life in their own idioms, and plan and carry through feasible changes.”²⁶ The substantive difference between a PRA and other types of context analysis conducted by development actors, is that the local population is actively engaged in analyzing itself and identifying its priorities, instead of an external body gathering data related solely to support its preconceived agenda. PRAs can be used in the realms of “natural resource management, agriculture, poverty and social programs, health and food

²⁶ Bar-On, Arnon A and Gerard Prinsen, “Planning, Communities and Empowerment: An Introduction to Participatory Rural Appraisal.”

security,” or any other area of development.²⁷ However as with all types of community engagement, development actors must be cognizant of undue influence and capture by local power holders in the PRA, as informants and as researchers, as the PRA sets the priorities and tone of programming to come.

How a PRA should be regarded by development implementers

Regardless of whether a development initiative is to be compartmentalized around a specific issue or holistic in its scope, the PRA informing it must be conducted from the perspective of the local informants, and create a view from the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid.²⁸ For a PRA to be genuine, the implementers need to adopt the mindset that: 1) “the poor are creative and capable, and should do much of their own investigation, analysis and planning; 2) outsider should play the roles of conveners, catalysts and facilitators; and 3) the weak and marginalized can and should be empowered.”²⁹ Implementing agencies need to work with their end-users and beneficiaries in mind from the beginning of a program, and the best way to do so is have them be actively involved in helping the agency learn.

A typical PRA consists of 6 steps: preparation, data gathering, synthesis, ranking of priorities, and preparing a community action plan.³⁰ The data collected ought to be holistic and encompass community issues broader in scope than the specific sector of the program the data is intended to inform. Information should be gathered from different sources and have few fixed goals. Data can easily become fetishized, but it is not an end unto itself; it must be useful and inform subsequent work and priorities. A well conducted PRA can yield a wealth of insights into

²⁷ Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

²⁸ Bar-On, Arnon A and Gerard Prinsen, “Planning, Communities and Empowerment: An Introduction to Participatory Rural Appraisal.”

²⁹ Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

³⁰ Bar-On, Arnon A and Gerard Prinsen, “Planning, Communities and Empowerment: An Introduction to Participatory Rural Appraisal.”

a community which can improve subsequent programming, but it must be put to use. “‘Why,’ one East Timorese teenager asked [a Columbia University researcher], ‘should we talk with people who come here and ask many questions but do nothing to help us?’”³¹

Participatory rural appraisal problems and paradoxes

When conducting a PRA, development actors must be cognizant not only of how local elites can affect the process, but the effects of their own power as well. Choosing to conduct a PRA or not is exercising power, and a choice which development actors can be disinclined to make. A PRA might take longer and be slightly more expensive to conduct than a cursory context analysis, but it yields greater efficacy in future program implementation, and cost concerns are generally over-estimated.³²

PRA as a facade

PRA can be intentionally manipulated by development actors. In some cases, a PRA can be used to legitimize a project that implementers were already intent on executing. A similar unethical practice is using a PRA to describe an entire program as participatory, when only the prelude had meaningful community involvement.³³ Most perniciously, the involvement of the local community in a PRA could be used by development implementers to absolve themselves of accountability to their program beneficiaries, and of responsibility for a failed program. It must be understood that the integrity of a PRA depends on the development implementer’s intent and rectitude, because they have the power to decide if a PRA is to be conducted, and the degree to which its findings are incorporated into subsequent programming.

³¹ “Lean Research Working Paper.”

³² “Participatory Approaches.”

³³ Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

Included and excluded voices in PRAs

Throughout a PRA, the outside implementers must ask themselves “who is participating in this process, and who is not participating?” Community leaders and those with power in a system are in a better place to present themselves as interlocutors and researchers for external agencies. Their interests can shape a PRA, and consequently subsequent programming towards their own goals, to the detriment of those without power. For a PRA to be true to its intent, it must be inclusive, with the poor and powerless able to be fully participate in the process, especially by serving as researchers themselves.

In addition to socio-economic power dimensions, PRA facilitators must guard against the exclusion of gender perspectives. There can be a “pervasive bias against the needs and knowledge of women,” both on the part of local men and development actors, so little research is devoted to addressing the needs of women.³⁴ Having local women as PRA researchers yields insights which otherwise would be lost. The illiterate are also fully capable of participating in PRAs. In addition to learning the priorities of the most vulnerable, the perspectives of marginalized groups can yield a more nuanced analysis of the power dynamics within a community. Knowing the interests, perspectives and positions of significant parties who may later be program beneficiaries, supporters, or spoilers, are vital insights for development actors.

Effects of the implementer-local power disparity

A degree of disempowerment on the part of implementers is needed to allow a PRA to guide itself. Development actors need to be willing to let their partners from the community and local informants to guide the direction of research, instead of forcing adherence to a narrow track of study. Implementers need to accept findings which are contrary to their expectations and preconceived notions, and be open to the priorities of locals which present themselves in a PRA.

³⁴ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

The manner in which a PRA is conducted will naturally determine the quality of the data gathered. The expat in the white Landcruiser is not merely a cliché. Visible manifestations of wealth and power can cause locals to defer to the preferences of those who will be dispensing resources. Impoverished locals are less likely, for example, to tell a development organization specializing in WASH that their real need is for education support. When foreign development actors are not cognizant of their own projections of power, it can cause locals to change their responses to researcher inquiries. To satisfy implementer and donor desires, rural visits can result in transformed model villages and villagers which do not yield genuine insights into their conditions or the effectiveness of projects. The typical brevity of such visits can be demeaning to locals, and demonstrates expatriates always have the power to leave. Engaging with locals on their own terms with lighthearted humility during the PRA and beyond is a matter of respect, and a recognition of their dignity.

The incentives and effects of pernicious elite PRA involvement

Having locals be a part of the data gathering and analysis process itself is one of participatory rural appraisal's greatest strengths as a method. In addition to possessing vital language skills and an appreciation for "indigenous technical knowledge," researchers from the community who are not part of the traditional elite can help to identify positive deviants who are conducting their own experimentation.³⁵ Having researchers, both local and expatriate, who are able to conduct research in a manner respectful of the interviewee's time and local knowledge, will enable more voices to be heard who otherwise would be missed.

A PRA is more than simply an opportunity for the community to express its problems and goals to a development actor. It sets the tone for the future relationship between the outside actors and the local community; is it to be one of mutual respect or top-down dictation? The

³⁵ Chambers, Robert, "The Origins and Practice of PRA."

consultation process can be one of collaborative analysis, setting of objectives, and creation of strategy.³⁶ The PRA is an opportunity for the outsiders to learn the local power dynamics. For this reason, it is imperative that development actors reach out to those at the bottom of the pyramid and do not allow the already powerful to capture the process.

Local individuals involved must be genuine in their intent to further the program's goals. When locals know that the allocation of resources is being determined, there are obvious incentives to "misrepresent their real economic circumstances." Researches in the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP) were "freely told" after the program by elites that they had deflated their assets so "that they might capture some of the benefits...[and] make sure that their political power was not easily challenged."³⁷ Misrepresenting wealth can be widely practiced by the affluent and penurious alike as resources are being allocated. Implementers must recognize though that those with power can be acutely driven by motivations of elite capture when participating in development programs. In these instances, the bias of development professionals implicitly seeking out the best educated or professional locals who speak major languages can exaggerate the problem of capture, and jeopardize the integrity of the PRA.³⁸ Once these vocal, visible and wealthier individuals are brought on as local PRA facilitators and development partners, often little effort is extended to include and 'identify less obvious partners.'³⁹ External development actors need to be aware of whom they select as partners, and biases within the community in which they operate. When conducting the EIRFP, European implementers were told by their local community organization partners that working to benefit "more obviously disadvantaged [ethnic] communities" would be a waste of time, as they were lazy and had no

³⁶ World Bank, *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*.

³⁷ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, "Programmed to Fail?"

³⁸ Chambers, "Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last."

³⁹ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, "Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments."

“interest in group activities.”⁴⁰ Cases such as this are all the more reason to ensure the poor and marginalized are included in the PRA and subsequent programming.

The local knowledge paradox

The focus on local knowledge raises an interesting paradox: if community stakeholders have the greatest knowledge of local conditions, why have they not solved their own problems? Poor locals may be prevented from trying new methods of living or earning livelihoods because of conservative leaders, social structures, or the difficulties of effecting collective action. Poverty itself is a great limiting factor; poor individuals are understandably risk averse. Experiments which could be disastrous if unsuccessful are unlikely to be undertaken without outside support.⁴¹ Deviating from tried and tested activities has an opportunity cost.

The Power of Development Actors in Participatory Programming

Development professionals have the opportunity to be full-time conveners, facilitators and organizers, and to do so, they must be receptive to the ideas and knowledge of locals.⁴² Outside actors are most often in a position of greater power than the locals with whom they work, and have the power to determine what knowledge is legitimate and worthwhile, and what is invalid and dismissed as superstition or ignorance. Incentives exist to give western and scientific knowledge greater weight than local indigenous knowledge. As a “former director of research at the World Bank [stated, there exists a] ‘trade-off between publishability and relevance.’”⁴³ Academic and professional knowledge is treated as superior to local knowledge, and the flow of knowledge is usually one-way in non-participatory development approaches.

⁴⁰ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, “Programmed to Fail?”

⁴¹ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

⁴² Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

⁴³ “Lean Research Working Paper.”

There are implicit biases held by development professionals which can affect the choices made when undertaking research, even in a PRA. There can be feelings of elitism over locals, and a disinclination to travel far from roads or during seasons of inclement weather.⁴⁴ But locals possess insights which can be of great importance to the success of a program which are easily missed by professional experts.⁴⁵ In many instances, outsiders need to listen more and talk less. Development actors need to realize that local and imported knowledge can bolster each other, and the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Recognition of different knowledge systems

In extreme cases though, this can engender the holding of local knowledge and methods sacrosanct. Outsiders must not project the idea of the noble savage or the rational peasant onto locals.⁴⁶ There are many instances when imported scientific knowledge and local knowledge can support each other, particularly in the realms of health and nutrition.⁴⁷ For there to be effective participatory development from a PRA onwards, there needs to be both top-down and bottom-up exchange of ideas and information.⁴⁸ Locals present information through their own worldview, just as outsiders see and hear it through their own lens.⁴⁹ Recognizing this is necessary, and a participatory process of analysis and interpretation is needed to meld different knowledge perspectives. Development agencies must recognize that they hold large sway over the flow of information and the parameters of its analysis. Local have power in this regard as well though, in what they share with implementers and what they withhold. But it is up to foreign experts to actively adopt a pluralistic view of the context in which they are working, be respectful of local

⁴⁴ Chambers, Robert, "The Origins and Practice of PRA."

⁴⁵ Chambers, "Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last."

⁴⁶ Chambers.

⁴⁷ Chambers.

⁴⁸ "Participatory Approaches."

⁴⁹ Parpart et al., *Rethinking Empowerment*.

culture and knowledge systems, and not revert to top-down positivist ways of looking at the world and how to change it.⁵⁰

The paradox of imported participation

While a participatory approach by foreign development actors may appear to be inherently positive, it does raise the paradox of the fact that even earnest participatory development methods are brought to a community by outsiders. It has been contended that participatory approaches are only rarely requested by locals; instead they are imported Western values demanded by donors.⁵¹ However this criticism is overly self-conscious, and fails to recognize that many cultures have traditions of community consultative and collective decision-making practices. The crux of participation for development actors is to tap into these traditions where they exist throughout the process of program implementation, and introduce participation in an appropriate manner where they do not. Because development actors determine the extent of participation in their programs, they must be sure to always work in a deeply respectful manner, treating locals as equals and vital partners in the development process.

It must be noted though that conducting a PRA does not mean that all of the perspectives gleaned and concerns raised can or should be incorporated into subsequent programming. Neither the poor and powerless nor the rich and powerful are homogeneous groups with uniform perspectives and priorities.⁵²

Development actor's power in partner choice

Development actors have the power to choose the local organizations and individuals with whom they work as implementing partners, and must be thoughtful in the selection process.

⁵⁰ Pretty, "Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture."

⁵¹ Kyamusugulwa, "Participatory Development and Reconstruction."

⁵² "Participatory Approaches."

It is simpler and easier to work through the local elites who first present themselves, but this undermines the very purpose of participatory development.⁵³ Elites are in a better position to self-select for involvement, particularly when “development workers ask the ‘best known’ members of a community to serve on a committee. The [usual] objective is to find a partner in order to allow the project to continue and the screening of the representativeness of the partner is, at most, secondary.”⁵⁴ It is the responsibility of outside development actors to work to incorporate community members who are either unable or disinclined to participate in the development process to become part of their programs, because otherwise these community-subsets are the most likely to be overlooked or excluded from program benefits.⁵⁵ At times issues of logistics and proximity limit the ability for marginalized groups to participate in programs. The population in rural areas is more dispersed, and thus more difficult to work with and include in programming than a dense urban core.⁵⁶ The onus is on the implementers to always ask “who is not participating and how can we bring them to the table?” because they have the power to ask this question of themselves and act upon it, though this is no small challenge.

Perceptions of implementer’s power

When considering the powerful actors and stakeholders with the ability to affect the dynamics of a community, development agencies must not forget themselves. Individuals with university educations in the offices and Landcruisers of an INGO have greater resources and decision-making power than people in communities whom they are ostensibly trying to aid. Visible trappings of power, including skin color, serve to implicitly project that power and the hierarchy that comes with it. This can cause “those in rural areas [to] see the power and wealth of

⁵³ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, “Programmed to Fail?”

⁵⁴ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

⁵⁵ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg.

⁵⁶ Pimoljinda and Siriprasertchok, “Failure of Public Participation for Sustainable Development.”

the urban elite and buy into the power difference.”⁵⁷ While the belief that the difference in wealth and power is ordained or merited is wrong, the recognition of its existence is accurate. When a Sierra Leonean subsistence farmer told this author: “you are the white man, you are stronger than me,” he was unfortunately correct.

