

# WHO CHANGES?

Institutionalizing participation in development

Edited by James Blackburn with Jeremy Holland

With a foreword by Robert Chambers



# **Foreword**

ROBERT CHAMBERS

For us – development professionals in whatever roles, the sort of people who will have a chance to read this book – this is a good time to be alive. Much that we have believed has proved wrong; and a new agenda is fast taking form. As *Who Changes?* shows, this promises, for all of us, whoever we are, whatever our profession or discipline, and wherever we work, the challenge and exhilaration of exploration, innovation, learning, and doing better.

## **The context**

This excitement can be seen in historical context. From the 1950s through the 1960s and 1970s, in the prevailing orthodoxies of development, it was professionals who had the answers. In general we were right and we were the solution. Poor and local people were the problem, and much of the problem was to be solved by education and the transfer of technology. Increasingly, that ideology has been questioned and undermined. The balance has shifted. Development imposed from the top down was often not sustained. More and more we have been recognized as much of the problem, and their participation as the key to sustainability and many of the solutions.

So participation has become a central theme in development. It is new orthodoxy in the World Bank, where it is being mainstreamed: the Bank now has flagship participation projects, and projects are monitored for their degree of participation. An Inter-Agency Learning Group on Participation has been meeting, comprising major multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and some NGOs. In more and more countries and sectors, participation is required in projects and programmes. The lexicon of development has expanded, perhaps irreversibly, to include participation. And as usual with concepts which gain currency, rhetoric has run far, far ahead of understanding, let alone practice.

Requiring participation has preceded a full understanding of its implications. At first, much of the official thinking was that participation was cost-effective: with participation, local people do more; projects cost less; and

achievements are more sustainable. So participation has been written into project documents, policies, and even, as in Bolivia, laws. There can be, though, a big gap between requirement and reality. For as this book shows, the changes needed extend back up hierarchies to include the cultures, procedures, incentives, rewards, and recruitment and staffing policies, of NGOs and of government and donor agencies.

One source of learning has been experiences with participatory rural appraisal (PRA). This has evolved rapidly as a mindset, a philosophy, and a repertoire of methods. The essence of PRA is changes and reversals – of role, behaviour, relationship and learning. Outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen, watch and learn. Outsiders do not transfer technology; instead they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders hand over the stick, trusting the capabilities of local people. The methods help: many involve visualizations – mapping, diagramming, estimating, ranking, scoring and the like – by local people. Beyond the methods, and as contributors to this book state again and again, personal behaviour and attitudes are crucial. Nor are new participatory methods and changes in personal behaviour and attitudes enough on their own. Repeatedly, PRA has encountered barriers to good performance, and to spread, which are institutional.

PRA only began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but its spread has been exponential, to over 100 countries and into most domains of rural and urban development. It has been adopted by many government agencies and NGOs. As PRA and participation have become popular, they have been demanded and required often at short notice and on a huge scale. The results have often been bad. At the same time, in some cases where introduction has been gradual, with good training, sustained support and institutional change, the results have been profoundly encouraging.

Learning from these experiences has become urgent and vital. Recognizing this, the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, through support from Swiss Development Co-operation, convened a workshop on Institutionalization of Participatory Approaches. On 16 and 17 May 1996, some 50 people from 26 countries took part. The papers and discussions, with James Blackburn as the main editor, provide the core of this book, updated and augmented by new material from this rapidly evolving field.

Another workshop a few days earlier drew together experience on PRA and policy. A companion volume, *Whose Voice?*, with Jeremy Holland as the main editor, similarly presents and analyses much learning from recent experience in a new field. It finds that PRA and related participatory approaches have opened up new ways in which policy can be influenced by the realities of those who are poor, weak, marginalized and excluded. Thematic studies in a participatory mode, and broader participatory poverty assessments, have revealed new insights with policy implications. *Whose Voice?* and *Who*

*Changes?* are part of a sequence of publications which draw on PRA-related experience.

