

EVALUATING PARTICIPATION PROCESSES IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In this study evaluation methodology is discussed in the context of a participatory community health development project. The paper presents a study of the participatory dynamics of the project and explores the implications thereof for the evaluation of participation. The principal source of data is interviews conducted with 13 selected participants in the project. Analysis of interview data is done using a structured hermeneutic method specifically developed for the purpose. The methodology and findings of this study are discussed in relation to the need to find ways of evaluating participatory processes. The authors develop a set of objectives which they suggest should be central to the evaluation of participatory processes in such contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In the following review of the literature on community development and community health development, the concept of “participation” and the related concepts of “partnership” and “dialogue” are discussed. These terms may be loosely grouped together because they are all used to refer to engagement in joint action by actors who are otherwise distinctive in their aims and interests. In the present study we focus mainly on dialogue, the participatory activity of coming to joint understanding (i.e. participatory understanding), rather than on joint action *per se*. The reason for this is that the project we researched never proceeded beyond the proposal drafting stage. It is obviously important to extend studies such as this one in contexts where projects have been implemented and in the context of relatively successful projects, in which case the focus would extend to the examination of participatory action.

The paper shows that participation between partners who are grossly different in terms of access to resources, education, power and the sense that their own individual efforts can make a difference, creates a communicative problematic which has not been adequately resolved or theorised in the literature. In relation to the nature of

problems involved in participation, the study presents ideas about how we can approach the evaluation of participatory processes. We attempt to set out a number of key objectives for “participation process” evaluation.

PARTICIPATION, PARTNERSHIP AND DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Participation

The term “participation” is widely used in the community health development literature. The term seems to have gained significance with the ascendance of the “primary health care” (PHC) movement. Kasege (1991) suggests that participation of communities in health planning and in the implementation of health services is the cornerstone of PHC.

Bennett (1992) points out that in the PHC literature participation has come to mean different things in different contexts and he has emphasized the need to understand that there are different forms of community involvement and these should be distinguished apart rather than, as they presently are, lumped together as if participation refers to a clearly discernible set of

processes. The view that participation refers to a range of different processes is supported by Rifkin (1986) in a review of over 200 PHC projects.

Not only in community health development, but in the development field in general, the term participation has enjoyed wide use, for at least the past 15 years. "Participation" is a key concept in the "people centred" approach to development (Brown, 1985; Erasmus, 1992; Cohen & Uphoff, 1977; Korten, 1990; Moulik, 1987; Santhanam, Sastry & Vijayakumar, 1982; UNRISD, 1979) and in the "participatory research movement," which emerged alongside the people centred development approach (Brown, 1985; Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993). Here, as in the PHC movement, the term has been so freely applied that its explanatory value has been compromised. Definitions of participation refer to a vast range of different processes, e.g. the capacity for influencing decision making processes at all levels of societal organisation (UNRISD, 1979), direct sharing in decision making (cf. Santhanam et al., 1982), the capacity to take initiative in developing one's society (Moulik, 1989), and being in a position to benefit from a project (cf. Cohen & Uphoff, 1977). It is not surprising that there prevails a degree of confusion amongst policy makers, social scientists, development workers and local people involved in development, as to what participation is (Rahnema, 1990). There is need to clarify the meaning of the term "participation" which seems to have become something of a "buzz-word," freely used to legitimise any and all community development projects.

Partnership

The literature on "partnership" deals with relationships between the formal and community-based, nonprofit sectors in the area of policy formulation and implementation. The term "partnership" is often used in ways which seem very close to the participation concept (cf. Billis, 1984, 1993; Kramer & Grossman, 1987; Mellor, 1985; Salomen, 1987). The term "partnership" has been used to describe many forms of interaction between such diverse groupings as governmental departments, volunteer social work agencies, local common interest groups and individuals who may or may not be in positions of power. It may refer to a pragmatic relationship involving no more intensive communication than fortnightly talks on the telephone (Mellor, 1985), or it may involve "elaborate" and "extensive" arrangements linking government and the nonprofit sector (Salomen, 1987).

The fairly well developed body of literature in the area of partnership has generally not been drawn on in the development of thinking in the participatory community development area. The literature on participation and partnership seem to have similar concerns and there could be a more fruitful sharing of ideas

between these two bodies of literature. However, both are in need of defining more clearly the different forms of participation (partnership) and the way in which different modes of participation "interact." The third concept which we review is "dialogue," which deals more specifically with the interactional dimensions of participation/partnership.

Dialogue

Several authors in the field of participatory development have stressed the relationship between the concepts of participation and dialogue (cf. Boeren, 1992; Genganje & Setty, 1991; Rajakutty, 1991). The Bhoomi Sena project in India (Oakley & Marsden, 1985), often thought of as a model of participatory development, has taken dialogue as a guiding principle. In this context dialogue is regarded as a kind of communicative context which enables participatory development to take place. Through dialogue a commonality of individual perceptions is facilitated and this is used as a basis for social action which represents the common good.