Delusions of superiority

The belief in the superiority of development professionals can also be imbibed by the professionals themselves. It can be easy for those with a wealth of power in a setting to feel that they possess a “monopoly of solutions” to development problems, and that local knowledge is of little value.⁵⁸ As one Indian villager stated: “they [the developers] arrived already knowing everything. They come here and look around, but they see only what is not here.”⁵⁹ Development practitioners are steeped in the traditions of scientifically testing and building models of how to combat poverty and spur development. But knowledge formed in this tradition is liable to discount or marginalize development strategies based on local knowledge systems. It is vital development actors recognize their own limitations and blindspots.

The power of choice

The power of development actors also comes in the ability to make choices in the allocation of resources, choices which necessitate tradeoffs.⁶⁰ Making these decisions necessitates creating a hierarchy of priority, or the dividing of resources. In either case, who receives development assistance and how much lies in the balance.

As much as well-intentioned development actors may wish to abjure their power, it is impossible to do so completely. A development implementer’s willed ignorance or obliviousness

⁵⁷ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

⁵⁸ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

⁵⁹ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg.

⁶⁰ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg.

can cause them to fail to appreciate how the differences in power between themselves and their program beneficiaries can affect their relationship.⁶¹ These power imbalances can substantively change the degree to which a community feels that is able to meaningfully participate in development projects.⁶² It is the responsibility of development actors to be cognizant of their own willingness to let locals participate, the willingness of local to participate, and their ability to do so in a way that validates their knowledge, perspectives and priorities.⁶³ This is why enabling genuine participation is vital from the beginning of a program. It is the PRA conducted at the beginning of a program through local partners which should determine the allocation of resources, not the development professionals. But development implementers have the power to choose whether to follow the findings of a PRA or not, and if they fail to do so, there are rarely accountability mechanisms available to locals. But blindly following the PRA is not always the best course of action. Divisions within a community can manifest themselves in the PRA and subsequent programming, especially with the introduction of valuable resources in a place of scarcity. When development becomes a force of division, it is the responsibility of the development actors to weigh different considerations and use their power in a ‘tension sensitive’ manner.⁶⁴

Participation as ersatz validation

Each stage of participatory development onwards can take many forms, some of which are simply window-dressings by development actors to legitimize their programs. “Communities are informed through the socialization process, which is used as a means to achieve the project objectives, while unequal power dimensions continue to exist between communities and

⁶¹ Carr, “The Place of Stories in Development.”

⁶² Carr.

⁶³ Carr.

⁶⁴ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

intervening actors in these interventions.”⁶⁵ To simply have locals participate in a project which was conceived entirely by an external implementer is to ignore the true purpose of participatory development: to give locals ownership of the program by having them determine goals which reflect local needs and priorities. However, it is the implementers who have the power to determine the terms of participation. Some organizations have an outright paternalistic view of participation, seeing it as a means of making “people within a local system learn the value and rationale of new social behaviors specified by an expert.”⁶⁶ Large institutions such as the World Bank have been known to use the rhetoric of participation and community control, while the program implementation systems they establish have weak downward accountability mechanisms.⁶⁷

Reinforcing the status quo through ‘participation’

There are many degrees to which participatory methods are used by development agencies. Locals rightly feel angered when they are not involved in programs effecting their lives. As a community leader in rural South Africa stated: “what we resent is the high-handed way that the planners go about ramming proposals down our throats. This is our community and we want to be part of decisions affecting us.”⁶⁸ Some implementer’s programs are fully participatory with genuine intent, while in other instances the participatory methods used have not “gone beyond community consultation or manipulative participation.”⁶⁹ In these instances participation is merely used as a smokescreen, to serve as “a symbolic sham intended to defuse

⁶⁵ Miles and Samndong, “Community Participation as a Means or an End: Local Perspectives on REDD+ from Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.” citing BROWN, K. 2002. Innovation for conservation and development. *The Geographical Journal*, 168(1): 6-17.

⁶⁶ World Bank, *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*.

⁶⁷ Fritzen, “Can the Design of Community-Driven Development Reduce the Risk of Elite Capture?”

⁶⁸ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

⁶⁹ Tosun, “Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries.”

discontent” in the community and give people the illusion of agency over a program.⁷⁰ This manipulation can be common when the governments of developing nations themselves are the implementing actor. Governments use “dubious or extremely limited” participatory measures in national programs “as a means of legitimizing the political system and as a form of social control.”⁷¹ Government which derive and perpetuate their power from the vested interests of an elite minority have little reason to enable the participation of the lower ranks of society in the development process. Regardless of the implementer, any ‘participatory’ program which touts manipulative or faux methods to legitimize a preconceived program in which the locals have no real say is top-down dictation and not participatory. In these instances, elite capture and involvement can play to a disingenuous implementer’s advantage. A particularly underhanded method of using participation selectively to legitimize a project, is buying the involvement and endorsement of local leaders and powerful interest groups, a practice known as “community-renting.”⁷² These illusory participatory practices highlight the great difficulty development agency have in ceding power to the people in the communities in which they work, for that is what lays at the heart of genuine participation.

Levels of participatory programming

For development actors who are used to holding power and making decision, it can be exceedingly difficult to give those things up, especially to “underdeveloped and poor people.”⁷³ There will be the temptation to interfere in program implementation which tests an agency’s commitment to self-help and local empowerment. This will be especially true for development agencies which are incorporating participatory methods into their work for the first time,

⁷⁰ Tosun.

⁷¹ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

⁷² Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg.

⁷³ Parpart et al., *Rethinking Empowerment*.

“carry[ing] programs to the edges of the map where serpents are drawn.”⁷⁴ The degrees to which an implementer enables participation can be incremental.

The steps of the “ladder” of participation are illustrated to the right and were first developed by S.R. Arnstein in 1969, though they remain valid today.⁷⁵ At the level of (1) citizen’s control, the community has full decision-making authority over a development program affecting them. (2) Delegated power means communities still make the major decisions, but this power is given and supervised by development agencies. The level of (3) partnership signifies that community members and organizations are actively involved in every aspect of local development programs, but a greater share of the power is retained by the implementing agency. It is within these three uppermost levels of the ladder that communities are able to steer and influence the content and sectoral area of development programs themselves. (4) Placation is the level at which development agencies hold power over programs, yet still attempt to assuage the concerns of the communities and change their programming accordingly. In (5) consultation, is development implementers engage with the community, but may or may not choose to adapt their programs. The level of (6) informing is simply that, development agencies tell communities what will be happening. The objective of placation, consolation and informing is “according to Arnstein, ‘tokenism.’ The purpose of tokenism is to allow the have-nots to hear and express their opinions...[but does not] ensure that those in power will heed citizens’ views.”⁷⁶ In the second

Type of Participation
1. Citizen’s Control
2. Delegated Power
3. Partnership
4. Placation
5. Consultation
6. Informing
7. Therapy
8. Manipulation

⁷⁴ Jennings, Ray, “Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism.”

⁷⁵ Mubita, Libati, and Mulonda, “The Importance and Limitations of Participation in Development Projects and Programmes,” quoting Arnstein, S. R., “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” JAIP, 35 (4): 216-224.

⁷⁶ Miles and Samndong, “Community Participation as a Means or an End: Local Perspectives on REDD+ from Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

lowest level, (7) therapy, development implementers tell communities why their intervention is acceptable. At the (8) manipulation level, this acceptance by communities is coerced.

It is important to observe that types four through eight are essentially pseudo-participatory levels, “in which the real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning, but to ‘educate’ or ‘cure’ them.”⁷⁷ Only levels one through three are genuinely participatory in the sense that the local community is given substantive agency and control over the programs affecting them. The implementer has the power to choose in which type of participation to engage. For development agencies to operate in the upper rungs of the ladder, it is necessary for there to be a change in roles. Implementers must give the decision-making power to those who have traditionally been silent and passive in the development process. Development actors must orchestrate and facilitate programs which disempower themselves, and act on behalf of the disadvantaged communities they intend to serve.⁷⁸ Doing this may require a paradigm shift, away from measuring aid effectiveness in terms of the quantity of goods delivered, but the manner in which decisions are made, the social utility of the process, and the impact of the program for the most marginalized in a community.⁷⁹

Confronting Local Power Structures and Elite Capture

Sources of elite’s power

By necessity and intent, the majority of nations in which development actors work are developing nations. External development agencies face complex decisions and difficulties when operating in nations which lack strong or enforced legal frameworks to prevent unfair practices by local elites and powerful interest groups. In these settings, soft-power, status and relationships

⁷⁷ Miles and Samndong.

⁷⁸ Jennings, Ray, “Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism.”

⁷⁹ Jennings, Ray.

can be more important than official rules. This, coupled with the limited monetary, human, and physical resources of development actors and their imperative to implement projects creates the possibility of elite manipulation and the capture of programs.⁸⁰ When development organizations begin working in a community, it is vital for them to remember they are inserting themselves into an existing system of local politics and power. Even in the poorest of communities, there are the haves and the have-nots, those with power and position, and those without.

It is important to be aware that the sources of elite's power are not limited to monetary wealth and control of land or resources. Social capital and connections, and the ability to ask favors and influence others through status are just as important in low-income settings as wealth. A development program can be captured by the best-connected to the detriment of the marginalized as easily as it can be captured by the rich over the poor.⁸¹ This power can come in the form of being part of a privileged ethnic or religious group, be based on wealth, control of resources, title, gender, or a combination of these characteristics. In many contexts, "social differentiation and exclusion are traditionally engrained," and to have "representative participation of all social groups" is exceedingly difficult and programming is liable to be greatly influenced by local elites if not outright captured.⁸² Frequently, development activities bring an infusion of resources or a change in the status quo in some form to an area. Those with power are better placed to take advantage of these changes. All aid is political in nature and affects the dynamics of communities, even if it is intended to be anodyne. An equitable participatory approach can be vital in helping implementers recognize the impact of their actions.⁸³

⁸⁰ "Participatory Approaches."

⁸¹ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, "Programmed to Fail?"

⁸² Nelson, Folhes, and Finan, "Mapping the Road to Development."

⁸³ Jennings, Ray, "Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism."

Impediments to shifting power

Elites in many instances have good reason to resist the genuine participation of the powerless in determining the allocation resources and priorities of development programs. Real participation is inherently a democratic process, and there can be fear that those without property or education will use their numerical strength to gain power and access to resources from which they were previously excluded.⁸⁴ National governments in developing nations and rural elites may be accustomed to a grand system of patronage, in which the “anti-poverty” programs of the national government are intended to be captured by the elites, thereby continuing their political support to the center and clout on the local level.⁸⁵

For programs which have the potential to change local power structures to have long-term efficacy, the involvement of the local poor is vital, beginning with a thorough and balanced PRA, and continuing through each phase of program design and implementation. This is because the adoption of new roles will be contrary to existing local power structures.⁸⁶ From the beginning of a program, development actors have to ensure that local elites do not overly influence the allocation of resources which would enable them to capture the benefits of the program. Though it would be ‘participatory,’ strengthening the position of the elite to the detriment of community members lacking resources would be a cruel misconception of participatory means and ends.⁸⁷

Those at the bottom of the power pyramid may be habituated to such arrangements. When those without power expect there to be elite domination of local affairs, they are often also unaccustomed to being included in development programs. Some combination of these

⁸⁴ Tosun, “Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries.”

⁸⁵ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, “Programmed to Fail?”

⁸⁶ Shand, “Efficacy in Action.”

⁸⁷ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

factors will be at play wherever a development agency seeks to undertake development work in places with local power disparities.

Expectations of the marginalized

For many at the base of the power pyramid with little practice in self advocacy, being asked to participate in a PRA and development program may be one of the first times they have had the opportunity to become a part of an initiative aimed at improving their welfare. The powerless who have witnessed development programs previously may have the expectation that they will be discounted, or that the community elites will capture the program.⁸⁸ Understandably this disincentivizes them from spending their energy in what they expect to be a waste of time. This is all the more reason why development actors must actively seek out the marginalized in a community and demonstrably exceed their expectations.

Supporting the powerless

Development practitioners need focus on how they can best support the powerless in areas where they operate and how power dynamics change throughout program implementation, yet this is an area which is lacking in thorough research.⁸⁹ A participatory process should commence early before the arrival of any commodities or other resources, so their purpose is determined before powerful stakeholders can unduly influence their allocation.⁹⁰ When confronting power structures, perhaps one of the most important things a development agency can do is promote accountability and transparency in regard to its own programming. By being transparent and providing clear information, those without power will be more able to see when the powerful are manipulating a program. Accountability mechanisms help to ensure that

⁸⁸ Kumar and SurnameCorbridge, "Programmed to Fail?"

⁸⁹ Kyamusugulwa, "Participatory Development and Reconstruction."

⁹⁰ "Participatory Approaches."

equitable practices are enforced.⁹¹ But not every powerless group is able to hold the powerful accountable, especially outside the development program bubble.

Subtle capture and false partners

In the execution of a development project, implementers have to make sure that their participatory methods are not inadvertently reinforcing a pernicious local power structure. Local elites may be unduly influencing the course of action in public project meetings, or behind the scenes.⁹² A participatory development process is unfortunately no guarantee that local elites will not be “making many of the decisions,” a reality that must be understood by development actors and foreign donors.⁹³ Working with local NGOs/CSOs is not foolproof either. Foreign implementers need to be cognizant when selecting local partners of the reality that these organizations can be an extension of national urban or local power holders.⁹⁴ Even local organizations can be exclusive in nature, catering to a niche subsection of their community. Researchers working with the Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples Federation found that while in theory all penurious members of the community were welcome to join this “grassroots” organization, the requirements of participation served to exclude certain demographics.⁹⁵ This realization must be coupled with the recognition that the leadership of many community NGOs/CSOs are not selected through a democratic process, and in many instances are led by self-appointed individuals who have the means to run such organizations.⁹⁶ These organizations might not necessarily represent the priorities of the entire community in which they exist.

⁹¹ Kyamusugulwa, “Participatory Development and Reconstruction.”

⁹² Winters, “Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness.”

⁹³ Winters.

⁹⁴ Winters, quoting O’Neil, Tammie, Marta Foresti, and Alan Hudson. (2007) *Evaluation of Citizen’s Voice and Accountability: Review of the Literature and Donor Approaches*. London: DFID.

⁹⁵ Shand, “Efficacy in Action.”

