

Role of Community Participation in Achieving Equitable and Inclusive Development for Social Sustainability in India

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Abstract

Social sustainability through effective community participation can lead to equitable and inclusive Development in India. The Mid-Term Appraisal of 11th Five Year Plan of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India and the experience of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) has demonstrated the need for adopting a process of change management that will ensure the sustainability of urban transformation. On the same lines, Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) laid emphasis on community participation in the process of preparing and implementing the State and City Slum Free Plans. It was widely propagated that the designing of slum redevelopment for the people should be done by the community involvement at every stage of Planning and implementation of the Programme, providing a much needed community ownership and sustainability. As Government of India's Programme Housing for all popularly known as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) after Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) has already initiated (2015–2022), it becomes imperative to review the scope and extent of community participation in the light of the learning's from similar past interventions for providing housing to urban slum-dwellers. The paper aims to discuss participation process and its various levels based on the various theoretical frameworks and add to the body of existing literature on community participation based micro-planning exercise for Slum Upgradation/Redeployment in India.

Keywords: community, equitable, inclusive, participation, slum

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BACKGROUND

Ever since, we have been groomed as urban planners the underpinning issues of urban development rather sustainable urban development has contributed to the zeal of our's in understanding the complex ekistics involved.^[1] I would like to start the discussion from the very first speech of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. On the eve of 14th Aug, 1947 he declared 'Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight

hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom'....he continued and reminded Indians ... 'That future is not one of ease or resting but incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. It further exclaims to bring freedom and the opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India. It also to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a

prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions that will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.

One of the deprivations to which Nehru made an explicit reference is 'inequality of opportunity' that emphasizes the need not only to promote development in general but also to recognize the distributional aspect of Development in a society. It also shows his concern towards the importance of participation in social change.

Participation, transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency are considered building blocks of good governance. As a known fact, people who live in a community know its needs and ways better than anyone since they internalize its culture. Participation, arguably the most powerful idea and trend currently shaping urban development thinking and practice, has been the subject of national debate in recent years.

Participation also plays a crucial role in the formulation of values and in generating social understanding. Issues of inequality and participation are particularly crucial in India, where class, caste and gender-based social disparities are pervasive. With these extremely rigid, if not immutable disparities, India during last decade witnessed enormous scope for countering the inequalities at present. The potential to change has already been demonstrated, to some extent during past decade.

Much has happened around us during numerous efforts earlier to Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY). To improve 'institutional' accountability mechanisms by the government and non-government organizations say under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) in the light of the Global consensus on the importance of involving

and empowering communities and partnering them in the development process.

Criticisms of JnNURM center on the lack of community participation to a greater extent including failure to extend credit facilities to the poor and to take a fragmented project-based rather than integrated approach. However, attempts to address many of these concerns are laid out in the approach to the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) incorporate for community Participation framework under Rajiv Awas Yojana RAY.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has already entered its Implementation phase (2015-2022), it becomes imperative to review the scope and extent of community participation in the light of the learning's from similar past interventions for providing housing to urban slum-dwellers. The paper aims to discuss participation process and its various levels based on the various theoretical frameworks and add to the body of existing literature on community participation based micro-planning exercise for Slum Up-gradation / Redevelopment in India.

The Guidelines of Community Participation released by the MoHUPA also endorses the fact that local people have enormous common sense and, consequently, are often capable of finding creative solutions to problems that are apparently technically insoluble.

All it needs is to create communication channels to ensure that mechanisms are in place for receiving such feedback both initially and over time. However they preferred to be silent on public participation as far as New Housing for all (HFA) Programme is concerned but why?