Schrijvers (1991) in an article entitled "Dialectics of a dialogical ideal" is somewhat more pessimistic than are the above authors, about the possibility of dialogue in development contexts. She outlines the difficulties involved in bringing about dialogue in the context of two participants wielding different degrees of power in a research situation. She suggests that dialogical forms of communication can be established most easily if there are only small power differentials in the research situation, a condition she describes as "studying sideways" as opposed to "studying down" or "studying up."

Habermas's (1984) "theory of communicative action" outlines the "speech conditions" of ideal dialogue. These conditions refer to communicative contexts where there is no domination of the dialogue by one of the participants to the dialogue or by one of the perspectives represented and there is an equality of discursive opportunity between participants. However, it seems that even if micro-contexts are created in which power dynamics are minimized, dialogue is not necessarily enabled. In a case study Ellsworth (1989) illustrates this point by showing how the dialogical dynamics of marginalization continued to operate even in a situation which was explicitly designed to overcome marginalization.

Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1972) sees dialogue both as a means of communication and as a goal towards which communication strives. His work consists of a sustained reflection upon the socio-political and cultural process that militate against "inter-subjectivity;" i.e. co-constituted and shared understanding. He shows how in the relationship between oppressed people and their oppressors there is a breakdown of the dialogical process leading to inter-subjectivity. His dialogical methodology has been

widely applied in "community building," but it seems to be rather less applicable in transition situations, where "partners" meet in a discursive environment where the structurally powerful are advantaged in terms of access to legitimate and dominant modes of discourse.

The authors believe that it is exactly in those situations where dialogue is not easily attained that participatory methodology is usually proposed by funders as the most appropriate approach. Ironically, if dialogue is not possible because of inequality of discursive opportunity and imbalances of discursive power, participatory development work is left without a *modus operandi*. Development work requires joint action and decision making between partners who differ in the degree of familiarity with, and access to, dominant modes of discourse. We believe that a concept of "dialogue enablement" is appropriate in such projects and Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1996) make some suggestions about how dialogue can be fostered in contexts where dialogical capacities are unequal.

PARTICIPATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In contemporary South Africa, in almost all spheres of public service, there is an acknowledgement of the need for transformation of existing services. There is a widespread recognition that this process requires "community participation" in the planning and implementation of new services. The planners of such services (including those in need of the services and service providers) would typically meet in adverse "speech conditions" (cf. Habermas, 1984). The situation of transition necessitates the meeting of parties who are grossly different in terms of their relative capacities to engage in planning and implementing new service programmes. The transition situation also involves the meeting of participants who were until fairly recently deeply committed to struggle rather than co-operation. The history of this struggle and the legacy of the past inevitably continue to create a degree of suspicion and mistrust and will arguably do so for some time to come. These factors militate against and undermine the development of shared understanding and co-operative action.

Rahnema (1990) suggests that the use of the concept of participation in development sometimes obscures real power differentials between "change agents" and those on the "receiving end" of the development relationship, and sometimes serves as a pleasing disguise for manipulation. We believe that this is especially true in transition situations where democratic procedures are all too often regarded as a sufficient safeguard of community interests.

In the community development arena the superficial application of ostensibly democratic procedures may

serve to legitimize relations of domination under the guise of correct procedure. For example, voting for the acceptance of motions before the full implications have been adequately understood and fully considered by all participants. Another example is the acceptance of paths of action through consensus, but which is achieved only by withholding objections in deference to the need to reach consensus. The amicable dialogics of negotiation may gloss over deeply problematic issues and lead to the creation of future problems. When unresolved conflicts of interest emerge later, the expression of the previously glossed over interests can be perceived as a set of new demands brought to the situation, and this can be seen as unco-operative and lead to an impasse. A community development project might allow the continuation of a problematic relationship between two parties which is contrary to the *real* interests of one of the parties, but which is not taken into account because of the need to discuss more immediate and overt problems, and to come to (superficial) agreement.

For the above and many other conceivable reasons agreement on a proposal or plan of action should not be thought of as a recipe for serving the interests of the parties concerned, or as a measure of participation. Lack of resistance is not a sufficient justification for saying that a community project involved participation. The question is then raised as to how participatory agreements can be made and how participatory action can be planned, in such a way as to facilitate a meeting of interests which can be sustained over time and endures beyond the planning phase. This issue is addressed by Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1996), but the understanding of the concepts of participation, partnership and dialogue and the question of how they are best facilitated, needs more attention. We now turn to examine how participation processes can be evaluated.

HOW CAN PARTICIPATION BE EVALUATED?

Rifkin (1986), building on Cohen and Uphoff's (1977) seminal work on community participation in rural development, suggests that evaluation of participation in primary health care projects should ask the following three questions. (1) "Why do planners choose participation as an approach in a particular case?" This relates to the objectives which the funders set out to achieve by pursuing a community participation approach. (2) "Who participates?" This relates to description of the groups and individuals which participate, recognizing that communities are not homogenous (cf. Butchart & Seedat, 1990), and that participation is usually led by elite groups within communities. (3) "How do people participate?" This relates

to the types of participation involved in a project, e.g. whether people participate by benefitting from the project, by participating in the activities of the project, by implementing health programmes, by monitoring and evaluation or by planning programmes. These questions seem to provide a useful foundation for assessing the characteristics of participation in a given situation.