⁹⁶ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

External actors partnering with them on development programs are more susceptible to having the programs co-opted by a subset of the community which is more able to advocate for itself. Frequently, delivering quantifiable success is the criteria for local partner selection, not the advancement of ethereal advocacy.⁹⁷ But external development implementers committed to a participatory approach need to consider the inclusivity and processes through which their potential partners operate as much as their quantifiable deliverables.

Gender considerations and tradeoffs

It is important for development actors to be cognizant that the power systems within which they are working have gendered aspects as well as economic and political elements. In many developing nations in which development programs take place, there are entrenched systems of gender norms and societally prescribed roles for men, women and children. It can be a dilemma for development implementers to choose whether to work within these gendered frameworks, or seek to change the respective power of men and women. Many smaller NGOs consider using participatory development methods to empower women to be a valuable end unto itself, while larger development actors generally focus on “improvements in terms of women having more ‘productivity and efficiency’ within a system.”⁹⁸ This is a pernicious dilemma: to have possibly greater impact while facilitating the existing gendered system, or go against the established norms and incur the resistance of those who subscribe to the status quo. In their place of relative power, men can be very reluctant to support programs which would give women greater agency or autonomy. But this consideration cuts both ways. Local men are frequently cast as a reactionary roadblock to progressive development. But elite local women can just as readily use their position to maintain dominance over the women below them.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Winters.

⁹⁸ Parpart et al., *Rethinking Empowerment*.

⁹⁹ Parpart et al.

Trade-offs and tools in confronting local power systems

An implementing development agency needs to be cognizant and prepared for its disruption of the existing and traditional power structure in the area in which it operates, if that is what it is intent on doing. To kick the hornet's nest inadvertently would be ruinous for a development program and the people it seeks to benefit. This underscores the importance of having an accurate initial and evolving context analysis. A development agency must tread carefully when making this pivotal choice, and its effects can be long-term. To play utopia could lead to a serious reduction in what can actually be achieved for those in the direst need. There can be serious paternalistic and neo-colonial implication when an external actor attempts to change or circumvent a local power structure, even if it is pernicious or unequal. But to work within a predatory system could further entrench it to the detriment of the powerless. It must be noted that a participatory program is unlikely by itself to radically change the local power structure, but a development organization must be aware of the implications of the choices it makes in regard to the power systems in which it operates.¹⁰⁰

Instead of attempting to confront the elite control of local power systems head-on, another approach can be to counter-balance the elites by giving the marginalized tools and training to build their cohesion. Participatory development can be a method for helping the disenfranchised to advocate for themselves more effectively and hold those with power accountable.¹⁰¹ Augmenting the "political capabilities of the poor" can be one of the most powerful effects of participatory development, but this is an uphill endeavor.¹⁰² Foreign development actors need to recognize that power structures are often subtle, complex, and based on local history and culture. In some settings, there may well need to be a substantive

¹⁰⁰ Parpart et al.

¹⁰¹ Kyamusugulwa, "Participatory Development and Reconstruction."

¹⁰² Kyamusugulwa.

redistribution of wealth and power for there to be real change in the lives of the marginalized.

However, any plan pushed by outsiders which could potentially do harm to the poor by reducing their means or causing elite retaliation “needs to be very, very carefully scrutinized.”¹⁰³

Program types and the resistance they incur

Robert Chambers created a scale of five “dimensions of rural deprivation,” projects which could directly address them, and the acceptability of those projects to local elites.¹⁰⁴

Dimension of rural deprivation	Examples of direct approaches	Acceptability to local and other elites
Physical weakness	Health and feeding programs	High
Isolation	Infrastructure, education extension	
Vulnerability	Public works, credit, crop insurance	Medium
Poverty	Distribution of new assets, redistribution of old	
Powerlessness	Law enforcement, unions, political change	Low

What can be gleaned from this chart is that there are clearly types of deprivation which will not harm the elite if remedied. A healthier population and new infrastructure are of benefit to all, and the elite are most likely to support these programs. But it is when development activities seek to lift up the poor through the creation of new assets for their benefit exclusively, and empower the marginalized to affect political change, the powerful are likely to resist and oppose these programs as threats to their status. When development actors complain of a “‘lack of political will’ [it] usually means that the rich and powerful failed to act against their interests.”¹⁰⁵ It would be to a development agency and their program’s detriment if they fail to consider who would win and who would lose as a result of their programs.

¹⁰³ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

¹⁰⁴ Chambers.

¹⁰⁵ Chambers, “Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last.”

As Chambers writes: the political will of the elite can be thought of as a brick wall. To bash one's head against it will lead to pessimism and self-deception. Instead of being frontal in the participatory development approach, looking for loose bricks or a way around the wall is more effective.¹⁰⁶ It is in these types of programs that participatory methods are particularly vital. If a new asset is created, or an existing one is to increase in value by the actions of a development agency, it is critical that those who are already wealthy do not take advantage of it before the poor are able to do so.¹⁰⁷ Collective action, mobilization, and programs to address systematic inequality need to be participatory for them to be not only efficacious against elite opposition, but to be legitimate and genuine.

Benevolent capture

The powerful in a community though are not necessarily all pernicious or predatory. There are instances of “benevolent capture:” cases in which the local powerholders actively seek to become involved and determine project priorities and steer implementation, yet the programs are still beneficial to the entire community.¹⁰⁸ Traditional community leaders and the powerful can certainly want to advance projects which will help everyone and avoid the repercussions from harming the communities in which they live.

Development workers with their own power can also co-opt progressive members of powerful groups and known figures to support their programs, but this must be done carefully and in a non-manipulative manner.¹⁰⁹ Development agencies need to be as attuned to the nuances and vagaries of local power dynamics as farmers are to the weather. Having a close participatory

¹⁰⁶ Chambers.

¹⁰⁷ Chambers.

¹⁰⁸ Winters, “Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness.”

¹⁰⁹ Gizelis and Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail.”

relationship with the community in which an implementer operates is the best way of understanding the local system of power and the changes occurring within it.

Spoilers

It can be tempting for development practitioners when instituting a participatory program to immediately look to the bottom of the power-pyramid and automatically discount the elite. But bypassing the powerful stakeholders in a community can easily incur their opposition to a program or development agency.¹¹⁰ Disgruntled elites can easily become spoilers in the development process. A illustrative example is the case of “a Zimbabwean participatory ecology project...[which] was initially captured by the local elites... When the team leader disbanded the committee and set up a more representational one, the project stalled for lack of support from the more powerful members of the community.”¹¹¹ The powerful acting as spoilers is especially prevalent when working in areas without strong legal frameworks. “Those who traditionally hold power may resist its redistribution, thereby hampering attempts at collaboration.”¹¹² A great deal of research has been done on the subject of spoilers in the peace process during armed conflict. Many findings from this body of knowledge can be cross-applied to the development sector, for in both realms, changes in the distribution of resources and power can threaten the position, interests, and even the worldview of the established elite.¹¹³ As Chamber’s ‘dimensions of rural deprivation’ table illustrates, there are areas of development which the elite will typically support, as they benefit everyone in a community, and others which can incur their opposition by threatening to change the existing distribution of power. Some forms of development can be

¹¹⁰ World Bank, *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*.

¹¹¹ Parpart et al., *Rethinking Empowerment*. Citing Robinson, J. (1996) ‘Searching for the “community” in community-based conservation: A case study of a Zimbabwe CAMPFIRE project’, Masters in Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

¹¹² Kyamusugulwa, “Participatory Development and Reconstruction.”

¹¹³ Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes.”

zero-sum, both in perception and reality. Programs which are beneficial for one subset of the community can be detrimental to another.

Supporters and spoilers

A development actor implementing any kind of program or intervention needs to explore and understand who the pertinent stakeholders in the community are in regard to their work. A

PRA can be vital in identifying

potential allies, resisters, outright

enemies and the salient reluctant

and relevant parties. This is another

reason why development actors

Supporter to Spoiler Matrix				
Level of agreement	High	Supporters	Advocates	Drivers
		Bystanders		Backers
	Low	Abstainers	Resisters	Spoilers
		Low	Power and influence	High

must prevent elite control of the PRA and gather perspectives from multiple angles. Many of the tools developed for conflict mapping and stakeholder analysis can assist in this endeavor.

The Supporter to Spoiler Matrix can be used to plot the relevant community stakeholders, leaders, groups and individuals.¹¹⁴ All community members relevant to a given project can be categorized based on their level of agreement towards a program, and their relative power within the community. When more parties are clustered towards the upper-left corner of the matrix, there will be greater community involvement and support for a given program not only from the less-powerful, but from the local elites as well. If too many parties are in the lower-right area, program implementation will be exceedingly difficult, and participation harder for its local supporters from marginalized groups.

Types of spoilers and their motivations

¹¹⁴ Babbitt, Eileen. "Guest presentation." Engaging Human Security, lecture at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Feb 15, 2019.

Spoilers in the development process can take many forms and have different motivations. Motivating factors for spoilers can include greed, the desire to preserve their wealth and power, and the defense of an ideology or maintenance of a cultural or political status quo. The problem of spoilers arises because of divisions which exist within a community, and the power differences between them. These divisions can exist along many dimensions: ethnicity, religion, age, gender, language, locals versus IDPs or refugees, “tenants versus owners,... employed versus unemployed” or a combination of these factors.¹¹⁵

External versus internal spoilers. Spoilers can be both internal and external to a development program. External spoilers are those are not directly involved or participating in the program due to their outright opposition; their methods of opposing a project are usually more overt and can include the use of hard power, violence or intimidation. A classic example of this would be managers of a plant intimidating workers attempting to organize for better conditions. Internal spoilers may be faux participants or allies of a program, who use “strategies of stealth” to hinder a program, such as sabotage, stonewalling, or the manipulation of interest groups against each other.¹¹⁶ This could take the form of local government verbally supporting a petty-traders association, but finding ways to deny them licenses and permits which would prevent them from threatening the business of established merchants. Development actors need to consider the motivations and actions of parties which have been identified as resisters, as well as those of program participants and partners.

Spoilers by exclusion. Another type of spoiler can be powerful groups who are not included in a development project and therefore oppose it as a result. During a series of urban development programs in South Africa, implementers witnessed “initiatives being sabotaged,

¹¹⁵ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

¹¹⁶ Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes.”

undermined or hi-jacked, because a specific interest group believe[d] it was allocated an insufficient role.”¹¹⁷ There are two motivating factors in these instances when interest groups or individuals become spoilers because they are prevented from participating. First, leaders and cadres know that involvement in a successful program will give them a share of the credit and increase their standing in the community.¹¹⁸ To oppose the program from the outside denies that credit to others. In these instances, if the spoiler’s intent is genuine, they can be included in the program, but only after a very considered assessment by the implementer. The second type of excluded spoiler who would want to become part of program is one this paper will call a “capturer.” These stealthy spoilers can have an interest in joining a program, at any time from the PRA onwards, in order to steer and manipulate the program and reap unfair benefits. An example might be a landowner offering a part of their property for a well or road knowing it will increase their asset’s value, or a powerful individual steering program priorities in a way which would benefit their family or ethnic group and bring them greater respect and power. The opportunity for capture is present in participatory development, which is why development actors must ensure their partners are from a broad swath of the community representing its different groups and have genuine intentions.

Spoiler Dimensions

Spoilers can be individuals or a group with a common interest. A spoiler group can be unified or there can be internal divisions which development actors can leverage. The leaders of a community can be subtle or overt spoilers, in which case the implementation of a program can be very difficult. Because not all spoilers are alike, it is important for development actors to approach them with tactics specific to the nature of their opposition. Some spoilers can have

¹¹⁷ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

¹¹⁸ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg.

smaller, reasonably accommodatable concerns, while others can be completely opposed to a program which threatens their position or even their worldview. The former group can be induced to make “reasoned judgements concerning the costs and benefits of their” opposition, while the latter can be inflexible and “may hold immutable preferences.”¹¹⁹ The commitment of a spoiler to their position will naturally determine the strategy used to address them.

Strategy formation

It is vital for development actors when considering how to best approach resolving the issue of spoilers to diagnose correctly the divisions which gave rise to the spoilers, their type, and motivations.¹²⁰ Actors must work with their local partners and program participants who have an acute knowledge of the local context in this assessment and strategy formulation. It is frequently locals who know the subtleties of the local power dynamics and cultural mores who can best advise on ways to cajole or bypass spoilers. The strategy selection for how to address spoilers must involve a careful process of cost-benefit analysis and consultation. Acting together in a unified way can create a group which is able to make progress despite the spoiler’s opposition, or convince the spoiler that the best alternative to their continued resistance is acceptance, or at least ceasing opposition.

Strategies to address spoilers

There are three broad strategies which can be employed when the programs of development actors and their community supporters are confronted with the problem of spoilers.¹²¹ **Inducement** is the process through which program supporters can attempt to assuage the fears of spoilers by making strategic concessions in the allocation of resources, legitimizing

¹¹⁹ Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes.”

¹²⁰ Stedman.

¹²¹ Stedman.

their concerns, and taking measured steps to preserve their position. As Chamber's dimensions of rural deprivation and the Supporter to Spoiler matrix illustrates, programs which address issues of physical weakness and isolation are less likely to encounter elite opposition and enjoy greater community support. Consequently, inducement strategies will be most effective in these cases, where spoiler resisters commitment is minimal. *Socialization* is using a combination of inducement and coercion, such as social shaming, "to change the behavior of spoilers" to be more progressive and less to the detriment of the development program. Projects targeting vulnerability and poverty in a community are more likely to encounter tougher spoilers, which may require socialization methods to address. Working to change the powerlessness of the most disadvantaged in a community can necessitate a redistribution of power and resources, and is liable to encounter hardened spoilers. *Coercion* is the use of forceful measures to change the behavior of such spoilers. This extreme should cause a development implementer to question whether the means used against these spoilers is justified by the potential end benefits.

When there are multiple spoilers with different motivations, a strategy to counter one may lead to the strengthening of another. For example: a development actor could ask a respected religious leader to endorse a program and cajole an obdurate landlord, only for the leader to then use their involvement in the program to steer it away from addressing conservative gender norms.¹²² Any approach is likely to be complex ballet of diplomatic persuasion and inducement, because spoilers are most often powerful parties in a community. Usually is it very difficult to gain the support of parties who were once spoilers. Bringing them around to a minimum of allowing a program and ceasing their frustrating behavior should be considered a victory.

