

Exploring Community E-Participation for Effective Pro-Poor Planning

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Abstract

The paper analyse the development of the conceptions regarding public participation in the last decades. Further paper explores to what extent these conceptions can be used by local and State authorities in order to improve interaction among government authorities and citizens in terms of Slum Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Projects. The study shall focus on the use of Information Communications Technology (ICTs) to provide innovative means of access to, and participation in Slum rehabilitation and redevelopment. Study assesses the potential that how web-enabled E-Participation/ICTs (electronic participation) can facilitate in participatory planning.

Keywords: community participation, E-participation, rehabilitation, re-development, slum, web-enabled

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BACKGROUND

The 2011 census has exclaimed a growing urban population and continued migration from rural to urban areas. Nearly 4500 cities and towns have some form of elected municipal body following the 74th constitutional amendment. Urban centers are bursting to their seams, with lack of planning and services for its inhabitants.

Recent initiatives have been made by the union Government about its policy commitments towards urban development with focus on basic services to urban poor. These include such populist slogans as “slum-free cities”, “inclusive cities”, “cities without poverty”, etc. recent schemes are launched such as Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) which purpose to ensure security of tenure for the urban poor. While the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) focused its investments on 65 large cities, it has yielded little in terms of reforms in

urban governance. There is still an absence of a shared political vision and agreed roadmap to make cities in India “livable” for all its citizens.

In this current scenario, where is the voice of community? Community based Organizations of the urban poor have grown, but have not kept pace with the growing numbers of the poor; new forms of poverty in urban areas (where a TV set and mobile co-exist with malnutrition of children and chronic ill-health of women) are not being articulated; community actions to promote transparency and accountability of municipal bodies are irregular and ad-hoc; experimentation of new approaches to service delivery in urban areas is seriously lagging.

The Global report on Human Settlements 2003 By United Nations Human Settlements Programme presents the challenge of the slums exclaiming slums

as a representative of the worst of urban poverty and inequality. Slums also demonstrate the various overlapping forces such as extreme poverty, inadequate infrastructure planning, ill-conceived local policies, unrealistic regulatory frameworks, inadequate institutional capacity and larger macroeconomic factors. Besides various disparities, slums often demonstrate ingenuity and elasticity. It is observed that extremely disadvantaged section of the society have organized them in the face of different day-to-day challenges. a multimedia sourcebook on adaptive and proactive approaches to urban slums by Barjor Mehta, Steffen Janus, Arish Dastu defines in detail the list of challenges faced by slum dwellers is long, and many of these disadvantages reinforce each other in a vicious cycle. The book also refers to the resourcefulness often demonstrated by slum dwellers in the face of such adverse circumstances is remarkable.

The Facts reveal by the popular literature demonstrates that slum dwellers collectively make a substantial contribution to city economy there by contributing there bit in National GDP as well. It is also understood that many towns and cities would cease to function efficiently without the household,

The heated controversy over "citizen participation," "citizen control," and "maximum feasible involvement of the poor," has been waged largely in terms of exacerbated rhetoric and misleading euphemisms. To encourage a more enlightened dialogue, a typology of citizen participation is offered using examples from three federal social programs: urban renewal, anti-poverty, and Model Cities. The typology, which is designed to be provocative, is arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the plan and/or program.

Fig. 1. Quote from Arnstein, S.R., 1969. A ladder of citizen participation, Journal of the American Institute of planners. building construction, drivers, mechanics and even the sanitary workers that live in slums. Decades have passed with experimentation

on.

Alternative approaches to planning and improving slums. The previous experiences with slums and urban poverty have shown what works, where and under what conditions. Popular studies exclaim that solutions lies not so much in providing a portable drinking water connections or constructing affordable shelters only, but in improving grassroots governance, in strengthening the capacities of urban local authorities and the communities themselves. The most important aspect is developing strategic and inclusive responses, involving the slum and poor communities through participation at different level so as to impart the power of decision making.