Rifkin et al. (1988) suggest that participation processes (as opposed to "types" of participation) should be evaluated in the following areas; needs assessment, leadership, organization, resource mobilization and management. They suggest that it is necessary to evaluate participation in each of these areas of a project as it changes over time. Their method has been applied in Sweden (Bjaras et al., 1991) and according to Bennet (1992) it is now proposed as a useful tool for projects funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

The literature appears to be contradictory on whether participation should be evaluated by the participants themselves or whether outside evaluation is necessary. In the primary health care literature it is often said (Feuerstein, 1980; Kasege, 1991; Tandon, 1982) that evaluation methodology should follow the participatory research model. According to this view evaluation planning, implementation and interpretation are to be done jointly by the community members and the professional researcher. The advantage of this approach is that it deepens participation and if successfully achieved it enhances the acceptance of the findings amongst the parties involved.

On the other hand, Billis (1993) emphasizes the need to evaluate "partnerships" without becoming a part of the process and suggests the need to take an "executive role." He notes the difficulties experienced in a particular case where the researcher attempted to study a partnership between a welfare bureaucracy and a non-profit welfare organization in Britain. The researcher in this instance gradually withdrew from the "partnership programme" evaluation as the methodological approach, itself based on assumptions of "partnership," began to be strained. He shows how an evaluation process can easily become embroiled in the power struggles, tensions and alignments which are part of the participation situation, especially in projects which are hampered by such difficulties.

We find the literature lacking in ideas about how to evaluate the relational and communicative dynamics between partners, which can only be described by assessing relationships from both sides of the interaction. Billis (1984) and Kramer and Grossman (1987) develop some preliminary ideas about the different ways in which partners can interact, but there is need for further developments of these ideas, and need for development of methods which evaluate how participants interact.

Although there has been some useful development of ideas about how to evaluate the different types of

participation and the aims of participation, there is further need for methodologies which give access to the relational nuances involved in participation processes. Having in mind the need to develop greater understanding of participation processes and their evaluation, we engaged in the following study of the participatory dynamics of a project which never proceeded beyond the project proposal formulation stage. What follows thus relates to a limited form of participatory action; namely, participation in the context of proposal formulation.

THE STUDY

The Context

The context of the study was a community health development initiative which attempted to bring together a range of "partners" in drawing up a proposal for a health development project, which was to be sponsored by an international donor organization if it fulfilled certain criteria determined by them. The idea of partnership was broadly conceived by the sponsors as a voluntary coming together for the purpose of conjointly engaging in an activity of mutual benefit. The partnership was intended to take place between health services, training institutions and communities in need and was to be aimed at assisting communities in addressing health issues identified by people in those communities as being critical to them.

The following participants were involved: a university; local community based organizations and political organizations; local development and welfare "non-governmental organizations;" local health institutions (including a psychiatric hospital; a general hospital and a number of community health clinics); individual members from various communities within the town of 90,000 people; and the donor agency represented by their own evaluators.

After many meetings a 200 page proposal representing 10 sub-projects and a management structure, was presented to the funders. The proposal did not receive funding, because in various ways it did not meet the funder's expectations. The rejection of the proposal resulted in the abandonment of the initiative, although some of the sub-projects continued to develop on their own without funding.

At the outset there was a realization on the part of those representing the politically and economically marginalized communities in the town that there needed to be a transformation of the health sector and that the communities in need of health services needed to take part in the transformation process. On the part of professional health workers (and allied disciplines) there was a recognition that a process of community participation was necessary, although the nature of this

participation, as will presently be seen, was not clearly laid out in respect of the way in which different participants would contribute. However, there was a degree of common purpose in the sense that there was agreement that there needed to be some form of co-operative action. In this respect the project was not merely a 'pragmatic partnership' (cf. Billis, 1993, p. 198) involving negotiation between partners who stood to gain individually by their involvement. The purpose of the project, and this was made quite explicit in the early meetings, was to lead to transformation, rather than merely practical agreement.

As researchers we were interested in understanding "how," in spite of the expressed commitments towards working together in a co-operative manner, and a great deal of effort on the part of most participants, the project gradually became a site of conflict, which overshadowed the shared, although ill-defined transformation vision. We were interested in examining the different interpretations of this vision and the process whereby these different interpretations became increasingly entrenched, leading ultimately to conflict, recrimination and cynicism about transformation. We were particularly interested in determining the relational and interactive processes through which this happened. We wished to determine what understanding the participants had of the dialogical process, how the different understandings interacted and how this interaction influenced the participatory dynamics of the project as a whole.

The authors were motivated to perform this evaluation out of an interest in developing theoretical ideas in the area, and it was performed quite independently of any interest group.