¹²² Stedman.

Development implementers at the start of a PRA and throughout program implementation must consider who is really needed to start and sustain a project. Who are the most important and relevant stakeholders participating in a program and how can their knowledge be used to influence potential spoilers? Progressive media and traditional and religious leaders, voices trusted by the community, can be powerful in convincing spoilers and skeptic bystanders to support a program.

What is the commitment of spoilers to their position? Like any group or individual with a goal, spoilers will have interests which underlay their stated positions. If a spoiler opposes a progressive program on the grounds of “defending traditional values and practices,” their unstated interest may be to preserve their status and power derived from the conservative status quo. If spoilers are incorrigibly avaricious, it may be a necessary cost of program implementation to give them a degree of what they want; a measure of elite capture in exchange for a portion of benefits to the poor. An agency may well decide to work directly with the powerful locals with the knowledge that they may warp a program, but accept it as part of the cost of implementation. That trade-off in order to reach the most vulnerable is the decision of the implementer and will need to be case by case and context specific.

Empathizing with spoilers

Understanding and empathy are necessary if a constructive and diplomatic resolution is to be reached in which all parties can benefit. Ideally a contested development program should be to everyone’s benefit, or at least be to the benefit of the downtrodden and not to the detriment of the wealthy. It is the responsibility of development actors and their partners to convince spoilers thusly. Focusing on shared community objectives through collective action can help to “overcome barriers of social difference” and divisions within a community.¹²³ The problem of

¹²³ Shand, “Efficacy in Action.”

program skeptics and naysayers can be approached by demonstrating deliverability and program efficacy, which in turn can help to convince spoilers to desist. The more participatory and broader the base of support for a program, the more successful it is likely to be. It is also important for external development actors to recognize that those who oppose their programs may have legitimate concerns. Listening to program opponents can enable development actors to recognize and rectify unintended negative consequences of their work which may have been previously overlooked.

Considerations when Building Local Governance and Capacity

A great benefit of using a participatory development approach and working through local partner NGOs/CSOs of genuine intent, is that these organizations can become better structured and coordinated in their efforts. Bringing local organizations which cater to different demographics together to work on a mutually beneficial program can serve to build trust between them.¹²⁴ External development actors can work with these organizations to make their own internal governance more participatory and representative, increasing their legitimacy and effectiveness when working inside their own community. This small-scale institutional strengthening can make the difference in the long-term sustainability of a program and its products, after a large external development agency hands over control to their local partners. Endeavoring though to increase the responsiveness and representativeness of local organizations is rarely a development priority. When working with local partners there is a “hard-issue bias” which places emphasis on building the “technological, financial, physical and material” capacities of partners, and disregards “soft issues, such as community involvement, [the]

¹²⁴ “Participatory Approaches.”

decision making process, [and] the establishment of efficient social compacts.”¹²⁵ This kind of institutional strengthening is a deeper form of participation, as it helps local organizations to become more engaged with their own community.

Reactions to local capacity building

Strengthening local actors can be received by national development actors or governments in two ways. It can be opposed or stonewalled if such advancement contests the vested interests of higher bodies. Or, governments can serve an “important enabling role to create conditions for inclusive development.”¹²⁶ Greater community participation and the strengthening of local NGOs/CSOs requires an element of decentralization of power, and as the UN has “noted, in many developing countries [development] planning is a highly centralized activity.”¹²⁷ Decentralizing is a ceding of power on the part of national governments and central development agencies, and to give up power is as hard for bureaucracies as it is for external development actors and local elites. Politicians can feel that their democratic election and representation of a constituency implies any development actions taken by them has been ‘participatory,’ and that no further participatory engagement by the community is required.¹²⁸ It is the responsibility of external development implementers to assess the disposition of local and national governments to the institutional capacity building of grassroots development and community organizations, and determining the costs and benefits therein. When working to convince national governments to allow for local NGOs/CSOs to have a greater role in

¹²⁵ Botes, Lucius and Dingie van Rensburg, “Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments.”

¹²⁶ Shand, “Efficacy in Action.”

¹²⁷ Tosun, “Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries.”

¹²⁸ Tosun.

development, external advocates should advance the position that their efforts can be mutually reinforcing and achieve greater results.¹²⁹

Promoting local leaders

The building of local governance can also happen on the micro and individual level. Local people that become part of participatory development projects are a naturally self-selecting group. Whether through self-interest or altruism, those who spend their time and energy becoming involved are usually motivated and engaged members of their community. The identification and training of exceptional individuals within a community can serve many beneficial purposes. They can serve as grassroots level program coordinators and be raised to leadership positions to continue a project after an implementing agency departs to help ensure sustainability. To the furthest end, participatory projects can be the incubation of “local leaders in the context of state-building.”¹³⁰ This approach though must be given careful consideration. The loudest, smartest or most rhetorically convincing person in the room is not necessarily the one with the wider community’s best interest at heart. While development program can cultivate local leaders, these leaders ought not necessarily select themselves. Program staff must be careful to not allow participation in its purest form to devolve into group-think, tyranny of the majority (or most obnoxious minority), which could lead already weak participants supporting a course of action which they would not have individually chosen.¹³¹

Introduction to case studies

No plan conceived in a sterile headquarters survives contact with reality. The implementation of participatory development methods is a complex iterative process. It requires

¹²⁹ Shand, “Efficacy in Action.”

¹³⁰ Casey, Katherine, “Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work?”

¹³¹ Kyamusugulwa, “Participatory Development and Reconstruction.”

cognizance of the potential for elite manipulation of programs and the effects of an implementer's own power. It is vital to understand development agencies' approach to participation and the opportunities and incentives it creates for local elites and their own staff. Elites are strongly influenced to spoil, capture and involve themselves in programs based on their type, but their behavior and the results of the programs can be greatly influenced by how implementers use their own power. Three case studies of development programs in Indonesia, The Gambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate these dynamics.

In the first case study, two phases of a large-scale participatory program in Indonesia are examined. The first phase was conducted with minimal implementer oversight, while the second was implemented with more thorough support for the democratic selection of community representatives. While elites still controlled the program, democratic mechanisms and the type of the project helped to change elite capture to benevolent capture.

The second case presents a deep look at the role of on-the-ground implementing field staff in The Gambia and their use of PRAs. Their actions were strongly influenced by the incentives created by their organization, as well as the local power dynamics. While a genuine commitment to participation was important, the support which fieldworkers received for realizing participation was critical. Also, the stage of the participatory process affected the nature of the elite's involvement.

The third case study is twofold, detailing a set of programs, one in the DRC and the second in Indonesia. In these examples, stark elite capture and implementer manipulation are compared to follow-up programs which attempted to rectify the shortcomings of their predecessors. While the methods used were an improvement, the use of limited participatory methods resulted in communities serving as a means to achieving an externally conceived objective.

Case Study 1: The Indonesia Urban Poverty Project

The Indonesia Urban Poverty Project (UPP) provides revealing insights into the nature of benevolent capture by elites, the importance of democratic participatory methods, and strong program design and support of those methods. The UPP was a large-scale community driven development program financed by the World Bank and implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Settlements and Regional Infrastructure from 1999 to 2005 and comprised of projects in micro-finance, small-scale infrastructure, and trainings. Since 1997 Indonesia had been transitioning towards democracy and away from an authoritarian state which has been described as “elite capture writ large.”¹³² This historical legacy led to an expectation of capture of by the populace, or at least their acceptance of benevolent capture and elite control of development programs. The UPP design though was intended address issues of government corruption on the intermediate and local levels, by using participation centered on the democratic election of community development boards. These boards were formed specifically for the purpose of implementing the UPP, and determining project activities and resource allocation. These community project boards were formed in 2,500 semi urban areas on Java, and each community received an average of \$40,000. In 2006 a qualitative study of 250 villages was conducted by the University of Singapore using focus groups and in-depth interviews to gage the effectiveness of the democratic mechanisms used for community development board selection.

Differences in community development boards

The UPP was implemented in two phases: 1999-2001 and 2002-2005. Due to the Indonesian financial crisis which preoccupied the government and severely affected the poorest Indonesians, there were distinct differences between the two phases which yield insights. The

¹³² Fritzen, “Can the Design of Community-Driven Development Reduce the Risk of Elite Capture?”

first phase was far more rushed, as results were more important than process. But during the second phase, there was greater support for ensuring a quality democratic and participatory process. Funds were dispersed in synch with “orientation and training workshops” on methods for including poorer community members and ensuring community board selection was more democratic. Candidates for the boards were nominated from all neighborhoods and elections were conducted by secret ballot to prevent manipulation.

That was the intent, but due to weak central management and poor information exchange, these procedures were carried out to an extreme range of degree by the myriad of sub-implementers involved. 25% of the boards were selected by local governments outright, which was directly contrary to program procedures, and the remaining 75% were selected with varying extents of democratic participatory processes. From this it is clear that while process matters, the commitment to participatory methods on the part of the lowest-level implementing partners is as important as that of higher-level management.

The community development boards came to be dominated by the local elites. But what is fascinating is that from the first to the second phases of the UPP when the participatory election process received greater support, the boards came to be dominated by two different kinds of elites: the old and the new. Old elites are “long-time residents who have been active and have held leadership roles in the community for an extended time, often an older generation of civil servants, teachers, and retired military service personnel, the leaders of the wards” who have developed neighborhood-level political machines.”¹³³ The new elites were primarily younger, and gained their status from their higher levels of education, professional occupations and economic wealth.

¹³³ Fritzen.

Old elite dominance vs new elite benevolent capture

In the second phase of the UPP's implementation, there were lower levels of old elite individuals on the community development boards. In some locations the level of elite control was lower than others, usually based on location; poorer areas have fewer elites, and consequently fewer elites on boards. But generally, there was still a great degree of domination of the boards by elites, and only 5% of board members were "poor" or "very poor."¹³⁴ The democratic participatory project mechanisms did not substantively change the degree of elite control, but they did lower the level of elite capture. Individuals from elite backgrounds still dominated the boards, but the boards orchestrated projects more effectively and the satisfaction of communities with their boards was higher. The democratic measures diversified the types of elites who were on the boards, adding more new elites versus old elites. Across the many boards of the UPP, the extent of participatory measures, open elections for boards in which the seats were "actively contested" and elections that were conducted with "secret balloting, was a consistent predictor of several intermediate project outcomes of interest. These included having a board less dominated by [old] elite status individuals, and facilitating the motivation, effort, competence and pro-poor attitudes of board members."¹³⁵ Board members were asked "which population group the UPP primarily assists" and "90% of those individuals who were democratically selected respond[ed] "the relatively poor," compared with 60% of those who were appointed. Fully 86% of the same individuals would select... a hypothetical project that benefits fewer, but poorer, community residents, compared with 73% of the non-democratic comparison group," and "democratically selected board[s]" met on average twice as many

¹³⁴ Fritzen.

¹³⁵ Fritzen.

times.¹³⁶ This indicates that participatory mechanisms resulted in better candidates acceding to the posts, which was the express purpose of those mechanisms.¹³⁷

Types of participation in the UPP

Through participatory democratic elections, the UPP attempted to reach the first three rungs of the “Types of Participation” ladder: citizens control, delegated power, and partnership, as illustrated on page 28. However, the varying degrees to which these levels were achieved led to most of the projects being in the middle rungs of the ladder in terms of their participatory nature: placation, consultation and informing. This failure was mitigated though by the large degree of benevolent capture which occurred. “Elite control of [the] boards [wa]s clearly not associated with poorer outcomes, whether viewed in terms of board competence, board performance in poverty targeting or enforcement of rules vital to the success of the microfinance component.”¹³⁸ While there was still elite control, the participatory measures transformed elite capture into benevolent capture.

Dimensions of rural deprivation addressed by the UPP

“Elites can and often do act in the broader [interest] of [the] communities” in which they live by orchestrating successful and universally beneficial projects and gaining the status that comes with those achievements.¹³⁹ Because of the nature of the UPP programs, primarily micro-finance and small-scale infrastructure development, which were addressing the physical weakness, isolation and vulnerability dimensions of rural deprivation as elucidated by Chambers on page 36, they would be expected to encounter less resistance from elites. Indeed this was the case. Had the projects been focused on addressing the poverty and powerlessness of the poorest

¹³⁶ Fritzen.

¹³⁷ Fritzen.

¹³⁸ Fritzen.

¹³⁹ Fritzen.

community members, they may well have encountered greater opposition, elite capture, and difficulties from spoilers. Instead of being spoilers or resisters though, the elites controlling the boards were project advocates, backers and even drivers. This was achieved not only by the nature of the projects themselves and the degree of participation with which the elites were elected to the development boards, but through the level of higher level of support the boards received as well.

The importance of program support and democratic mechanisms

The extent to which project staff cultivated strong cooperative relationships and invested in capacity building with the local development boards was a significant predictor of their efficacy.¹⁴⁰ This was only possible during the second phase of the UPP when the program's tempo was more relaxed, and these efforts were advanced far more consciously and frequently. This additional coaching, oversight, and capacity building augmented the boards' sense of accountability, at least upwards towards higher-level program staff, donors, and the Indonesian government. This is an instance in which program implementers can use their power to enforce and inculcate positive norms. In the second phase of the program, the more community development boards worked closely with project staff, the greater their program's focus on poorer beneficiaries "regardless of whether board members were elected democratically or not," showing a "strong, positive impact of...community outreach and focus[ing] on communicating the anti-poverty intent" of the UPP.¹⁴¹

In essence, the prevalence of elite control of the boards mattered less than the means by which the members acceded to their positions and the support those boards received. Appointments to boards by local governments and democratic elections (to varying degrees) both

¹⁴⁰ Fritzen.