THE PERCEPT AND THE PRACTICE

Community participation in any Government programme related to slum improvement and upgradation has been acknowledged as a prime tool for the planning and implementation, rather it is the most primary tool to start with. The process of community involvement at every stage of programme is made mandatory in many Government programme. While there is a statutory requirement for the community to be involved in the micro 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 about what is happening and a right to object but there is often very little participation in the real decisions.

Owing to the importance of public participation it has been historically demonstrated as a primary factor in the development of democratic societies since 1960s. But nowadays, with the inclusion of ICTs in day-to-day lives of the public, these instruments have also facilitated

generation of new forms of public participation a platform to raise their voice, thought and opinion through e-participation. E-participation is a means for improving public access to the policy & decision making. The E-Participatory planning also incorporates a more interactive and collaborative environment for understanding public aspiration. United Nations (UN) provides benchmarking of its member states according to the e-participation index since 2003. UN, 2008 provides, the assessment is based on national governments and selected ministries web portal, without taking into account the local level initiatives. Still, there are studies from all over the world aimed to restock this gap and evaluate e-participation initiatives promoted by local authorities.

According to Arnstein civic participation refers to the redistribution of power from the authority to the public. Arnstein exclaimed that there are eight types of public participation that can be presented as ladder with 8 rugs (Figure 2): The first two i.e. manipulation and therapy represents no participation whereas. The next set of three rugd i.e., informing, consultation and placation represent the degree of Tokenism. The last set of rugs i.e. partnership, delegated power and citizen control demarcates the degree of citizen power allowing citizens to democratically exercise their power through a public- authority partnership.

Around 2001 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) introduced a similar classification of the participatory process of public“ involvement in the decision making and planning that incorporates information, consultation and active participation as major levels of Participation. The information is treated as one-way relationship between community and

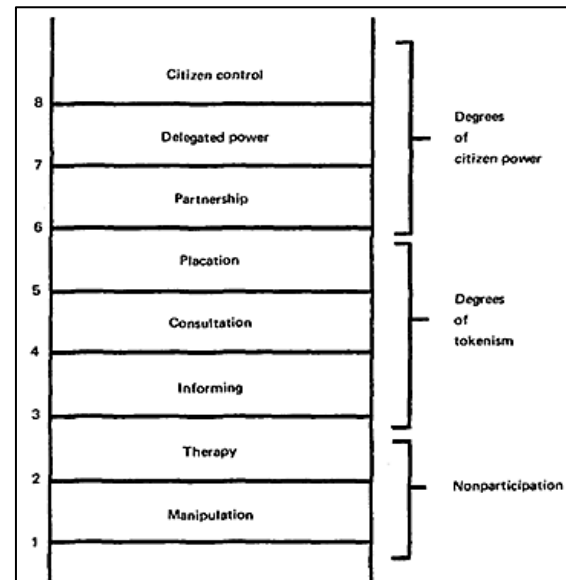


Fig. 2. Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation.

Government in a way that governments delivers information to public in various forms. The second level under the suggested framework is consultation with a preposition of limited two- way relationship in which community provides necessary feedback and suggestions on the matters defined by the government. The top level of participation in the framework is designated to active participation defining it as an advanced two-way mechanism where community and government are partners to each other in formulating a policy, development planning and retaining the Government's responsibility for final decisions after active community participation.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has on the similar lines of participation levels defined and detailed in the previous section have presented the active participation level, by dividing it into three major levels like involvement, collaboration and empowerment corresponding to OEDD's Information, consultation & active participation.

The description of these participation levels states that involvement being first shall describes the process of working

directly with the community and ensuring that community concerns are constantly heard, understood and considered in the resultant plan. The second level described in the framework is collaboration which represents government partnering with public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of substitutes and the identification of the preferred solution. The top level has been described as empowerment this level of participation demonstrates a place where the final decision-making in the hands of the community. The comparison above shows that the levels of community participation as defined by Arnstein, OECD and IAP demonstrate similar characteristics.