METHOD USED FOR EVALUATING PARTICIPATION

Orientation

In designing this study we were strongly influenced by "grounded hermeneutic research" methodology (Addison, 1992) and in particular the idea that research questions should be allowed to develop during the course of the research. A hermeneutical model is exploratory, discovery-oriented and theory-generating rather than hypothesis-testing (Elliot, 1989) and involves a reflective process of engaging with the data, during which the questions guiding the research are re-examined and reformulated (Brown et al., 1989). The process of asking more perspicacious and better defined questions leads to knowing a phenomenon better.

The "reading guide" method used by Brown et al. (1989) was adapted for use with the interview material. This is a method of textual interpretation developed for extricating from a text those features of the text which

clarify the meaning of the text in terms of particular questions. The development of a reading guide begins with the generation of a set of questions through which the textual material is to be read. Initially a reading guide brings an ordering to the interview material. Further development of the reading guide or the development of second and third order reading guides facilitates further and deeper exploration of the material.

In conducting this study we were also guided by Patton's (1987) conviction that evaluation is a creative process and that evaluation procedures must be allowed to develop in the course of the evaluation process. We believed this to be especially relevant in this case, considering that this was not a commissioned evaluation task, but a piece of research which was intended to explore the nature of participatory dynamics and how they might best be assessed.

Procedure

Thirteen participants in the project were interviewed. An attempt was made to select participants who represented a broad range of what the researchers anticipated were the different ways of participating in the project. Because it began to emerge that the modes of participating which participants identified with were not always the same as what the researchers anticipated, the choice of participants targeted for interviewing was deliberated upon and changed as we proceeded.

A semi-structured interview format with a twelve question interview schedule was used to obtain from each interviewee descriptions of the project and its outcome, descriptions of personal involvement and the involvement of others in the project, and descriptions of the meetings attended. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Stage 1: Reading Guide for Individual Interviews

The following reading guide was used:

1. How did the participant see his/her own participation in the project?
2. How did the participant see the grouping of other actors in the project?
3. How did the participant see the participation of other actors in the project?
4. What was the participant's understanding of the process of the project and problems associated with the project?

The reading guide was then applied to the transcriptions. The researchers underlined with different coloured pens any material which related, even in an oblique way, to each of the questions of the reading guide. Subsequently the material relating to each question was clustered together and summarized. Thus a

specific response was obtained to each question from the perspective of each respondent's experience.

Stage 2: Reading Guide for Describing Common Modes of Participation

To obtain a general account of the dynamics of participation in the project as a whole, which would elucidate how the different forms of participation interacted, and specifically how self and other descriptions related, a second reading guide was developed and applied to the descriptions obtained in Stage 1. At this level the researchers sought out the common ways in which people experienced "participating," and set about defining these common ways by using the following two questions to read "across" the individual accounts; i.e. across the 13 interviewee responses as they had been analysed in terms of the Stage 1 reading guide.

1. What common modes of participating can be identified from the perspective of self-identification? (It was deemed possible that an actor may have participated in a number of modes; e.g. someone may have participated both as a member of an institution and as a co-ordinator in the context of the project.)
2. From the point of view of each of the common modes of participating how are the other modes understood? (In the case of a participant having participated in a number of modes the interviews were re-read so that their experience and understanding of the roles of others could be understood from the point of view of each mode of participation engaged in.)

A summarized description was written, which described each mode of participation from the point of view of identification with that mode of participation (1, above) and from the perspective of not identifying with that mode of participation (2, above); i.e. from the point of view of the other modes of participation.

Initially we attained 12 modes of participation, but as we worked with the material we were able to reduce this to four major modes of participation.

Modes of Participation and their Interaction

The following modes of participation were identified:

1. Participating from the perspective of having organizational resources and special project skills.
2. Participating as a representative of a non-community based institution motivated to participate in the project.
3. Participating from the perspective of identifying with the sector of the community which the project defined as having the needs to be met.
4. Participating from the perspective of trying to co-

ordinate the process and to bring coherence to the project as a whole.

For purposes of illustration a central feature of each mode will be presented, firstly from the point of view of adopting the particular mode, and then from the perspective of the "others" not identifying with it. These were termed the "alterior" (from Latin *alter* meaning other) view of the modes of participation. More comprehensive descriptions of each of these modes can be found in Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1996). Specific illustrations are found in the discussion which follows.

Mode 1. Participating from the Perspective of Having Organizational Resources and Special Project Skills. Mode 1 participants saw themselves as having to take stronger initiative and responsibility as funder imposed deadlines approached, when others appeared to them to not be taking appropriate initiative. They felt that they had sufficient knowledge of community needs, in relation to the resources available (of which they had first hand knowledge), to enable them to translate community needs into projects in the course of drafting sub-project proposals.

An alterior view. Those identified with the community in need (Mode 3) felt that there was in the process of interpreting needs into interventions, a tendency on the part of those with skills and specialist knowledge to dominate the project and its formulation. At a point where the project seemed to be making little progress, Mode 1 participants took over the process and proceeded with project formulation on their own. Those with skills and resources were seen to have interpreted community needs into programmes of action according to their own prejudicial interpretations of what was most expedient and in ways which favoured and superimposed professional and institutional interests upon the needs of the community.