¹⁴¹ Fritzen.

resulted in boards dominated by elites. But the boards formed in more participatory manners had more new elites, and those which were supported in adopting more “pro-accountability norms” were more effective in benefiting poorer sections of their communities.¹⁴² “Greater attention should therefore be paid...to learning what mechanisms may raise the likelihood that elites will play a constructive role in community development.”¹⁴³ This why it is imperative to distinguish between the two phenomena of elite capture vs elite control and benevolent capture. Elite capture may be less of a problem than project designs which fail to use participatory methods to select the elites which become involved, and neglecting to actively support positive norm training and enforcement. This can be a more efficacious use of energy, instead of attempting to completely preclude elite control which may be unrealistic in many development program contexts.¹⁴⁴

Another interesting insight though gleaned from the UPP program is that there can be some benefits to elite control. Community development boards which were elite dominated and had been appointed by local governments were more effective in collecting the repayments of micro-finance loans. This could have been expected; democratically elected boards were loath to harshly collect repayments, while appointed boards “enjoyed a greater capacity to enforce repayment by resorting to quasi-governmental authority.”

Shortcomings in empowerment

As would be expected, the UPP also showed that empowering the least powerful segment of the population in a community cannot be expected to be an ancillary benefit of microfinance and small-scale infrastructure programs - it has to be an intentional and primary part of programming. The study of the UPP concluded that small regard was paid to the large assumptions linking community development programs, “the participation of the poor, and

¹⁴² Fritzen.

¹⁴³ Fritzen.

¹⁴⁴ Fritzen.

longer-term “empowerment” outcomes.”¹⁴⁵ The author of the study did not expressly define ‘empowerment,’ and used the term in a general feel-good community-ability-to-act sense. In all fairness, there would need to be studies with longer time-horizons to gauge changes in this unclear metric. But effects caused by the UPP would still be doubtful since the boards were dominated by elites, even if many of them were benevolent and elected democratically.

The case of Indonesia’s Urban Poverty Program yields revealing insights. It matters less if the community development boards are elite dominated, but rather the methods by which the elites gained their position. Democratic participatory processes, along with training and accountability support, created boards which were still controlled by elites. But these boards were comprised of newer elites that were more effective in realizing projects that benefited the poorer segments of their communities than those boards which were appointed and controlled by older elites. Capture of the programs and the problem of spoilers were avoided both by the increase of participatory selection and accountability support mechanisms, and the nature of the projects themselves as they sought to benefit those at the bottom of communities without threatening the position those at the top.

Case Study 2: The PRAs of ActionAid’s Field Staff in The Gambia

The extent to which development workers in the field execute participatory methods, including participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), is affected by many factors. Participatory processes and the use of PRAs “emerge as a complex process of negotiations” between the fieldworkers who conduct them and the “unique combination of competing influences, from the organization they work for, the communities they work with, and their own personal characteristics.”¹⁴⁶ ActionAid in The Gambia (AATG) is the largest development agency in the

¹⁴⁵ Fritzen.

¹⁴⁶ Holmes, *A Participatory Approach in Practice*.

country, and conducts programming work throughout the country in the realms of water, nutrition, livelihoods, literacy, health and community institution support. AATG is committed at the institutional level to using PRAs and participatory development methods, but these are carried out through the “actions of staff working at field level.”¹⁴⁷ AATG’s forty-five field staff are all local Gambian nationals, and directly interact with the AATG program partners and beneficiaries in communities throughout the country. The manner and extent to which PRAs and participatory methods are used by AATG field staff was examined over seven weeks of interviews with field staff at the behest of the Institute of Development Studies and AATG. The study shows that while the organization’s culture and trainings are salient in determining the actions of field staff, the organization can ensure PRAs are more thoroughly conducted by changing their system of incentives and support to field workers. The nature of the communities and the attributes of the field workers themselves are also important influences affecting the use of PRAs.

Field staff in AATG

In development studies, most of the attention is placed on the development organizations and on the communities in which they work. “The practices and perceptions of fieldworkers have been relatively neglected due to the dominant organizational-centered literature that tends to assume that implementation is a mechanical process of carrying out orders.”¹⁴⁸ An organization’s policy though is “that which is actually experienced by clients rather than simply ‘written statements of intent.’” Simply put, fieldworkers at the bottom of the institutional totem pole interacting with locals and facilitating programs “are capable of making or breaking a project.” Fieldworkers’ discretion is the “key in determining how participatory processes are utilized,”¹⁴⁹ a

¹⁴⁷ Holmes.

¹⁴⁸ Holmes.

¹⁴⁹ Chambers, Robert, “The Origins and Practice of PRA.”

power which makes them “de facto policymakers.”¹⁵⁰ But the choices fieldworkers make are shaped by institutional culture and which behaviors are professionally rewarded and supported bureaucratically.

Types of participation facilitated through PRAs

Action Aid in The Gambia (AATG) has conducted multiple trainings for its staff in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and holds refresher trainings whenever a large-scale PRA exercise is to be done. In The Gambia, AATG serves in more of a facilitator and technical advisory role in the development and implementation of community action plans formed by the various village development groups it organizes. National field staff are the link between the village development groups and AATG, and their job is to facilitate the community-based management of their own development projects. The PRAs conducted by field workers are the conduit of information exchange between the communities and AATG. The communities determine and articulate their priorities with the help of field staff through the PRA process, and transform the PRA findings into community action plans. AATG then supports programming tailored to the communities specified goals. This process and AATG’s commitment to PRA and participatory development methodologies is intended to place their work in the highest rungs of the Types of Participation Ladder found on page 28: citizen’s control, delegated power and partnership. But the internal unintentional incentives created by AATG and the external pressures from Gambian elites combine to cause field staff to conduct PRAs of reduced quality. The greater the disincentives and pressures, the lower the work of AATG can slide on the typology ladder, to placation and consultation, and the greater the chance for elite manipulation and capture of programs.

¹⁵⁰ Holmes, *A Participatory Approach in Practice*.

The shortcomings of AATG's PRAs

AATG Fieldworkers are “required to conduct a PRA exercise, compile the findings (in English), present this to the community to review and produce a final version. These reports inform the community action plans which are to be continuously updated.”¹⁵¹ The reality on the ground though is quite different. Community action plans are usually only updated once a year, contrary to guidelines. AATG has found that copies of the action plans are frequently not available for the communities, and locals see the plans as being ActionAid’s, not of their own design. There are few indicators of progress selected by the communities, and monitoring and evaluation of programs through iterative PRAs does not happen. The preparation and physical resources of AATG field staff are “sometimes insufficient,” and teams are frequently poor in gender and diversity in terms of their areas of development expertise and practice. According to fieldworkers, trainings in PRA are usually inadequate and PRA activities are frequently rushed, marring their quality. There is minimal transfer of PRA skills and there is little direct training of communities. Consequently, locals do not use PRAs by themselves, and when they do, it is rarely outside of community action plan formulation. Attempts are made to get a cross-section of the communities involved in the PRA process, but this has proved difficult. AATG field staff have found that PRAs are more effective when men and women are consulted separately, but gender groups are rarely used and “despite attempts at fair representation, gender and power bias is common.”¹⁵² PRA methods are not adapted to local contexts and the steps are usually done in an illogical order which limits useful results. The greater the shortcomings in the PRAs, the more they become a tool of placation and less a catalyst of partnership. These deficiencies though exist

¹⁵¹ Holmes.

¹⁵² Holmes.

despite the fact that AATG has extensive policies on how its field staff are to conduct PRAs and other aspects of participatory programming.

PRAs within AATG

AATG has attempted to compel field workers to use PRAs in prescribed ways through “supervision and hierarchical authority” as well as “market incentives,” such as the lure of contract renewal. It was found though that these methods of motivation are hard to realize because of the difficulties in measuring employee performance, and full oversight of fieldworkers is impossible. What has been most effective in motivating fieldworkers to conduct PRAs has been a human relations approach; staff knowing why AATG uses PRAs. To the extent that PRAs have been conducted, it has been achieved by staff understanding their purpose. AATG does not have a problem of institutional culture; field workers believe management and the organization is committed to participation. They understand that PRAs are an important part of participation and help to make their programs sustainable because the communities identify the issues they face and select the methods to address them. Institutional-culture reinforcement between new and old fieldworkers has been important in sustaining this. AATG pays its staff well, but that is not why the staff is motivated and professional. It is because “of a clear sense of purpose” and appreciation of the organization’s mission and goals.¹⁵³

This culture positively affects how AATG community development workers in the field consider PRAs and participatory methods. But why then are there still persistent problems with PRA’s? The AATG PRA policies are backed up by training. Fieldworkers say that their first introduction to PRA methods was important for setting the tone of their subsequent work, but that their training was insufficient. For example, the lack of training is reflected in the minimal use of community-based indicators. As could be expected, when there has been more training,

¹⁵³ Holmes.

better PRAs are the result. But more trainings are not the only answer to improving the quality of PRAs and their frequency.

The discretion of field staff and problems of measurement

AATG field staff are “given the freedom to manage their own work, arranging and conducting PRAs.” The organization places large emphasis on the judgement and discretion of its fieldworkers. This is to AATG’s credit, as it allows field workers to adapt to changing local conditions. There is little supervision or performance measurement for PRAs, because of the inherent difficulties in measurement and the resources required. Plus, PRA’s intended flexible nature makes evaluating PRAs difficult. There are limits to output measures from PRAs as well. AATG considered having the communities themselves evaluate fieldworkers on their PRAs, as it was thought this could be a way to encourage more thorough PRAs. But this local evaluation process could easily be manipulated by elites and used to pressure the fieldworkers. Monitoring workplans is the biggest form of oversight for field staff in AATG, but workplan’s success or failure cannot be based on using PRA methods alone.

The existing discretionary decision making allowed to fieldworkers enables them to use PRA methods to which the local communities are most receptive. It has been found in The Gambia that focus group discussions are reflective of local traditional ways of problem solving and action planning, and is more appealing to locals than other participatory methods. “Despite the limitations of such community meetings, the introduction of other unfamiliar ‘PRA methods’ was seen as an unnecessary burden by some AATG staff.”¹⁵⁴ Fieldworkers have said that focus group discussions are frequently the only PRA method used because they can create a community action plan from them without using other techniques. “It is a short cut.”¹⁵⁵ When

¹⁵⁴ Holmes.

¹⁵⁵ Holmes.

field workers have the ability to choose and limited support for their PRAs, they naturally use the methods to which the communities are most receptive. Relying on focus groups exclusively though misses insights which can be gained more effectively through other methods. Why do community development workers use “unsanctioned discretion” to act outside the PRA policies of AATG? The organization needs to examine the incentive structure it has created for its field staff.

Perverse Incentive Structures

In addition to providing more structural support, AATG must reform its organizational incentives. Fieldworkers have stated that while they want to do PRA thoroughly, these “attitudes must compete with incentives that influence our behaviors, [and] it is not surprising that attitudes often lose out to the rewards we seek or the penalties we try to avoid.”¹⁵⁶ Even in an organization that values participation and PRAs, perverse incentives are very difficult to overcome. This is a classic principle-agent problem, except in this case, it is the principle (AATG) which determines the incentives of the agent (field workers). Field staff have the power to choose what participatory steps in the development process to cut, and what to do less frequently or to a minimal extent. While they have good intentions, field staff unfortunately do not have the time and resources to do all they desire.

This discretion, minimal institutional support, and the lack of performance incentives tied to PRAs yields truncated PRAs. The PRA is regarded as just a stepping-stone to starting work with the local population. Other aspects of participatory development are instead structurally incentivized by AATG. Fulfilling the workplans, which “emphasize program activities...and immediately observable activities” is the most important thing for field staff, as that is what brings professional accolades and rewards, not PRAs. AATG field staff are on one-year

¹⁵⁶ Holmes.

renewable contracts, which they say negatively affects their motivation to put in long-term commitment and favors immediately measurable activities.

AATG field staff have a tremendous workload and have great difficulty in implementing all of the mandated participatory elements, including PRAs, into the programs they oversee. “Community development workers are loaded with many other requirements, so it is not possible to do a PRA properly.”¹⁵⁷ Field staff say they cannot effectively meet with a broad range of people within their short time constraints. This relates back to problem of insufficient financial physical, and human resources. The time of annual planning and budget renewal is the only time that community action plans are updated, which involve PRAs, because they are only monitored at that time. When faced with the necessary choice of what activities to enact fully and which to abbreviate, it is natural that fieldworkers will pursue the activities that are institutionally incentivized, rewarded and supported.

The effects of local power structures on PRAs

These influences internal to AATG warp the actions of field staff, but there are powerful external factors as well that affect the execution of PRAs. PRAs take place within the system of local Gambian Society, where power is “based on gender, age, ethnicity, access to resources and political/religious authority.”¹⁵⁸ AATG introduced targeting methods to focus on the ‘very poor’ instead of the entire community in its development work from the PRA onwards. It is up to the communities though to identify the ‘very poor’ for themselves and no criteria was given on how village development groups are selected. This leaves open the possibility of elite manipulation of the PRA process, and indeed PRAs are often “strongly influenced by one or more of the men, the old, the rich, an ethnic group, and/or the village head or their relatives.”¹⁵⁹ AATG field staff have

¹⁵⁷ Holmes.

¹⁵⁸ Holmes.

¹⁵⁹ Holmes.

found that women are consistently less likely to contribute their thoughts during PRA meetings. This is due to the dominant position of the established male elite which allows them to unduly steer the PRA process. The result is “the very poor come off worse.”¹⁶⁰

Elites have also tried to manipulate AATG field workers. “When you visit village leaders they give you milk, fowl, etc. so they can win your confidence and anytime they approach you, you will be obliged to help them. A sort of bribe. This can be difficult to reject but you need to put it at the back of your mind so you are not easily influenced.”¹⁶¹ Locals have tried to manipulate PRAs as well by learning the jargon of development. An individual wanted to start a “sheep fattening project” from which he would profit, and stated that ‘the community’ supported this project. At a general meeting “the people said it was a good initiative, but it had never been discussed with them.” This local notable wanted to gain both the benefits of the program and the credit from any others who benefited as well. This was attempted benevolent manipulation and capture, insofar as the elite individual proposing of the idea would profit and others might as well, though the program was far from focusing exclusively on the very poor.

Analysis of elite influence on PRAs

Were AATG to impose preconceived programs onto communities, it would be likely that elites would oppose or support the programs based on the dimensions of rural deprivation the programs seek to address, and act as spoilers or drivers accordingly. However, AATG programs are created in The Gambia through the PRA process through which communities articulate their preferences for development support. It is to be expected that elite individuals would want to become involved and use their clout to steer the process for their own benefit. Individuals who participate in PRAs with the intent of manipulating the process for their own gain would not be

¹⁶⁰ Holmes.