SUSTAINABLE URBAN COMMUNITY PLANNING AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The answer to the above question is may be in the revealed facts through various local level studies that inspite of the increased sense of consciousness on sustainability especially in urban Community Planning; the term is more often than not used in its very generic form and for many as a jargon. In a project frame the term sustainability refers to the achievement of envisaged goals, and on the other to the continuous sustenance of project. Sustainability in this context refers to projects that can eventually function without external assistance, and that will have a long-term impact on the environment and quality of life of local people.^[2]

Community participation is one of the ways in which the sustainability of a project can enhance.^[3] When people involve in making decisions, such as Community Planning a water supply system, they develop a sense of psychological ownership of the endeavour and feel motivated to sustain it.^[4]

EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN URBAN COMMUNITY PLANNING

For the large part of the 20th century, urban Community Planning was a field dominated by technological expert engineers. The foundational work of Ebenezer Howard and Fredrick Law Olmsted “laid the philosophical groundwork for large-scale urban Community Planning efforts” (30) that focused on rational Community Planning based on scientific principles and experiments. During the 1970s, these large-scale urban models started to be criticized because of their dysfunctions. At the same time, a change in society was more focused on social issues as part of

the Community Planning process to learn about the social dynamics of the environment and community for better Community Planning.

The idea of participation first evolved contemporary to this in the mid-1970s when Paul Davidoff first argued that it was impossible for the planner to have an overview of the entire needs of the citizens and that a method for the greater diversity of opinions to sought. This gave birth to a ‘communicative approach’^[5] that ‘attempts to make planners aware of the value of discussion, debate and information sharing...’ through a culture of ‘...greater community collaboration, consensus building, debate and discussion’.^[6]

The trajectory of participatory methodologies, though gaining ascendancy initially became famous by an array of multilateral and bilateral donors, it slowly but firmly built its grounds in rural development through Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodologies.

As the global consensus on the importance of community participation in development projects increased, the 1990s saw the rampant use of community-based environmental Community Planning. Since then, there has been no looking back. However, as the idea grew, so did the many ways of defining it. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Informal Working Group (IWG) on Participatory Approaches and Methods transcribes some useful definitions in a website dedicated to participatory project formulation.^[7]

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

Forester (1999) states that ‘because Community Planning is the guidance of

future action, Community Planning with others calls for astute deliberative practice, learning about others, as well as issues, learning about what we should do as well as what we can do'.^[5] Thus, critical attributes for a successful development program like sustainability, empowerment and learning are all associated closely with participation.

Participation' as a concept is, however, a contested subject. The World Bank Participation Sourcebook (1998) defines participation as, a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings.

For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, a practice and for still others, an end in itself. There is no one comprehensive definition that describes how participation works in development. The definition depends on the approaches to the development organization and their capacity to implement participatory approaches.

Since the late 1970s, there has been a range of interpretations of the meaning of participation in development. Some examples by Peter Oakley in his Book titled *Projects with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development* has described in detail.

Concerning rural development participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.

Participation concerns to the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.

'Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project to (or "intending to") enhancing their well-being regarding income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish'.

Other popular definitions cited from various earlier works in the similar field tend to define participation in different forms. 'Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organisations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant!'

'Participatory development stands for a partnership that is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being beneficiaries'.

'Participation is a process through which stakeholder's influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them'. A common interpretation may arrive from the discussed definitions for a broad nature of a process of participation and the fact that interpretation linked to an agency's development perspective. There are, therefore, no universal interpretations or models of participation applicable to all development programmes and projects. Cohen and Uphoff's interpretation have had a major influence regarding identifying the key stage of the project cycle in which participation could occur:

decision-making, implementation, benefits and evaluation.

In a different way, Pearse and Stiefel's interpretation have been similarly influential in suggesting a more structural and political role for participation and not one simply linked to development practice. Both of these interpretations set the tone in the 1980s with a considerable body of participatory practice, which evolved in 1990s into the notion of stakeholding.^[8]

THE PERCEPT AND THE PRACTICE

In 2005, the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation launched JNNURM with an aim to encourage reforms and fast track planned development of cities. It focused on efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/Parastatal agencies towards citizens.

Citizen participation has been acknowledged as a prime tool for the Community Planning while there is a statutory requirement for the community to be involved in the Community Planning process; this is all too often limited to a fairly basic level of participation say once-in-a-blue-moon consultation or a focus group discussion on an ad-hoc basis. This more often than not allows the public the right to know what is happening and a right to object, but there is often very little participation in the real decisions.