Mode 2. Participating as a Representative of a Non-community Based Institution Motivated to Participate in the Project. Mode 2 participants felt a need to develop their own institutions through the project and saw their institutions benefitting from involvement, both materially and in terms of credibility, in the "new South Africa." They believed that the project would give them resources to work out programmes that they thought were good for both the community and their institutions. They experienced their own interests as needs. They felt the need to extend existing institutional programmes in a community oriented direction, but felt threatened whenever they were encouraged to participate in ways which did not coincide with existing institutional programmes and plans.

An alterior view. Mode 3 participants (identifying with the community in need) saw Mode 2 participants as competitors in the quest for funds, but who masked their own wish to dominate behind a veneer of community interest. They were seen as foisting their institutional agendas upon the needs of the community and their participation was regarded with suspicion because it lacked a commitment to institutional transformation. They were regarded as arrogantly thinking that they knew what was good for “black people.” The funders were categorized as Mode 2 participants because they were seen by all participants as responsible for imposing pre-conceived ideas and requirements upon the process of health services development.

Mode 3. Participating from the Perspective of Identifying with the Sector of the Community which the Project Defined as Having the Needs to be Met. Mode 3 participants felt ambivalent about participating because the project threatened to be “white” dominated and this meant that it would probably perpetuate the power dynamics of South African society by serving the interests of the powerful above the interests of the disempowered. Yet they participated because any opportunity to develop community resources was better than none, and they were committed to serving the interests of the disempowered community which the project was supposed to serve. This perception initially gave rise to a response of passivity in relation to participation. Finally it led to resistance to the process and attempts to derail it.

An alterior view. The more active participants identifying with Mode 3 were seen, from the perspective of Mode 2 (institutional/professional) participation, as needing to bring their own political aspirations and personal needs for power to bear through the project. Mode 2 (institution based) participants felt that the participatory needs analysis was a sufficient measure of community needs and that Mode 3 participants were being overly sensitive in saying that the project did not address community needs, which in their interpretation it clearly did. Mode 1 (specific skills) participants felt that certain Mode 3 participants were being destructive towards the entire process, to the extent that they were critical without making explicit and constructive contributions towards the development of alternatives.

Mode 4. Participating from the Perspective of Trying to Co-ordinate the Project as a Whole. Participants in this mode saw themselves as initiative takers who directed and guided the project from its inception. They saw themselves as mediating between the funders and the project, and between the interests of the different participants.

An alterior view. Both Mode 2 and 3 participants saw themselves as not sufficiently supported by Mode 4 participants who were seen as being aligned with conflicting interests to their own. Perception of the co-ordinators as having been aligned with a particular group precluded them, in the eyes of other participants, from playing the role of mediator and promoter of dialogue.

TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE METHOD FOR EVALUATING PARTICIPATION

The following discussion teases out the interactions between the different modes of participation (i.e. between modes and their alterior views). The relational dynamics are interpreted in a way which leads to discussion of the evaluation of participation processes, and to formulation of a set of objectives for process evaluation in participatory projects.

KEY EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

We suggest that the evaluation of participation processes should feature a number of specific objectives. What follows is obviously not an exhaustive list, but points to the concerns which evaluators of participation should bear in mind in planning a “participation process” evaluation.

1. Evaluation of Modes of Participation

We suggest that it is necessary to determine the types of modes of participation before one can understand the complex relational dynamics between participants. It was the modes of participation and their interaction, rather than the groupings of community, health institution and university, which determined the relational dynamics in the project.

By analysing the participation of individuals or organizations as they represent themselves, we miss the full range of characteristics associated with a mode of participation and the relational dynamics which set the modes of participation apart; i.e. the complex tensions which determined the relationships between modes of participation. Therefore, it is crucial, in describing the modes of participation, to consider the alterior perspective associated with each mode; i.e. the way that modes of participation are understood by others. It is interesting to note that certain modes of participation, such as the mode of participating as a “white person” were not identified in any of the self-accounts and only emerged as alterior perspectives. The range of modes of participation is only fully defined through the sum of self-accounts and alterior accounts.

We have suggested in the literature review above that there is a need for methods which gain access to the interactional dynamics of participatory projects. Our

study shows that understanding of these dynamics seems to be readily accessed by obtaining subjective descriptions of project processes, events, roles, etc. and by then developing an understanding of the differences of interpretation which exist between participants. Understanding the relationships between these different interpretations facilitates description of modes of participation. We suggest that understanding of dialogical dynamics begins with a description of such modes of participation, and particularly how these are related to each other, and define each other. This appears to be an appropriate starting point for participation process evaluation.

2. Evaluation of the Degree to which the Project Incorporates Meta-dialogue as Part of the Work of the Project

In the project studied unrecognized or unrevealed discourses were undoubtedly a cause of misunderstanding and an impediment to dialogue. Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1996) suggest that participation and dialogue may be enhanced by a greater degree of reflection upon dialogical process. This requires of participants, at the outset, a greater sensitivity to how they are being seen by the other participants.