¹⁶¹ Holmes.

categorized as advocates, backers or drivers of the programs on the Supporters to Spoilers matrix. They would instead be categorized as “capturers” because of their intent to participate and manipulate the programs for the benefit of themselves and other favored groups instead of the intended disadvantages recipients. Because these elite “capturers” are involved in the program process from the opening PRAs, they can create and advocate for programs which are highly acceptable to themselves, which they will support fully, and which will have been captured from the outset.

Field staff mitigation strategies

The fieldworkers themselves hold very different perceptions of PRAs. Field staff have expressed divergent opinions on when in the year PRAs should be conducted, how often, and how long they ought to take: from every six months to every five years, and from one to ten days.¹⁶² Because of the discretion afforded field staff, the difficulties in oversight, and the pressures they face from AATG and the communities in which they work, field staff have adopted their own strategic methods for approaching and conducting PRAs.

It can be exceedingly difficult for fieldworkers to overcome the challenges affecting the integrity of their PRAs, so instead fieldworkers opt to minimize their PRAs and focus their time and energy on other activities that are more rewarded by AATG. While this is a way of sorts to prevent elite capture, it is ultimately self-defeating as PRAs are shortened or not conducted at all.

The effects of field staff attributes

A fundamental strength of AATG fieldworkers is that they are local staff and generally have strong relationships with the communities within which they work. This is because instead of arriving in white Landcruisers for brief visits, fieldworkers live and work in the communities,

¹⁶² Holmes.

are integrated socially, and are “honest and transparent.”¹⁶³ These relationships take time to develop though, especially for Gambian national staff who come from different tribal groups than the communities in which they conduct fieldwork. AATG field staff are still usually seen as outsiders, especially in the early stages of their work when PRAs are to be done.

Despite being locals, field workers are keenly aware of the power disparity between themselves and their program beneficiaries. Having the power to dispense resources places field staff in awkward positions as locals appeal to them for assistance. Local interlocutors have tried to relate the needs they express in PRAs to AATG’s known specialties and past programming out of fear that if their needs do not match AATG’s work areas they will not receive assistance. Gaining any resources is better than gaining none. On other instances communities withheld “embarrassing information” which they felt might jeopardize their chance of receiving aid.

The relationships between field staff and local communities ultimately comes down to relationships between people. In these relationships, fieldworker’s personal attributes and self-motivation is a critical element affecting the degree to which PRAs are conducted. The personal characteristics of the fieldworkers are vital too; they must be curious listeners and not moralize. Many fieldworkers are “very good at talking to people but not good at people talking to them,” and do not reflect on how they can improve.¹⁶⁴

Most AATG community development workers feel that their gender both helps and hinders their work depending on the circumstances. Some female fieldworkers say that being a woman helps them to connect with other women, and most of The Gambian village groups are women’s groups. Local women generally trust female field workers more quickly and easily than their male counterparts. But AATG has found that male fieldworkers are able to go out more

¹⁶³ Holmes.

¹⁶⁴ Holmes.

safely at night when most community gatherings take place and are better able to ride motorcycles to remote locations. Given the patriarchal nature of Gambian culture, male AATG fieldworkers have found it easier and more socially acceptable to be bold and assertive in meetings.¹⁶⁵ These gendered dynamics affect how PRAs are conducted. Local elite men are more likely to dismiss female field staff and local women are less likely to be assertive in meetings conducted by male staff. Most AATG fieldworkers are men, and the organization has acknowledged the need for greater gender balance in the teams conducting PRAs to yield better results, though this will require more resources.

Recommendations for improving the PRAs of AATG

The factors of the institutional incentives of AATG, the structures of community power, and the attributes fieldworkers themselves are all important in influencing the use of participatory methods and PRAs for field staff. It is now the behavior the organization incentivizes and supports that is the most important and easiest to change. Recognizing this, the agency can increase the use and value of the PRAs conducted by its community development workers, which will improve the quality of the participatory methods in its programming to follow.

The institutional incentives created by AATG need to be reexamined. PRAs are not conducted to the same extent as steps in the development process which are rewarded professionally. A challenge to addressing this are the difficulties in measuring the quality of PRAs, but measures could be instituted more easily to check the frequency with which they are conducted. Fortunately, the strong institutional culture of AATG which values participatory methods means that if more resources are allocated for PRAs and their frequency is monitored, they will in all likelihood be conducted to a greater extent.

¹⁶⁵ Holmes.

AATG management should listen to their fieldworker's request for more trainings and support. Fields workers have stated that while insufficient physical and financial resources are a problem, their biggest impediment was the lack of human resources. The teams are too small, and do not have a gender balance and development specialty diversity. Though this would require a greater outlay of resources, it will improve the quality of PRAs which serve as a vital communications and assessment link between AATG and the communities in which it operates.

AATG needs to allow the feedback of fieldworkers to guide the formation of PRA policies. PRAs are usually conducted in the rainy season, and that is when locals are working on their farms. Locals have less time to be involved in PRAs, and consequently there is lower participation, especially on the part of the most economically disadvantaged: subsistence farmers. Fieldworkers have said that "the farmer's seasonal calendar is not honored," but are unable to choose when to conduct PRAs because of "bureaucratic delays."¹⁶⁶

Additional resources and greater support for conducting PRA at times more conducive for the participation of the poor will also help to mitigate the interference of elites in the PRA process. If more support were to be provided that enabled separate PRA groups to be held for women and poorer community members, the problem of elite manipulation could be squarely addressed. If the intent of PRAs is to begin a partnership and dialogue with the most at need in a community, measures need to be taken which guards them from elite manipulation, enable the marginalized to participate, and incentivize and support field staff to conduct them frequently and fully.

¹⁶⁶ Holmes.

Case Study 3. Participatory Development in REDD+ Programs in the DRC and Indonesia

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Participatory approaches are now being used in every realm of development, including a category of project goals called ‘reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation,’ or REDD+, which has both environmental protection and livelihood building aspects. Two case studies of projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Indonesia each contain illuminating comparisons of locations which had programs implemented without participatory methods, followed by REDD+ programs in which local participation was attempted to varying extents. The participatory REDD+ programs were considered by locals to be more equitable and inclusive in the program’s implementation and benefits than their non-participatory predecessors. However, in both the Congolese and Indonesian cases, the implementing development agencies failed to be fully participatory and cede important decision-making power to the local communities. In these cases, participation was not an end unto itself, but was used as a means of implementation to achieve a programmatic end.¹⁶⁷ Both of the REDD+ programs were “externally imposed interventions” in which the community had no say in forming the project goals, and the local populations were partners at best and manipulated at worst.¹⁶⁸

Case Study 3.1 - Elite capture in the DRC

The comparative development program cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) took place in villages in Bikoro territory and were examined using “interviews, focus group discussions, household surveys and field observations” of salient stakeholders and

¹⁶⁷ Miles and Samndong, “Community Participation as a Means or an End: Local Perspectives on REDD+ from Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

¹⁶⁸ Miles and Samndong.

program implementing agencies for several months in 2012, 2013 and 2014.¹⁶⁹ This territory has 28% of the DRC's forest and the largest swamp forest in the world. The two programs were food security programs which aimed to build the capacity of local subsistence and smallholder farmers in the territory and increase their yields. The first program was instituted by the Roman Catholic Church Development Bureau, Bureau Diocésaine de Développement (BDD), but was implemented on the village level by local Peasant Development Organizations (OPD). These organizations were the conduits for the larger-scale development actor to train locals, deliver farming inputs, and manage the projects on the ground. In addition to allocating resources, members of the OPDs' executive committee gained status and access to local government officials.

Mechanisms of capture

A critical mechanism which portended the coming capture, membership in the OPDs was in theory open to all, but required an education and property-owning qualification, a \$1 monthly membership fee, French literacy, and general good social standing. The ability to be a part of these OPDs was only open to relatively well-off members of the community, and the poor were effectively barred. The election of the executive committee was intended to be a mechanism for ensuring democratic accountability, but the high bars for entry combined with the incentives for becoming involved in the OPDs meant that this critical organ for local development was ripe for elite capture. Due to the requirements for joining the OPD, only those already privileged in the communities were able to accede to the executive ranks. A handful of the executive positions were reserved for women and locals of Pygmy ethnicity as required by the BDD, but these members had little ability to influence the committees. The Pygmies were looked down upon,

¹⁶⁹ Miles and Samndong.

and the cultural norms prohibited women from participating actively in the decision-making process in front of the men, so the voices of both were consistently stifled.

The effects of capture

It remains unclear in the case study why the Roman Catholic Church Development Bureau (BDD) did not take steps to prevent this total elite capture, but what is clear is what the local Peasant Development Organizations (OPD) did with the resources under their control when controlled by elites. Out of the 403 possible households in the program area, only 15 were selected by the OPDs for inclusion and assistance in the food security project.¹⁷⁰ Local focus groups “revealed that all these households selected by BDD were made up of members of the OPD executive committees and their families.”¹⁷¹ The committees defended this decision by stating: “we cannot work with all the population...for our food security project...we often support villagers with large farms who produce more for the market.”¹⁷² This naturally excluded subsistence farmers who could not produce crops for market and those without sufficient social capital. The already affluent landowners and farmers were able to grow more powerful; wealth and control of resources perpetuated itself.

Analysis of Capture

The capture of the program is in line with what would be expected when considering Chamber’s table of elite opposition to programs based on types, found on page 36. According to the table, elites would be expected to have minimal opposition to a program that focusses on feeding, as everyone in the community can benefit. What is critical to understanding the capture of this program, is that it was not simply a food security program. It was a food security through

¹⁷⁰ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷¹ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷² Miles and Samndong.

agricultural support program, which increased the value and productivity of assets. In the local Congolese context, farmland is by far the most valuable asset possessed by the majority of the population. Whoever received the farming inputs would have increased their economic power relative to that of those who did not. Since it was the elites who controlled the local OPDs and determined the allocation of resources without oversight, their opposition to the loss of relative power and the opportunity to increase their own farms' productive capacity led to the elite's seizing the opportunity to capture the program. Because the elites were able to become internal elements of the development program, they did not become spoilers. Instead they became pernicious supporters and "capturers" since they were able to control the allocation of resources.

As would be expected in a case of utter elite control and capture of a program, local villagers complained of their concerns being disregarded despite their contributions of time and labor in meetings and activities. This was because of the elite committee members control of resources, the flow of information, and lack of accountability. Induced ignorance in the community during the program meant that no OPD executive was ever "voted out of office in these villages or sanctioned through fines," despite their manipulation of the program.¹⁷³ The lack of effective accountability mechanisms and restricted information meant the elites had no fear of sanction from the villagers or reservations of allocating resources for their own benefit.

Attempts at REDD+ participatory programming in the DRC

This initial program was managed by the BDD, but conducted on the ground by the OPDs which led to its capture by local elites. Two years later, a second project was conducted in the same villages, this time with the Woods Hole Research Centre (WHRC) orchestrating the project through the BDD with REDD+ goals using participatory principals. While the implementing agency had good intentions, there were still major problems and consequences

¹⁷³ Miles and Samndong.

arising the manner in which the program was conducted. From the beginning, “no village member was part of the team that organized the process of introducing the project in the village.”¹⁷⁴ A series of focus groups and meetings were held which were free and open to all, with the intent of sharing program goals and salient information so the community could give their “free, prior and informed consent.”¹⁷⁵

While this was a good start, the intent of these meeting was only to tell the community about the program, not to ask for their input in its design. The program was climbing only to the middle rungs of the Types of Participation ladder: placation, consultation and informing (page 28). It was the within the power of the development agency to choose to which type of participation to engage. There was no delegation of power or input in the program’s design by the disadvantaged members of the community and consequently there was minimal community buy-in or ownership of the projects.

There were impediments to full community participation as well due to the biases and prejudices which existed in the local community. Individuals who were tasked with sharing program meeting times intentionally did not include Pygmies and certain families to prevent them from attending and informed only “selected households.”¹⁷⁶

Limited and palliative participation

The WHRC REDD+ program commenced with workshops to map the community livelihood practices. Small groups of villagers were selected and given per diems “based on ethnic identity, sex,...age groups [and included] the customary landowners, migrants, men, women, youths and Pygmies.”¹⁷⁷ These meetings were at least representative of the community,

¹⁷⁴ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷⁵ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷⁶ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷⁷ Miles and Samndong.

and their purpose was to select activities that would help to reduce the deforestation while assisting the locals in their livelihoods. While this goal may be laudable from an outside perspective, it was not explored if this goal was in fact what the people in the community wanted.

Workshop participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their thoughts and perspectives with the program implementers and stated that the information they received “motivated them to accept and support the project.”¹⁷⁸ While these steps were better than nothing, they were still steps of consultation, informing, and therapy, the middle and lower rungs of the participation types ladder. It was revealed in later interviews that the information shared was accurate but “insufficient for the local people to give their [informed and meaningful] consent to the project.”¹⁷⁹ Only the potential benefits of the project were shared, not the possible costs and downsides, and there was no discussion of activity implementation and monitoring. This was a completely imported program, with the locals having “no control or power to influence the purpose, structure and goals of the REDD+ pilot project...and process.”¹⁸⁰ This placed the project into the lowest realms of the participation type ladder, manipulation; the locals were told incomplete information to assure their acceptance of the program. The only redeeming thing that could be said is at least the workshops and project were inclusive, trying to prevent elite capture and attempting to benefit everyone in the community.

The legacy of elite capture

The legacy of the previous project, which was utterly captured by the elites controlling the OPDs proved difficult to overcome and affected the WHRC REDD+ program. Many marginalized villagers, especially Pygmies, were skeptical about the project and its ability to

¹⁷⁸ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁷⁹ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸⁰ Miles and Samndong.

reach everyone in the village. They were loath to trust the implementers because they had “been excluded in many development projects [conducted by] NGOs [that] preached about local development in the same manner, but implemented something else or disappeared.”¹⁸¹ Previous NGOs had used manipulative participation as well just to inform the local populace and legitimize their programs. This led to the expectation of exclusion, marginalization, the capture of programs by the elites, and cynicism.