Public participation has been the main instrument to democratize, legitimate and enhance the quality of the policy making since 1960s.^[9] According to Arnstein civic participation refers to the redistribution of power from the authority of the citizens. From the author's point of view, there are eight types of public participation that can present as the ladder with eight steps. (i) Manipulation, (ii) Therapy, (iii) Informing,

(iv) Consultation, (v) Placation, (vi) Partnership, (vii) Delegated power, and (viii) Citizen control.^[10]

These eight steps are grouped into three categories. The first two steps correspond to the non-participation, which the main objective consists of the enabling power holders to educate the participants. The rungs 3, 4 and 5 represent degrees of tokenism and allow citizens to hear and to be heard, however without any power to ensure that their views will be taken into consideration. The last three steps of the ladder correspond to the degrees of citizen power, allowing citizens to exercise their power democratically through a public-authority partnership.

Arnstein refers to the third, fourth and fifth levels as tokenism. This is where the citizens become involved but only to certain extent. The informing level is where the citizens are informed of what is happening. This is a one-way information process, where people receive the information in newspapers, in the media, online or by other means.

Consultation is the fourth step, in which citizens' opinions can start to affect the power holder's opinion. This is a common form of citizen participation utilized in urban planning. If consultation and information are taken into account as part of the planning process, this can be effective. However, if the consultation and information are not taken into consideration at the end of the day, this step will be of limited value and could, therefore, fall back into the non-participating level.

The fifth level in Arnstein's ladder is where a citizens' opinion will start influencing the power holder's decision. Arnstein calls this level in the ladder placation. At this level, citizens may be

hand-picked to sit on a governing board that makes decisions on the planning process. According to Arnstein, this process is more likely to work if the board members are equally split (citizens and power holders), so the citizens cannot be outvoted in the process.

The last category in the participation ladder is what Arnstein calls citizen power. This is where the citizens get to influence the decision making directly. At the sixth level, the power-holders and citizens create a partnership. Arnstein considers partnership relatively high on her ladder as she believes this can keep both citizens and power holders content.

The seventh level is what Arnstein calls delegated power. At this level, the citizens can start taking control, and the power holders need to start negotiating with the citizens. Compared to the example given for placation (the fifth level), the majority of the board members would be the citizens. This would mean that the power holders would need to negotiate decisions with the board members.

The final level is what Arnstein calls citizen control. The words describe this level since it gives the citizens the power to decide. This can be achieved through referendums, but since those are often costly and difficult to arrange it would most likely slow down the process substantially. They are therefore often only utilized for larger decisions. In many cases, local authorities do not, however, give their citizens full control in such elections, but treat the results instead only as an advisory for the final decision made by the city council or other such decision-making bodies.

Similarly, in 2001 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) introduced another classification of the process of citizens' involvement in

the decision-making that incorporates the following levels of participation: information, consultation and active participation. Information is a one-way relationship between citizens and government, in which government delivers information to citizens. Consultation is a limited two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by the government. Active participation is an advanced two-way mechanism where citizens and government are partners in policy formulation, retaining the government responsibility for final decisions.

In 2007, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) had detailed the OECD's active participation level, by dividing it into three levels: involvement, collaboration and empowerment.

Involvement characterizes the process of working directly with the public to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. The collaboration represents government partnering with citizens in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Empowerment corresponds to placing final decision-making in the hands of the public. The levels of public participation provided by Arnstein, OECD and IAP have similar characteristics.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

There is an obvious need to incorporate the interests and aspirations of the public in the development process. Greater public support is needed to ensure that development programme/plans are relevant and implemented. This in turn requires provision to encourage and support the involvement and participation of local people in designing and implementing development programme/

plans during last decade Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, a few elements received more attention. These included public participation and resultant transparency and social accountability. To mainstream these elements, going beyond full-fledged tokenism laws like the Community Participation Law and Public Disclosure Law were addressed.

A very few social Community Planning activists and progressive environmental planners have raised flags of social accountability. Citizens were participation in Community Planning and Implementation of an Inclusive development programme. There is now a reasonably functional and systematic support system consisting of civil society organizations, multilateral donors/financial institutions, planners, municipal officials and academia who are involved in advocacy efforts to institutionalize public participation and social accountability mechanisms through inclusive Community Planning approach.