A dialogue can only really ensue when each participant and each group adopts an openness to how others perceive them. This would arguably need to be accompanied by a doubt about the participant's own appropriation of reality and an openness to having their own self-understanding enhanced by what is brought to that understanding from the point of view of the other. Without this participants are trapped in their own subjectivity and dialogue is not possible. This openness to seeing ourselves from the perspective of "other" horizons is the opening hand in the development of shared ideas about social transformation. Without it the process of participating in social action will inevitably lead to the accentuation of isolation, and fragmentation in social organization. In dialogue it is ultimately "inter-subjectivity" that is sought (cf. Habermas, 1984), an understanding that surpasses and transcends the subjective understanding of individual participants, that can be agreed upon by all and used as the basis for social action.

When A and B are defined in opposition to, or in conflict with, each other they will only attain a common ground (intersubjectivity) if a third possibility of participation is introduced, which they can identify with, without giving up their primary identifications and through this third mode they can develop a common ground of communicative interaction. This does not require that participants give up their primary identifications. The concept of dialogue embodies a recognition of the separate identifications of the partners to the dialogue. It might be said that these identifications are the social realities which make participatory endeav-

ours necessary in the first place. When the differences are too great and the identifications too entrenched it is clear that the "intermediate" ground is more akin to a "no-man's" land than a place of co-operative exchange and finally of co-operation. One procedure which is "dialogue enabling" in such situations is the process of reflection upon dialogical process. We might refer to the need for meta-dialogue; i.e. dialogue about dialogue.

We suggest that evaluation of participation needs to assess the degree to which a project incorporates meta-dialogue within the process of the project itself. As such we suggest that a project be assessed for the extent to which it is reflective of its own discursive processes and the extent to which this reflection feeds back into and changes the dialogical process. One way of achieving this is to assess whether participants having an overarching sense of the project apart from the points of view of their own understanding of process. In the project studied many participants had no sense of what was happening in the project apart from the points of view of their own understanding of the process, showing that there was no understanding of the overarching dialogical process. In evaluating participation processes it is necessary to assess the degree to which the communicative problematics of participation have been identified and dealt with in the context of the project. One might expect that there will inevitably be some who do not understand the overarching dialogical process and others who only approximate that understanding. But optimally one would find a growing core of participants who do.

In our study the full range of modes of participation in the project was visible to the researchers as a result of the methodology they applied, and was not something that any of the participants were aware of through having participated in the project. The self-understanding of each participant in the project had significant "blind-spots" and this impeded the development of dialogue within the context of the project. In the project studied the funders regarded themselves as adequate evaluators, but the participants interviewed felt that the sponsors were themselves participants and because of this they were unable to gain a purview of the project as a whole. This finding throws light on the issue of whether evaluation of participatory processes is possible from within the context of a project. We believe that it suggests that the necessary degree of "distanciation" is not attainable from within the horizons of a project. In the project studied none of the participants was sufficiently objective and sufficiently disengaged to provide an overview of the participatory processes involved. It is arguable that even if they had attempted a group evaluation this would have been subject to the relational dynamics and "blind spots" which characterized the relations between participants. Evaluation involves an "etic" perspective (a

view from without) as well as an “emic” perspective (a view from within) (Fetterman, 1989). In agreement with Billis’s (1993) view that evaluation of participation processes involves an “executive role” we believe that the evaluator ideally needs to be relatively detached from the project dynamics.

We imagine that a type of evaluatory function could be served by an evaluator jointly selected by the participants and whose *sole* activity in the project would be to facilitate the evaluation of participation process at critical moments in the development of a project; such as when participants are recruited, when strategy decisions are made, when proposals are drafted, when management structures are created, etc. Such strategically timed evaluation might well be expected to remedy some of the problems mentioned above and in this sense the evaluator might be something of a facilitator or coach, whose evaluation highlights dialogical problems by filling in “blinds spots”.

3. Evaluation of Changes in the Nature of Participation and the Degree to which Participation Changed the Existing Relational Dynamics Between the Parties Involved

Professional–Community Relations. Evaluation of participation processes should assess the receptivity of the dialogical relations to change, leading to increasing accommodation of all needs, views and interests within the dialogical exchange. We suggest that in participatory processes there needs to be a recognition that the interacting participants will be changed by the process of participation itself. It is interesting to note that in the project studied the need for “self-change” was not widely acknowledged. There were expectations from the alterior perspective that change was necessary and this tended to set up conflicts between how participants saw their own future participation and the expectation that their roles would and should change in the course of the project and as a result of the project. The types of changes involved are different for professionals (Mode 1 and 2) and community (Mode 3).

Professional. The mode of participation from the perspective of having special project skills (Mode 1) and from the perspective of representing a profession (Mode 2) seemed to exclude recognition of the need for self-change. These modes of participation tended to be accompanied by clear, pre-formed ideas about what was appropriate in terms of the types of skills necessary and the type of professional activities involved. Certain professional participants felt pressurized to reformulate their own professional identities and interests, and for this reason became increasingly hostile towards the project.