The paper in the next section tries to explore that whether the level of participation as revealed by various studies are as relevant to the present frameworks of web based participatory tools. The popular references from last couple of decades reveal that around mid-1990's a number of examples were developed for the use of GIS technology in community participation framework. The study of the literature provides an understanding on specific methods which were developed by Shiffer (1995) concluded that there has been increased access to relevant information. The implementation of a collaborative planning system has helped to increase the levels of communication among participants in a group planning situation which in due course had a positive effect on the quality of plans and decisions made by the planning authority. The literature available on various e-Participatory Tools developed over the last few years reveal that they have mirrored traditional planning process to ascertain whether or not such systems have a role to play within the development planning system as far as Europe & US countries are concerned. The efforts in the directions to improve

participation level by the use of e-tools have been complimented over the same time period by the British Governments commitment to the E- Government agenda. The similar agenda has also been propagated through DFID funded MPUSP & APUSP programme to an extent in India through slum development/upgrade projects. The last decade initiatives and the ongoing programme in India for urban renewal and basic services to poor under JnNURM and RAY followed by Housing for all Mission under PMAY also endorse similar approaches. The online monitoring system developed through Center for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad for MoHUPA has been able to atleast identify and tag the details of the individuals proposed to be benefited through the slum improvement programme of Ministry of Housing & poverty alleviation, Govt. of India. But as a researcher my key question to ask though is how "are these on line monitoring systems can be facilitated as online/web based e-participatory tools with an objective to increase community based participation in the programme?"

In Indian context, where we exclaim to be the one amongst the largest democratic Governance structures, it becomes more important to look in to why we need to involve the people in decision making and how it can be done in different ways. With the inclusion of ITC in our day – to – day lives one also needs to understand that what should be the framework for community participation for slum R&R projects. The community participation as being envisaged shall certainly help in addressing the grass root level issues of the concerns and provide a much effective platform open to citizen views and input. It may be appropriate to understand that to involve people, their representative and communicate to participants, what they need to know to provide relevant input?

Who, where and when they must be given the assess to participate. Several previous experiences of traditional process with huge efforts towards involving grass roots level participation in Planning & Implementation of slum improvement R&R Projects have revealed the facts that the Community participation or public participation as envisaged is often difficult and very cumbersome. But when we look at the trends from the beginning of this millennium, the expansion in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have notably affected various aspects of human's life and so as the participatory approaches in various slum development programme. Information & Technology have enabled conception of the so called electronic dimension „e“, ensuing in paradigm shifts of already existing and in fact unalterable notions related to business, governance and education sectors across the society. In this background, the way people interact, participate and collaborate in the modern world has significantly modified.

THE RATIONALE

There is an obvious need to incorporate the interests and aspirations of community in their development programme, especially of those populations living in settlements that lack infrastructure and services. Larger public support is sometimes required to ensure that development programme/plans are relevant to the need of the ultimate user. It is also required to successfully implement and monitor these programmes. This in turn requires provision to encourage and support the involvement and participation of local people in designing and implementing development programme/plans. In previous and ongoing urban renewal initiatives/transformation, a few elements received more attention such as physical infrastructure and basic services but one need to include public participation and resultant transparency and social

accountability in the same so as to make then more effective. In order to mainstream these elements, going beyond tokenism, full-fledged laws like the Community Participation Law and Public Disclosure Law have been addressed by the supreme level of Government, the grass root implementation and assess to the community is still under way.

Only a handful of social planning activists and progressive environmental planners have raised flags of social accountability and Community participation in Planning & Implementation of Inclusive development programme, there is now a reasonably functional and systematic support system consisting of Non-Government & civil society organizations, multi-lateral donors/financial institutions, planners, municipal officials and academia who are involved in advocacy efforts to institutionalize community public participation and social accountability mechanisms in Slum Improvement R&R Programme through inclusive planning approach. This is also happening to an extent. But as the prevailing methods of involving the public in the planning and implementation process are often limited in both extent and effect and are often determined by the organisational structures within a local planning authority there is a felt need for systems like E-participation, E-Planning tools, or E-government tools that may provide development planning authorities with an alternative means to inform and engage their public.