However, there is flip side to this whole advocacy participatory approach that criticizes the idea of participation for overriding and wrongly channelling, and hence influencing the decision-making process involved in Participatory Community Planning.

Another criticism has to do with the whole idea of looking at society/community as a homogenous group and not understanding the group dynamics of members of a community can result in decisions and points of view of the already powerful overpowering others.

This in turn raises a serious concern about the various community statements, statements of needs, vision statements and community proposals that are produced as a result of participatory exercises.

Local knowledge that often forms the base for local solutions is often at risk of being mutated by officialising strategies and these further getting manipulated in the light of the plethora of existing scientific knowledge.

Public participation is also prone to the issue of rational ignorance. Ignorance about an issue is said to be rational when the cost of educating oneself about the issue sufficiently to make an informed decision can outweigh any potential benefit one could reasonably expect to gain from that decision, and so it would be irrational to waste time doing so. Besides, citizens feel that they cannot influence final Community Planning decisions. In such cases, they decide to ignore the possibility of involvement and participation. Economists say that these poorly informed citizens are rationally ignorant. Rational ignorance appears independent of the implemented participative method and is a term most often found in political science and economics, particularly in public choice theory.

The larger question is, should one endure the risk of the flip side of participation to achieve the overall goal and attributes of participatory development, i.e., sustainability, empowerment and learning? Are these attributes always attached to participatory exercises taking place, or are there any others? Can participatory methods be applied to achieve sustainable solutions, empower people and facilitate learning?

Especially in the Indian context, where we exclaim to be the one amongst the largest Democratic Governance structures, it becomes very important to look into why we need to involve the people in decision-making and how it can be done in different ways.

One also needs to understand that is public participation open to citizen views and input, involve people representative of all citizens, and communicate to participants what they need to know to provide relevant input? Recent experiences and efforts towards involving grassroots level participation in Planning & Implementation of slum improvement Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Projects have revealed the facts. The Community participation or public participation as envisaged is often difficult and very cumbersome.

CONCLUSION

Urban communities are complex systems and networks that shape the character of society and define the life quality of city dwellers. Rapid urban expansion (sprawl), inequality and social conflicts effects the connection between different sectors of society and also the perception, thus, the larger public agenda always influence to compromise on the possible potential of low-income communities in becoming active participants in the welfare programme. The so-called community-driven initiatives envisaged within comprehensive urban renewal programme encourage sustainability of projects and improve the links with the rest of the city. However, the community participation has limitations; involvement of all sectors of society and support from government agencies are essential to promote holistic urban renewal.

Although culture and context are crucial for conceiving integral strategies, the core elements of sustainable urban renewal programme present similarities when analysed regarding the process of planning and development; elements that can be classified regarding physical development, authenticity, social development and governance. These components become the framework for formulating comprehensive slum upgrading

programme, with community-based initiatives and participation as the foundation for improving the built environment.

Public participation process is not a standard process and one size usually never fits all. When a process for participation is decided upon, a decision has to be made on what kind of process should be used and at what level the citizen participation should be and to what extent. Participative processes generate distinctive demands and demand made-to-order solutions, so different approaches can be used and have been tested over the years, such as workshops, open houses, community meetings, surveys, etc. However, despite the achievement and recognition in participation field, a long road lies ahead. The main argument is not that everything will lead to dead-end if actual participation does not happen, but the real challenge lies in synchronizing the elasticity of community needs with the most rigid frames of centralized planning. Community participation as fundamentals of sustainable development, not only reconstruction is enough, but people's participation is important for social sustainability. Sometimes pseudo-participation may result in public satisfaction but it may not be fruitful to meet sustainable developments goals in Urban Community Planning projects.

As the prevailing methods of involving the public in the planning and implementation process are often limited. In both extent and effect participation is often determined by the organizational structures within a local planning authority there is a felt need for systems like E-government tools that may provide municipal planning departments with an alternative means to inform and engage their citizenry. The need to examine the use of information and communication technology tools to promote citizen participation in the

planning process may help in addressing the underpinning issues of public participation in sustainable community planning.

The efforts to attract the people's participation shall be more effective when the participation process executed at an appropriate time and phase, in that peoples' participation may result in social sustainability to meet suitability in community planning projects.

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