As Stewart (1990) has pointed out in the case of professionals interacting with self-help groups, edu-

cational preparation is needed to assist the transition from provider to partner. Professionals engaging in processes requiring community participation can expect to encounter frustrations should they fail to understand that the process of participation requires them to reconsider the nature of the services that they are in the business of providing. It may also require them to think more holistically and broadly about the role of their profession in community development. An important task of any project involving professional–community interface should be to facilitate development in the professional sector. We suggest that evaluation of participation processes should incorporate evaluation of changing attitudes of professionals towards their own role in relation to community needs. In optimal situations one would expect to find that the process of participation has led to the growth of the profession in ways which are consistent with the broad vision of the project.

Community. In the context of community development and especially in societies in a process of democratic transition one would expect participation to lead towards a situation where all parties feel that they have the capacity to influence the development of the project. In this sense one would expect a degree of “capacity building” through which there is a development of the capacity of the more marginalized participants to increasingly engage in all the activities of the project. In the project studied there was a tendency for the community not to be involved in proposal writing, for example, and because of this there was domination by other groups in the course of proposal writing. As the project moved beyond the initial needs assessment phase the community whose needs were assessed became increasingly disengaged from project activities.

Capacity building might take many forms (cf. Van Vlaenderen & Gilbert, 1992), but the common feature is the enablement of the capacities which are required in order to facilitate participation; e.g. proposal writing skills and workshop facilitation skills. Participation process evaluation should assess the degree of capacity building which is part of the project and under optimal conditions one would expect to find an increasing involvement of those who previously did not have the capacity to participate fully.

Societal power dynamics. Our study leads us to believe that the nature of participation is strongly determined by existing relations within the society and these are interpolated into dialogical processes within projects. For example, the politics of race was significant in determining degrees of trust and groupings in the project studied, and especially in the development of the community–professional tension which came to be a feature of the project.

It was clear that the project participants organized themselves along ideological lines following patterns of social and political stratification which, to an extent, cut across the categories of the three ostensible partners. It was partly the dynamics between these ideological groupings that determined the outcome of the project. These dynamics might have been predicted had the socio-political context of the project been taken more fully into account. We can extrapolate from this that a project should be aware of the context out of which it emerges and should take this into account. This context involves a history of previous participatory initiatives as well as broad socio-political history. These histories are present in the minds of the participants (some more than others) and in the ways in which they have been prepared to engage with the other partners. Although not given voice in the many discussions which took place in the course of the project this context can be seen to have had an impact upon the dynamics of the project from the start and at all levels. For example, in the context of the present project, some professionals failed to understand that certain institutions were seen to represent the political power of the elite and failed to see how initiatives arising out of these institutions were regarded with suspicion by those representing the community, and this had an impact on the communicative dynamics of the project.

Great care should be taken to assess the contextual forces at play and to take them into account, as forces impacting on the dynamics of the communication process. Participation process evaluation should focus on the extent to which a project is cognisant of the impact of the socio-political context out of which it emerges and specifically of the societal power dynamics involved. A project's success in this respect can be measured by the degree to which the project brings about different alignments and groupings that exist in the broader society in which the project exists.

4. Evaluation of the Needs Analysis Process

In the project studied only the needs of the community were assessed and this was done at the outset through a needs analysis process. However, our research shows that all participants brought needs to the project and the operation of undisclosed needs and their gradual insertion into the project dynamics, led to hostility on the part of those who represented the community. They felt that the participation on the part of those with institutional affiliations should not be motivated to satisfy needs of their own. When they saw these needs being met they began to withdraw their support from the project.

All partners have needs and interests which must be assessed and brought to the dialogical encounter. The demands of the funders, the institutional and professional aspirations involved and the needs of the indi-

vidual actors should be acknowledged as forces having a bearing on the project. A process of needs analysis in respect of all groups of participants is necessary. Greater transparency of the forces at play would obviate the ill-will, alienation and sense of being dominated which attend the operation of undisclosed needs, interests and agendas.

We suggest that there is a need for evaluation of the way in which the participation processes took into account the range of interests having an impact upon the project. Participation process evaluation should describe the specific needs and motivations of each of the modes of participation and clarify the manner in which these have been dealt with in the context of the project.

5. Evaluation of the Process of Converting Needs into Strategies

People can know what they lack only to the extent that they know that an alternative is possible. I cannot know my need for spectacles if I do not know of spectacles as a possibility. I may not even know I am short-sighted until the horizons of my sight have been thrown into relief by the suggestion that my seeing capacity could be different.

In the project studied, amongst the needs expressed by the community were many needs which related to the domain of psychology. Yet the community could not express their need for psychological services without knowing what psychology is, and what kind of resources might be made available through the involvement of psychologists. Similarly a professional psychologist can only know what he/she can offer based on a knowledge of expressed needs.