As per the studies it is evident that the on-line public consultation exercises rather a e- participation through web-based of Mobile based participatory framework can be used as a means to augment traditional methods of participation such as public meetings, focus groups and consultation documents. Pickles in 1995 revealed in his publication that similar efforts the past with introduction of GIS have been

criticized by some geographers and social scientist as being an elitist technology. It has been viewed as being a technology that has handed increasing power to those in authority while giving community organization and the general public less of a say in the decision making processes due to a lack of access to, and understanding of the technology. Further it is needed to study the use of information and communication technology e-government & e-planning tools to promote community participation in the planning process especially for Slum improvement rehabilitation and redevelopment programme. One should also explore the dominance of simple, information-based, e-participation tool may be web enabled.

LEARNING TO BE CARRIED FORWARD

Little research has been done on online participation in urban planning especially on the Slum R & R Programme in developing countries and the applicability of technology to enable citizen participation as well. New research are, however, underway that focuses on the use of technology to enable better governance through e-participation.

The Characterizing e-participation in policy-making a paper presented by Macintosh, A in 2004 at 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences and other popular literature available on E-participation demonstrates 3 major levels of e-participation such as e-enabling, e- engaging and e-empowerment that demonstrate to information, consultation and active participation of the OECD level discussed in the earlier section of the paper. The beginning level of e-participation i.e. E-enabling refers to differentiated by giving support to those public that would not typically access the internet serving them to take benefit of the large amount of information available and

dealing with the aspects of ease of access and understanding of information. Further level of participation in the framework is referred as E-engaging which provides the platform to facilitate a deep assistance and supporting deliberative discuss on policy issues through consulting with more community. Final level of participation is referred as e- empowerment has concerns with the original level of OECD's public active participation and influence on policy planning and formulation. However a similar comparison presented by Tambouris taking in to account the IAP's classification of public participation as discussed earlier in this paper the information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment and try to transfer them in to the electronic dimension, the resulting framework which comes is in the form of e-informing, e-consulting, e-involving, e-collaborating and e-empowerment level of e-participation in development planning.

With the help of comparing the e-participation levels proposed by Macintosh and Tambouris as briefed above demonstrates that e-enabling level participations to e-informing, e-engaging relates to e-consulting, e-empowerment is divided into e-involving and e-collaborating levels in, while e-empowerment has no correspondent as in the final decision making is delivered into the dispenses of the community. Comparable to public participation, when going up the e- participation levels, the public's role deviates from the information user to the active decision maker. It is also noticeable that the purpose of the ICTs' uses shall also vary in the e-informing stage (or e-enabling stage) ICTs shall be used to acquire information regarding Programme & policy making promoted by the government where as in second scenario the e-consulting stage (or e-engaging stage) ICTs shall allow public

opinions collection on the issues distinct by government authority and finally in the higher e-participation levels (e-empowerment; e-involving, e-collaborating and e-empowerment). ICTs supports in better understanding of the community aspirations and in their motivation to collaborate with the government and one another in programme formulation, planning and decision making procedures.

E-participation tools have been used in a variety of participatory processes but less instances have been documented in case of Slum R& R programme. The paper seeks opinion from the concerned academicians, practitioner, professionals and officials involved in these processes to provide open views on whether these simple e-participation frameworks can be incorporated into existing methods in order to enhance the communication, education, and capacity building goals in order to achieve the desired community

participation goals. Discussion can be invited from focus groups on whether these e-tools can also form the basis for potential new decision-making and policy processes, which meet all three goals of public participation: communication, capacity building, and access to decisions. It can assist in finding better solutions to sitting and juxtaposition issues by encouraging understanding among and across stakeholders.

It may be understood from various literature studies that the degree of participation has been very poor in conventional top-down development/planning process. The conventional decentralized planning techniques often lean to keep exclude community from planning process that severely limits their ability to convey the intended results at local level and strengthen the centralizing tendencies in decision-making. Hence a newer approach may be adopted as suggested under;

Characteristics	From 'PROJECT' approach	To 'PROCESS' approach
FOCUS	Infrastructure development and physical planning	People / Community led development and planning
PLANNING	Top-down	Bottom up
CHANGE	Linear, controlled	Iterative, uncontrollable
PEOPLE	"Beneficiary"	"Partnership"
BEHAVIOR	Dominating	Empowering
TYPICAL PROCEDURES	Logical framework	Negotiated principles and processes
ACCOUNTABILITY	Upwards	Downwards and 360 degrees
SPREAD	Replicated	Catalysed
OUTCOMES	Infrastructures, standardized	Relationships, diverse

Source: Adapted from, Towards Mainstreaming Social Accountability: Mapping of Participatory Planning in East Asia, A Study Conducted by PRIA Global Partnership in partnership with ANSASEA, Introduction to Participatory Planning and Social Accountability, Chapter 1, Pg- 6, July 2010.