The WHRC REDD+ program though was not able to rectify this legacy because their methods of participation were confined to placation and manipulation. After the workshops, the early activities were commenced without any local inclusion in activity selection or “contractual agreements with the villagers,” and “no system was established for lodging complaints, grievance and suggestion.”¹⁸² Accountability and feedback mechanisms are critical in establishing trust and productive working relationships between development agencies and the participants of their programs. Their absence in this case reveals the WHRC’s and BDD’s commitment to local participation in this program. Locals participation was a means for convincing the locals to support a program not of their own design.

The negative effects of limited participation

While these organizations had good intentions, being more participatory would have increased the efficacy of the REDD+ program’s activities. At the start of the project, a well was constructed to provide water for everyone in the community. However, locals had “very negative feelings and views towards the water project” because they were not consulted in any aspect of its design and realization.¹⁸³ The well ran dry in the first dry season. While it is impossible to know definitively if this would not have happened if the locals had been consulted, it is clear that

¹⁸¹ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸² Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸³ Miles and Samndong.

the locals deeply resented the lack of consultation. In this case the WHRC and BDD were either unwilling or unable to cede power and the program was negatively affected as a result.

In the water project, traditional village elites were involved as supervisors and those few indigent locals hired as laborers were “either not paid or poorly paid. Some complained of using their own tools in the project without compensation.”¹⁸⁴ The elite capture and manipulation of this aspect of the program was plainly visible, and deeply resented by the population. It caused the locals to lose respect and trust in the implementing organization for being unwilling to use its power to prevent the elite capture of their own program despite their rhetoric. While having positive REDD+ goals and attempting to be inclusive, the program in Bikoro Territory DRC was manipulative in its participation and exclusive in the decision-making process. A large part of this was due to WHRC’s failure to acknowledge and address “social inequalities and skewed local power dimensions,” and their “intervention... further exacerbate[d] these inequalities, adding insult to injury already being suffered by the more vulnerable segments of the local population.”¹⁸⁵ Participatory intent on the part of development actors is a necessary first step, but for the lowest members of the community to be meaningfully involved, they must have real decision making power, and not be made to simply validate an externally predetermined program.

Case Study 3.2 - Manipulation and power delegation in Indonesia

The Mega-Rice catastrophe

The second comparative case study of a REDD+ participatory program focusses on programs conducted in Central Kalimantan in Indonesian Borneo. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted in the seven villages in which the programs took place. The first

¹⁸⁴ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸⁵ Miles and Samndong.

program which occurred in this area was the Mega-Rice Project in the mid 1990s. This was a purely externally directed government led top-down program that attempted to transform 1 million hectares into rice paddies. At the time, President Suharto of Indonesia ruled as a strong-man, and the local people were had no ability to speak out. The Mega-Rice Project resulted in massive deforestation and wildfires so large in scale that they caused 13-40% of the world's carbon emissions in 1997-1998. The environmental catastrophe utterly destroyed the livelihoods of the locals. The fall of the Suharto regime and the Asian financial crisis caused the project to be abandoned, with no attempt made at clean-up or salvage.

Orangutans over people

In 2005, the first organization to work in the area after the devastation was the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOS). This wildlife conservation organization used their power in a very harmful way, cruelly treating the locals as part of the problem. “The word “afraid” commonly arose in interviews about the BOS, because of the NGO’s previous use of police and their threats to send local community members to jail if they housed or hurt an orangutan.”¹⁸⁶ In addition to the harsh treatment meted out, the locals had their ability to use forest resources severely restricted, and saw no benefits from the BOS Mawas Reserve. “When [BOS] came here they didn’t even do socialization... they just established their area and the masyarakat (community) was confused about what they were doing...” stated an elderly local.¹⁸⁷ BOS distributed highly manipulative questionnaires simply to get the locals’ signatures to validate their program. These actions place the BOS firmly in the lowest levels of the participation type ladder. Naturally BOS encountered great resistance from the local population, but these counteractions are understandable given the local’s grievances.

¹⁸⁶ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸⁷ Miles and Samndong.

Rebuilding trust through participation

The second development organization which worked in the Central Kalimantan area was the Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership (KFCP) which attempted to implement a REDD+ livelihood and reforestation project from 2009 to 2014. The KFCP was comprised of the Indonesian and Australian governments, CARE International, and BOS, despite their previous dictatorial programming towards the locals. As was the case in the DRC REDD+ program, the KFCP had to contend with the perceptions of development actors left by their predecessors. As a community member stated, “in the past, when BOS came, we filled out a questionnaire. When CARE came here [previously], they helped us with the firefighting tools. We are thankful that they gave something to us. [CARE] showed up again in KFCP. And they are the same people like before... but KFCP is much better, because they are able to reach the community.”¹⁸⁸

The locals appreciated receiving tools which allowed them to help themselves and the development organization’s efforts to communicate with them, instead of making no attempts at a local dialogue or using manipulative surveys.

Sharing information and livelihood opportunities

The KFCP took great steps to include the locals and keep them informed of the program’s activities, “and the potential payments for forest restoration and conservation.”¹⁸⁹

Field staff with university educations from the indigenous local ethnicities were hired to live in every community part-time, going “house-to-house conducting research and sharing information, and they organized frequent communitywide meetings throughout the duration of the project.”¹⁹⁰

This commitment to participation was not a passive decision; it required active facilitation on the part of the implementing development organization. In every village there was an in-depth

¹⁸⁸ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁸⁹ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁹⁰ Miles and Samndong.

process of consultation, and publicized open community meetings were held to create agreements for project entry. Locals were hired for the manual labor that was required for the reforestation activities. Jobs were also made available that were well-suited for women which allowed them to bring their young children. These labor initiatives were implemented and managed “by village organizations specifically designed for the task” so the opportunities would be distributed evenly and not be captured by elites. These actions on the part of the KFCP were delegations of power and local partnership, the second and third highest rungs in the participation types ladder and were a marked improvement over the disastrous Mega-Rice Project and the adversarial BOS program. However, the KFCP did not accede to the highest level, citizen’s control, because the main programmatic area and goals were determined by the KFCP themselves, not the community.

The beneficiary communities greatly appreciated that the KFCP program had two main facets, REDD+ and building the livelihood of the locals. In addition to pursuing their forest rehabilitation program, each village negotiated livelihoods programs. KFCP tied the ecological and livelihood programs by distributing livelihood inputs to each household once specific REDD+ goals were met.¹⁹¹ In addition to ensuring people understood the ecological conservation project, the KFCP made sure locals saw material gains from it. Another new village group was also created to review the programs and prevent corruption. The members of both the accountability and livelihoods program working groups were comprised of community members elected to their positions. These groups served as an accountability and transparency mechanisms, delegating power to those who had never before had influence in development programs affecting them. These steps were “frequently mentioned by local interviewees as a positive aspect of the REDD+ pilot project” and were an important step in building a relationship

¹⁹¹ Miles and Samndong.

based on trust and power sharing between the community and the KFCP. The villages in the program also critically had the option of withdrawing from the KFCP based on a community vote. Multiple mechanisms which allowed locals to express their opinions and complaints either anonymously or publicly were important for the program's accountability and delegation of power to the locals. The ability to withdraw and express criticism signaled an actionable transfer of power from the implementing agency to the community.

Limited accountability

However, there were concerns about the degree of the KFCP's commitment to honoring the power ceded to the locals. "Villagers expressed uncertainty about what happened to their feedback after it was received by the KFCP field staff."¹⁹² There were fears that complaints were simply absorbed by field staff, and that local concerns never progressed to the central management who had the real power over program governance and resources. It was not known if the field workers were loath to report problems to their superiors, or if the superiors choose not to respond to the complaints. Locals stated that the KFCP did not fully back up their feedback and accountability mechanisms with actions to redress their concerns, and it remains unknown if a community's request to fully withdraw from the program or demand a major change would have been honored if made. At the end of the day, it was still the development agency that held the power to make decisions and change the program or not based on the community's concerns.

Bifurcated power delegation

Though imperfect, the KFCP at least did not engage in the outright manipulation and harmful practices of its development program predecessors. Locals participating in the programs stated that the quality and quantity of the interactions between themselves and the KFCP were an

¹⁹² Miles and Samndong.

improvement, but that participation was “absent at some critical junctures of the KFCP REDD+” program.¹⁹³ The nature of power sharing and delegation in the KFCP was bifurcated. The participatory elements of the program were more in the details, the aspects which related to on-the-ground implementation, and the livelihoods program. While the KFCP practiced delegated power and partnership in these areas, the power to make big decisions was held by the agency. The accountability mechanisms focused on the lower levels of the program’s implementation, and there was dubious downward accountability for the KFCP to its participants and beneficiaries. When it came to the main goals and activities of the program, the KFCP only used participatory methods which placated, consulted, and informed the locals, instead of delegating real decision-making power. This conclusion is due to the fact that the program’s objectives were formed before the implementing agency ever entered the communities. “Although local villages could negotiate the details of the village agreements and work packages, they could not negotiate the underlying purpose, structure, and budget of the project.”¹⁹⁴ While the villages could vote to opt out of the program, they had no power to make the program continue should the decision have been made to withdraw by the development agency.

At least the KFCP REDD+ was beneficial for the communities, unlike the previous Mega-Rice and BOS projects which gravely harmed the communities. Even though the program was an externally imposed intervention, the locals expressed great hopes that the program would succeed. But the fact that ultimate control of the KFCP was not in the hands of the locals meant that the beneficial activities and terms of participation could have been changed at any time without their approval or consultation. This fact, combined with the previous negative experiences of the locals with development actors meant that with each “repeated cycle of high

¹⁹³ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁹⁴ Miles and Samndong.

hopes and let-downs,...local skepticism increases,” as does the willingness to participate in programs brought into the community.¹⁹⁵

Participation at a means to an imposed end

Participatory methods are not fully realized when the major programming priorities and decisions “are dictated by government agencies in the capital city, donor agencies from abroad, and externally-driven goals,” and not by the local communities in which the programs take place.¹⁹⁶ Accountability mechanisms which are directed upwards to assist in the realization of predetermined objectives instead of downwards to local participants is another aspect of programs which are only partially participatory. Villagers are included, but only “as users, choosers and passive consumers of predetermined values and interests rather than makers and shapers of these values and interests...[and] meeting project targets becomes more important than seeking substantive participation.”¹⁹⁷ In both cases of REDD+ development in the DRC and Indonesia, these problems were pervasive and persistent. Local participation in the programs was vital to each, but was treated as a means to achieving preconceived ends comprised of externally determined priorities without the locals having the ability to affect those major factor which would touch their lives.¹⁹⁸

Case Study Lessons

While each of the case studies presented focuses on various aspects of participatory development, they yield common insightful lessons. In all of the cases, there were resources at stake which needed to be allocated. This motivated the elites to become involved and attempt to

¹⁹⁵ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁹⁶ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁹⁷ Miles and Samndong.

¹⁹⁸ Miles and Samndong.

manipulate the allocation of those resources for their own ends. In each context it was the patriarchal elite which moved to involve itself in the development programs, and used its traditional power to marginalize women and the already less-powerful groups from having a meaningful say in managing the programs.

Given this powerful commonality, we can see the differences which resulted from having varying degrees of implementer oversight and support for the desired participatory outcomes. In instances where local elites were given control of the local development boards and free reign to allocate funds as they saw fit; the result was total capture. However, in both of the Indonesian cases, the mechanisms of selection for community representatives and the support they received from the implementing agency resulted in greater participation being realized, and the elites involved acting in a manner more beneficial for the programs. The involvement or absence of the development actor prevented or allowed the capture of the programs: a clear sign that development actors have a great degree of power over the implementation of their programs and must use it to prevent elite manipulation.

However, the cases reveal that it is nearly impossible to prevent the involvement of local elites in development projects, as seen particularly in the Indonesian UPP program. But the parameters of elite involvement and the degree of implementer support for democratic participatory mechanisms can determine if the elites help or capture programs. Elite involvement is almost a given when valuable resources are involved. Their inclusion and democratic oversight helps change elites from capturers and spoilers to supporters.

The cases also illustrate that the varied extent of participation to which implementers engage is a powerful determinant of the degree to which the marginalized in a community are able to be a part of the program. Comparing development actors' programs at various stages of the ladder of participation, from manipulation to placation to citizen's control reveal that those

which were more participatory were better received by the communities and suffered from less elite manipulation and delivered better results. But in all instances, it was the development actors who chose to which level to accede; the community never forced an implementer to be more participatory.

This choice of the extent of participation though is not a fait accompli, regardless of the decisions made by high-level implementing actors. Policies are enacted on the ground by low-level field staff and local partners. On-the-ground implementers are strongly influenced by the incentive structures and levels of support and oversight which they receive from their organizations. This was demonstrated by the disposition of fieldworkers in The Gambia towards PRAs, and the degree to which grassroots partners in Indonesia enacted democratic community board selection mechanisms. The commitment of development organizations to participation is critical, but that commitment must be institutionally supported on the ground level.

Recommendations

Development actors need to always realize that their choices substantively affect people's lives and have long-term consequences. The resources they bring to communities can positively assist them for years to come, and to do this most effectively, program implementers must cede a portion of their power to the people with whom they work. Allowing locals to articulate their own priorities through the PRA process creates programs which address their needs more accurately, instead of forcing communities to accept preconceived development plans which may have limited relevance to the local context and problems. This results in more sustainable and efficacious programs.

Respecting the rights of local participants

Agencies doing participatory development work may have to contend with the negative legacies of their predecessors. Members of communities which have contributed their time and

energy to programs yet seen no positive benefits can feel “consultation fatigue” and disillusionment from their repeated disappointments.¹⁹⁹ It is incumbent upon development actors to reach out to those locals who have only been manipulated by development agencies or excluded by elites and encourage their participation, facilitating and validating it through a genuine delegation of power. Establishing an anonymous feedback mechanism for local participants is an important step, and their concerns and complaints must be addressed by program implementers. The rules for allocating resources need to be promulgated, and decision making, budgeting, and bookkeeping, need to be conducted in a transparent manner. Enabling locals to observe and participate in open program governance helps to ensure proceedings are done in an aboveboard manner.