On the part of service providers the needs assessment was perceived to be a one-way channel which led from the community to the service planner and service provision was perceived as a one-way channel from planner/provider to community. From the community's perspective expressed needs were experienced as self-evidently leading to the need for services which would directly address those needs, although these needs were expressed before there was an acknowledgement of the nature of what was possible given the types of resources available amongst the partners. Those identifying with community needs felt that the programme proposal settled for a very roundabout and indirect way of addressing needs and they were dissatisfied with this. On both sides a greater understanding was required of the fact that needs and services cannot be considered apart. The whole process of needs assessment should not occur as a discrete and preliminary stage of the project, which is completed and then translated into strategy. Needs analysis should be conducted in a way that enhances dialogue and which takes into account, *ab initio*, the nature of possibilities and resources that exist. Ideally

the process of translating needs into strategies of action should be achieved in partnership and as an ongoing process. Intervention strategies follow on from and develop in relation to the continuing assessment of needs.

It appears that in the proposal development stage planners need to be cautious about prematurely deciding on intervention strategies. In the context of the present project the time deadlines imposed by the funders created a pressure which corrupted the process of remaining faithful to needs. The need for dialogue and grassroots consultation should increase rather than decrease as the proposal drafting stage is reached.

We believe that participation process evaluation should track the development of the needs assessment process and it is important to assess the relative degrees of involvement of all partners in the process of needs assessment and programme design. Under optimal conditions there should be an open-ended assessment of needs which does not end with the choice of intervention strategies; and a dynamic relation between needs and strategies, which at the outset and throughout should not be considered apart.

6. Evaluation of the Co-ordination Process

We believe that the difficulties of co-ordinating a process like the one researched are a direct reflection of problematic participatory dynamics. In the project studied the co-ordination function (Mode 4) became a kind of pressure point, in relation to which underlying conflicts began to emerge. Viewed from the perspective of community interests co-ordinators were regarded as having "sold out" to institutional interests. The co-ordinators, in spite of an awareness of the need for facilitating dialogue amongst participants and in spite of attempts to do this, were perceived by those identifying with community needs as being more familiar with and finally more aligned with the mode of participation of experts and institutions than with the direct needs of the community. Viewed from the perspective of institutional and professional interests those identified as co-ordinators were seen as pressurising them to adjust their ideas in ways which tended towards being unacceptable to the institutions involved and did not suit the aspirations of their departments and/or professions. Viewed from the point of view of those with special project skills (Mode 1) co-ordinators were blamed for their frustration with having to take responsibility for group facilitation processes and sub-project proposal writing. Reluctance of those with special project skills to take responsibility appears to have been mediated by the feeling that their participation was being drawn on beyond what they had initially thought would be necessary. It was also mediated by the thought that co-ordinators had not successfully created a context of participation. It can thus be seen that the co-ordination

function increasingly came to be a site of conflict between the participants. Perception of the co-ordinators as having been aligned with a particular group precluded them from playing the role of mediator and promoter of dialogue which was crucial for the partnership programme.

Furthermore, the link that the co-ordinators were perceived to have with the funders provided them with a power which had an important impact on their social identity in the eyes of those identifying with community aspirations and this further impeded their function as mediators. They were seen as responsible for bringing the pre-conceived ideas and requirements of the funders to the process. This, together with a sustained closer contact with the funders, meant that the co-ordinators could not stand "inbetween," from where they could mediate the conflicts of understanding between either the participants in the project or between the funders and the project.

It was clear that for most of the participants in the study there was still a lack of clarity about what the project as a whole was about. Being identified with their own sub-projects rather than the project as a whole, they knowingly allowed the co-ordinators to "carry" the overarching vision of the project on their behalf. To the extent that from both community and institutional perspectives the co-ordinators were eventually declared partisan, there was nothing to hold the project together and no joint project.

In relation to participation process evaluation it seems important to evaluate the relation between the co-ordinators and participants. One index of the adequacy of the participatory processes is the degree to which the co-ordinators are able to stand "between" rather than to become enmeshed in the participatory dynamics of the project. It is also important to evaluate the shifting role of the co-ordinators and one would expect in an optimal situation that participants would increasingly take ownership of the broad vision of the project and responsibility for its furtherance.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is a need for theory development in this area and we consider that the general epistemological principles developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their "grounded theory" approach provide a useful orientation through which evaluators can develop a theory. A multitude of non-governmental organizations have conducted evaluations, either on their own or using organizational development consultants, but these and similar evaluations conducted by the formal sector, are seldom used in the development of theory. The result is that there has been little accrual of knowledge in this area. Similar mistakes are repeated and the successes

are discovered anew each time by imagination, trial and error.

Considering the resources and energy that have already been lost in the growth and premature demise of a great many projects similar to the one discussed above—which have in common the meeting of professional and centrally organized service delivery organizations with non-governmental and community-oriented interest groups—it seems pressingly necessary to study and understand the communicative and participatory processes that underlie unsatisfactory outcomes and those which contribute towards satisfactory outcomes. Such study is made problematic by the difficulties involved in defining what participation means and what it should optimally entail.

There exists only a rudimentary understanding of the complexities of participation in development and more attention needs to be paid to the problematics of evaluating participation in the developing world. We hope that the above contribution goes some way towards outlining the considerations which need to be taken into account in developing methodologies for evaluating participation processes. Participation process evaluation research is critical to the future development of participation methodology.

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