E-PARTICIPATION AS AN

ENABLING TOOL

E-participation facilities are usually web-enabled mapping applications which are based on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), they can be equipped with interactive interfaces for visualizing and editing of spatial situations this technique is quite helpful in planning remote and unreachable slum areas. Web-based applications also enable stakeholders to easily access comprehensive and targeted information in form of maps, pictures, videos or 3D visualizations and also provide the possibility to query, measure and edit maps, express their views, comments, opinions and feedback on the planning issue and actively involve with planning authorities in desired phases of Planning & Implementation of the Slum R& R Programme. Additionally, the use of decision support systems may also be equally beneficial which are created to support the monitoring and evaluation of submissions in such programmes.

Finally a periodic assessment of Government's e-participation practices may provide a vital data on to what extent public is participating in e-collaborating initiatives (or e-empowerment, depending on the classification of the e-participation levels) by means of electronic participation in Slum Re-habitation & Re-development initiative. The further studies may focus on the national level initiatives analysis with perspectives of local level, the e-participation initiative which may be a success among the urban poor community/project beneficiaries, may be assessed by creating a web enabled Community participation platform to be incorporated in existing Online Programme Monitoring and evaluation systems.

CONCLUSION

Urban planning is usually considered to be a technical, expert-driven exercise drawing on existing official data, which in many

cases are out dated, resulting in plans with little or no connection with the existing environment and reality. Plans in most cases are not inclusive and pro-poor, and the recognition and development of the marginalized and excluded sections is ignored. Further, prepared plans are unrelated to the local Government's capacity to implement them. The local populations for whom the plans are prepared remain unaware of them and have therefore little or no ownership of these plans.

The city comprehensive planning processes, involves sophisticated and innovative public participation techniques. However, like in most Indian cities, comprehensive planning in Cities take place in a political environment involving citizens with diverse views, interests, and backgrounds (stakeholders form every walk of life). India reflects a spirit of democracy and innovation. The tone of the projects of Slum Improvement rehabilitation and redevelopment programme has been documented in the, which proposed challenging conventional participation approaches through a range of innovative techniques.

Several decisions made about Slum Improvement rehabilitation and redevelopment programme interventions may reflect goals for participation not considered here. Even when the results do not satisfy shared criteria (such as representativeness), they provide useful and necessary results. The evolution of professional practice requires both deliberation about the definition and purpose of participation, as well as empirical investigation of specific participation approaches.

In particular, the only way to investigate how new technologies like the Internet can be utilized effectively in professional

practice is through learning from experimentation. Despite the variety of participation methods used in the recent initiatives, I found that large segments of the city have not been consulted and some voices have been heard disproportionate to their size in the city. Even the most successful participation approaches have not always clearly described the scope of the plan, or asked sufficiently focused questions to garner useful results. The most innovative features, including the community outreach meetings, have been organized in an *ad hoc* way and did not affect the overall participation approaches.

Recent development of large scale Collective Intelligent system coupled by the web enabled Planning tools has the potential to enable a researcher to generate, analyse and compute the data from a diverse set of stakeholders. This suggest that they may be useful helping participants in understanding the interaction between scenario variables and produce more complex, rich narratives of the future.

The potential of web enabled Community participation GIS planning tool with large scale collective intelligence system, if realized, suggests that it may be possible to incorporate larger, more diverse perspectives, with more in-depth and rigorous analysis, in a way that is also rapid and more cost effective. There is a need to do a study and share the research findings with the policy makers and larger community of development practitioners on a continuous basis to ensure a constant awareness of the roles, responsibilities of various actors in urban development.

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