### Lessons being learnt

The contributions to *Who Changes?* are a rich harvest of experience and judgement. They represent a stage in a process of learning. Most of the authors have been engaged in practical work over at least a decade. Though drawing on experiences from different contexts, countries and continents, they converge strikingly on similar insights and issues. The lessons are convincing but cannot be final. Perhaps there can never be closure on any conventional wisdom in such a dynamic and complex field. In five or ten years' time, more will be known, other lessons will have been learnt, and what we believe we have learnt now will have been qualified and added to by further experience.

All the same, two strong working conclusions stand out as basic and likely to last. They are that:

- sustained participation in development demands transformations in three domains: methods and procedures; institutional cultures; and personal behaviour and attitudes. All three are needed. Each reinforces the others. Each presents points of entry for change.
- of these, personal behaviour and attitudes are crucial. Participation is about how people interact. Dominating behaviour inhibits participation. Democratic behaviour to enable and empower encourages it. For those with power and authority to adopt non-dominating, empowering behaviour almost always entails personal change.

### Frontiers now

Many of the frontiers now are practical, about how to make good change happen. They concern methodology – how to do things better, and research – how to learn from experience. The contributors to this book give us a flying start, with readable accounts and practical analysis. Readers of the book may wish to draw up and act on their own lists of priorities. To me, after reading the book, five stand out:

- **Training.** How better to conduct training for attitude and behaviour change, the ABC of PRA (Kumar 1996); how sympathetically to help those threatened by participatory modes of interaction; how best to arrange programmes of total immersion in villages and slums as learning experiences for powerful people (as being implemented for its senior staff by the World Bank), and how to spread this practice; and how to assure continuity of training as part of a long-term process.
- **Going to scale.** How optimally to balance drives to go too fast and brakes to go too slow; how to assess, improve and insert 'benign viruses' in going to scale, elements like behaviour and attitude training, embracing error, reflection and critical self-awareness which have self-improvement built in; and how to insist on small pilots for testing and learning, with only gradual scaling-up at a measured pace.

**Institutional change.** How to change the cultures and procedures of hierarchical organizations, whether donor agencies, government departments, or larger NGOs; how to overcome the common conflict between low-level corruption and participation; how to avoid the tyranny of targets and drives for disbursements; how to select participatory staff and achieve a gender balance; how to protect and retain good staff and participation when there is a backlash; how to reward participatory work; how to help middle managers who resist change; and how to assure continuity of support at the top.

- **Participatory monitoring and evaluation.** How to complete the participation circle by enabling groups and communities to conduct their own M and E, with their own baselines and indicators; and how to reconcile this with central needs for standard indicators and information.
- **Disempowerment.** How to enable powerful people to recognize that power is not a commodity to be amassed, but a resource to be shared; and how to enable them to gain satisfaction, fulfilment and even fun, from disempowering themselves and empowering others.

To learn how to do these things better will not be easy. It requires more practitioners and researchers to follow contributors to this book in engaging with and learning from field and organizational realities. Combinations of approach may be best, including PRA, participatory action research, process documentation, participatory monitoring and evaluation, and self-critical reflection. Above all, it is vital to make the effort to share experiences and insights openly and without boundaries: in conversations, writing, and workshops, and through words, diagrams, videos, publications, networking and newsletters. This book provides a baseline of rich experience and insight. The challenge is to make the baseline a springboard, to learn more and to do better. May it inspire others to innovate, research, write and share, to help all of us do better in our understanding and actions.

The central message I draw from the contributions to this book is that participation has to be pervasive. In Andrew Shepherd's phrase (this volume) it cannot be bolted on. It cannot be confined to a low-level ghetto. Any belief that induced participation can succeed on any scale without participatory cultures and practices in the initiating organizations, and without personal change, cannot survive this book. Participation has to be lived, and lived at all levels by all concerned.

So the final frontier remains personal. In earlier decades, it was local people who had to change. Now the imperative has been reversed. The finger now points back to us – development professionals, the sort of people most likely to read these words. The experiences presented here drive us to an uncomfortable truth: that the quality of development depends on what sort of people we are and what we do. The title of this book poses the question *Who Changes?* The answer is inescapable. It has to be us.