When conducting research during a PRA, local informants must give their meaningful consent and their anonymity needs to be assured. Locals must be able to refute the research findings, and they should benefit from the program which the research will inform.²⁰⁰ It is critical to ensure the dignity of informants throughout research, and that they are treated as people and not merely as sources of information. Data gathering should be participatory and not extractive. Locals must be able to disagree with outside development experts during the PRA process through which development program priorities are determined, and afterwards when a course of action is proposed.

Development actors must be aware of the local prejudices which exist in the communities of their programs. This is why it is necessary to conduct PRAs from multiple angles, including women and marginalized groups so these prejudices can be revealed. It is the responsibility of

¹⁹⁹ Doody, DG et al., “Evaluation of the Q-Method as a Method of Public Participation in the Selection of Sustainable Development Indicators.”

²⁰⁰ “Lean Research Working Paper.”

the development actor to use their power to ensure all subsets of the community are included, especially the marginalized.

Above all, development actors must do no harm. They must not accidentally perpetuate a harmful social structure which subjugates women and minorities, and entrenches an already established elite. When working with powerless groups, implementers must ask themselves “who is not participating?” while also being cognizant of who could be hurt or ostracized due to their participation in the program. If a powerless group or individual joins the program, would they be sticking their neck out and placed in a dangerous situation because of their challenge to the established hierarchy? Development actors, especially expatriates, need to remember that while they can always leave, their program participants rarely have that luxury.

Choosing higher levels of participation

It is within the power of the implementing development agency to determine the level of participation in which it engages. To hand power over to local communities can be a great leap for many development actors. This is why it is far more common to see participation done only in a manipulative or placatory manner, instead of engaging in genuine partnership and power delegation. But the confidence to do so can be gained from witnessing the successes which have been the result of participatory programming. Development actors intend to assist the communities in which they work, and this can be done most effectively by partnering and delegating power to the communities to enable them to realize their own goals themselves. Participation also taps into the wealth of local’s knowledge on their unique context. These insights are a tremendous asset for development programs which otherwise would be missed.

Guarding against elite capture

Even with full community control of development programs, development actors still have a vital role to play. The potential of elite capture is prevalent when resources are introduced

into a community. It is the responsibility of implementers to use their power to ensure that the already powerful do not warp a program for their own benefit at the expense of the marginalized. Development actors can anticipate the degree of capture which may be attempted by local elites and the level of resistance of potential spoilers by understanding how the type of program they are implementing will be received by those elites. If it is a program of universal benefit, the risk of capture and spoilers is low. However, if the program threatens to upend the established power hierarchy, it is much more likely to encounter resistance. Development agencies must anticipate the level of resistance they are likely to encounter and plan accordingly.

This can be done most effectively by fully supporting the participatory involvement of the community and agency staff in the field. Development agencies have the ability to determine the participatory parameters of their programs and the level of ongoing support and oversight they will receive. Potential elite capturers and field staff are alike in that they respond to incentives and take advantage of opportunities and resources. The more oversight and resources available to field staff, the greater their ability to facilitate participation and guard against elite capture and manipulation. Even programs in which there is a high level of elite involvement can still deliver positive results if they are given proper oversight and democratic accountability mechanisms are enforced.

Fostering positive community relations

Development actors must be cognizant of their own projections of power in underdeveloped settings. While the trappings of power are an important consideration in this regard, it is the actions of development actors which determine their relationships with local partners. Attitudes and behavior are key – “listening and learning, rather than lecturing and imposing – relaxing and not rushing – metaphorically sitting down and handing over the stick – embracing error and falling forward – being transparent – asking them – unlearning – using your

own best judgement at all times (as opposed to procedures developed that are not context specific)” all contribute to building a genuine and equal working relationship between development actors and their program beneficiaries.²⁰¹

It is inevitable that moments will arise when the power of development actors is starkly contrasted against that of the people with whom they work. In situations such as these, development professionals have found it best to make light of the situation and gently remind local interlocutors they are the expert on the local situation, culture and language in ways that outsiders will never be, and that their knowledge is vital for development programs. While working on an agriculture project in rural Ghana, a development researcher found a local farmer deferring to him because he was the ‘expert.’ “Do I look like a farmer?” the researcher asked. The farmer “paused, admitted [he] did not, and then started laughing.”²⁰² This recognition and humility in such interactions needs to be the norm, not the exception. Not only will such recognition help to respect the dignity of the locals, it can engender an easier rapport between development actors and program participants which can lead to more genuine feedback and information exchange.

Modeling positive change

Participatory methods in development can be an incubating element for working to change local power systems which have caused the systematic marginalization or subordination of parts of a community.²⁰³ The participatory program itself should be an example of the larger change it wishes to create. Program structures, governance, and development agency staff must be equitable, responsive, transparent, and accountable to their program’s participants and beneficiaries in contrast to negative local norms. Participatory approaches which model and

²⁰¹ Holmes, *A Participatory Approach in Practice*.

²⁰² Carr, “The Place of Stories in Development.”

²⁰³ Kyamusugulwa, “Participatory Development and Reconstruction.”

implicitly provide training in progressive community decision making can be both a means to achieving a development goal and an end unto themselves.²⁰⁴ However attempting to create changes of this nature are an uphill endeavor and must be an intentional part of programming. They cannot be expected to arise as a secondary benefit to a program of a different nature.

Limitations on structural change

It is vital that foreign development agencies not delude themselves into overly idealizing participatory development and its potential for radically changing the local power structure and methods of community decision making. “Learning and practicing new values forces local communities to overcome local opposition or social obstacles, which may prove difficult to change.”²⁰⁵ Development actors are usually personally insulated from the barbs of local social and political conformity enforcement. Foreigners must always remember that “‘voice’ and ‘choice’ can be quite costly in some conditions” for their local colleagues and program beneficiaries.²⁰⁶

Hampering the dissemination of more equitable governing practices beyond a participatory development program is the reality of a “project bubble.” In these instances, local project participants adopt the progressive decision-making procedures practiced within a program, “but do not embrace the principles behind them.”²⁰⁷ Implementers must be aware that program participants may be telling them what they think the foreigners want to hear. Locals have different ways of making decisions and relating to power within the confines of a development program, and within their traditional context. Even if locals do genuinely adopt more progressive decision-making practices and marginalized groups are empowered within a

²⁰⁴ Kyamusugulwa.

²⁰⁵ Kyamusugulwa.

²⁰⁶ Kyamusugulwa.

²⁰⁷ Casey, Katherine, “Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work?”

program, which is a laudable achievement in itself, this progress can unfortunately be highly contextual.²⁰⁸

If foreign program implementers want to change the methods of decision making or power relations within a community, it needs to be a specific element of their program. It cannot be hoped in idealist naive simplicity that a side benefit of a WASH or infrastructure project will be a transformation of existing power dynamics. If a dramatic change of the social and political structure is the intent of a development program, such a lofty goal is almost certainly going to remain unrealized. It cannot be assumed that progressive processes introduced in a development program will naturally disseminate into the broader system of local governance. Changing the decision making and power dynamics in a community is an uphill endeavor and requires intentional targeting and long-term effort.

Conclusion

The processes of international development are intimately tied to issues of power. Development seeks to change communities, through the introduction of new resources or building new skills in the local population. This process of change can present the opportunity for disadvantaged groups to increase their wellbeing, and in doing so increase their power relative to those who already hold higher positions within their communities. But local elites also have opportunities and incentives to benefit from development programs. Consequently, they can move to influence development programs and capture resources introduced into communities to maintain their power or spoil programs to prevent marginalized groups increasing their relative power.

²⁰⁸ Mubita, Libati, and Mulonda, "The Importance and Limitations of Participation in Development Projects and Programmes."

The adoption of participatory methods as a paradigm for development has increased not only the efficacy of programs by having initiatives more accurately reflect the needs of the local population; participation allows for marginalized groups to actively be a part of each step of context analysis, program design and implementation, thus helping to guard against elite capture. But participation requires development actors to cede a portion of their power to the people they are trying to assist. This results in many development actors using community participation to varying degrees. In the worst of instances, development agencies can use participation to manipulate and placate locals into joining imported preconceived programs. But if participation is embraced with genuine intent, development implementers can delegate power and form equal partnerships with locals who know their communities best.

The change to participatory approaches in the process of development, from *telling* to *asking* locals what they need, from working with elites to seeking out the marginalized, is an act of respect and recognition of the human dignity of the people development programs are seeking to benefit. Using the methods of participation with genuine intent is a signaling mechanism from the implementers of development to communities that they value the locals' contributions of time, energy and knowledge. This is the foundation for an honest working relationship on an equal footing.

Honesty, trust, and a genuine recognition of the humanity of participants is the cornerstone of participatory development. Implementers need to be forthright with their local partners and program beneficiaries about the realistic expected outcomes and limitations of their programs, and not promise unattainable expectations which would be very difficult to achieve.²⁰⁹ Development actors must not make promises to local communities that cannot be kept. Failing to meet a technical or tangible goal which could benefit a community is disappointing enough. But

²⁰⁹ "Participatory Approaches."

it would be a betrayal of trust to promise to a marginalized group that a program will change the local power structure, only to have the benefits captured by local elites. It would be a deception for development actors to promise communities that they will have a meaningful say in the programs affecting them, and then engage in manipulative participation to validate a preconceived course of action. Openly acknowledging to participants the difficult nature of development and creating more equitable power dynamics, both within communities and in development programming, is an important first step to forming an inclusive and feasible plan of action based on local knowledge.

Bibliography

- Bar-On, Arnon A, and Gerard Prinsen. "Planning, Communities and Empowerment: An Introduction to Participatory Rural Appraisal." *Int'l Soc. Work*, no. 42 (1999): 277.
- Botes, Lucius, and Dingie van Rensburg. "Community Participation in Development: Nine Plagues and Twelve Commandments." *Community Development Journal* Volume 35, no. Issue 1 (January 1, 2000): Pages 41–58.
- Carr, Edward R. "The Place of Stories in Development: Creating Spaces for Participation through Narrative Analysis." *Development in Practice* 20, no. 2 (April 2010): 219–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520903564165>.
- Casey, Katherine. "Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work?" 10 (2018): 139–63.
- Chambers, Robert. "The Origins and Practice of PRA." *World Development* 22, no. 7 (1994).
- Chambers, Robert. "Who Really Counts? Putting the First Last." *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 50 (April 2002): 759.
- "Community-Driven Development: Does It Build Social Cohesion or Infrastructure? A Mixed-Method Evidence Synthesis." *3IE Working*, Paper 30, 2018. <http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/publications/working-papers/3ie-working-paper-30/>.
- Doody, DG, P. Kearney, J. Barry, R. Moles, and B. O'Regan. "Evaluation of the Q-Method as a Method of Public Participation in the Selection of Sustainable Development Indicators." *Ecological Indicators* 9 (2009): 1129–1137.
- Fritzen, Scott A. "Can the Design of Community-Driven Development Reduce the Risk of Elite Capture? Evidence from Indonesia." *World Development* 35, no. 8 (August 2007): 1359–75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.05.001>.
- Gizelis, Theodora-Ismene, and Kristin E. Kosek. "Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail: The Role of Local Participation." *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 4 (December 2005): 363–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836705058224>.
- Hage, Leroy, and Peterson. "Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Knowledge Production." *Futures* 42, no. 3 (2010): 254–64.
- Holmes, Tim. *A Participatory Approach in Practice: Understanding Fieldworkers' Use of Participatory Rural Appraisal in Actionaid the Gambia*. Working Paper / Institute of Development Studies 123. Brighton: Inst. of Development Studies, 2001.
- Jennings, Ray. "Participatory Development as New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism," 2000.

- Kumar, S., and S. SurnameCorbridge. "Programmed to Fail? Development Projects and the Politics of Participation." *Journal of Development Studies* 39, no. 2 (December 2002): 73–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380412331322761>.
- Kyamusugulwa, Patrick Milabyo. "Participatory Development and Reconstruction: A Literature Review." *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 7 (August 2013): 1265–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.824653>.
- "Lean Research Working Paper." The Fletcher School, Feinstein International Center and MIT D-Lab, n.d.
- Miles, Wendy Beth, and Raymond Achu Samndong. "Community Participation as a Means or an End: Local Perspectives on REDD+ from Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo." *The Green Economy* 3 (2015): 101–23.
- Mubita, Aurick, Mundia Libati, and Munalula Mulonda. "The Importance and Limitations of Participation in Development Projects and Programmes." *European Scientific Journal, ESJ* 13, no. 5 (February 28, 2017): 238. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n5p238>.
- Nelson, Donald R., Marcelo T. Folhes, and Timothy J. Finan. "Mapping the Road to Development: A Methodology for Scaling up Participation in Policy Processes." *Development in Practice* 19, no. 3 (May 2009): 386–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520902808225>.
- Parpart, Jane L., Shirin Rai, Kathleen A. Staudt, and University of Warwick, eds. *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World*. Routledge/Warwick Studies in Globalisation. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- "Participatory Approaches." In *Policy Issues*. Rome: World Food Program, 2000.
- Pimoljinda, Thanawat, and Ritthikorn Siriprasertchok. "Failure of Public Participation for Sustainable Development: A Case Study of a NGO's Development Projects in Chonburi Province." *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 38, no. 3 (September 2017): 331–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2016.08.016>.
- Pretty, Jules N. "Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture." *World Development* 23, no. 8 (August 1995): 1247–63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00046-F](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00046-F).
- Saravia Matus, Silvia L., Geertrui Louwagie, Fabien Santini, Gert Guri, Marius Lazdinis, Boban Ilic, and Sergio Gomez y Paloma. "Challenges To Participatory Development In A Rural Cross-Border Area Of The Western Balkans." *Economics of Agriculture* 60 (October 2013): 623–36.
- Shand, Wayne. "Efficacy in Action: Mobilising Community Participation for Inclusive Urban Development." *Urban Forum* 29, no. 2 (June 2018): 109–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12132-017-9326-z>.
- Stedman, Stephen. "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes." *International Security* 22 (October 1997).

Tosun, Cevat. "Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries." *Tourism Management* 21, no. 6 (December 2000): 613–33. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00009-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00009-1).

Winters, Matthew S. "Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness: Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness." *International Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (June 7, 2010): 218–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2010.00929.x>.

World Bank, ed. *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*. Washington, D.C: World Bank, 1996.