PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT:
A CLASS & GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH

By Dan Connell[*]

Abstract

The farmers in a small village in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya in western New Guinea, had rarely, if ever, seen a cow before provincial government officials announced the imminent arrival of a boatload of them. If villagers were shocked, they didn't register it, for they had grown accustomed to bizarre surprises from the visiting experts, who periodically dropped by to tell them how to "develop" their community. But the incident triggered a series of events that encapsulate the evolution of the debate over "people's participation" in development.[1] This article will recap the Irian Jaya experience as a vehicle for clarifying the centrality of popular participation to the development process. It will then explore the ways in which a focus on class and gender takes participatory development to a new level. Finally, it will consider ways that development agents can support transformational development.

Integrating the strengths of political economy and gender planning into a participatory methodology yields an approach that puts people first, that does not isolate or privilege particular sectors for special, and often separate, remedial attention, and that places subjugation alongside poverty as social evils to be decisively overcome, not simply alleviated. The outcome is an emancipatory concept and practice of development, in which inequalities and inequities are addressed together, not with a view to simply redistribute wealth and income on a transitory basis, but to reconfigure society to the benefit of the majority of its members, while empowering them to develop themselves as they see fit. Fostering this demands a delicate and evolving balance between guidance and support, facilitation and response, on the part of the development agent.

The 100-to-1 Cow Project

In the early 1980s, when the Irian Jaya cattle-raising project was first conceived by development professionals, the target village was comprised of some 300 households. Most people eked out a living from small-scale, subsistence farming. They supplemented this by raising a pig and a few chickens, and from hunting. There were no regular links to the few towns in the district, and, apart from government officials and the occasional itinerant trader, the village had infrequent contact with the outside world. Villagers had to walk a half-day to reach the nearest road, where they often waited another half-day for a "bus" plying the rural routes. No one owned a boat large enough to travel more than a short distance away.

Government development planners were anxious to introduce beef cattle to the region, a former Dutch colony that fell under Indonesian administration in the 1960s, in order to provide a new source of meat for the country's rapidly growing urban centers. As the people of the village had migrated to the coast from upland areas known for breeding pigs, the planners assumed that these people would adapt easily to the challenges of expanded livestock-raising.

[*] Dan Connell (*www.danconnell.net*), a Distinguished Lecturer in journalism and African politics at Simmons College, Boston, is the author of numerous articles and books on the Horn of Africa, including *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (1997), *Rethinking Revolution: New Strategies for Democracy & Social Justice* (2002) and *Conversations with Eritrean Political Prisoners* (2004). This article appeared in *Development in Practice*, vol. 7, no. 3 (August 1997), Oxford, U.K.

The visiting experts convened a one-day training program to introduce the idea to the villagers. Soon afterward, 100 beef cattle arrived. Almost at once, they began wreaking havoc. Knee-high fences designed to keep pigs from entering the village center were no barrier to the animals: They trampled gardens, damaged homes, broke tools, and fouled fresh water sources. When the cows were shooed out of the populated area, many wandered into the bush and disappeared.

Within days, the farmers met to organise themselves to deal with this menace called "development." Deciding to hunt the cattle down before they did any more damage, villagers armed themselves with bows and arrows and set out into the surrounding countryside. One-by-one they encircled and killed the cows, until there was only a single animal left alive. Satisfied that the danger was passed, they spared the lone survivor, a living memorial to the futility of the "blueprint" method of development, in which experts designed projects far from the community for which they were intended, with little or no input from the members of that community, and then set out to implant them. In Irian Jaya, development planners learned a hard lesson about the value of participation, but the learning process had barely begun.

A few years after the infamous "100-to-1 cow project," as it came to be known, members of a development team from the provincial university visited the village to make an assessment of community needs. They were committed to drawing up a development plan that grew out of village input, so they brought no fixed plan with them.

The team convened a village assembly and told the people that this time things would be different. They asked villagers to tell them what they needed, and they promised they would do their best to oblige them. When the farmers asked to delay their decision until they could consider it more deeply, the team agreed and left. When they returned a few days later, they convened another assembly, where village leaders announced that they had come to a decision—they wanted cows!

Now it was the development agents' turn to be shocked, for they knew the story of the ill-fated cow project. They asked: How could the farmers risk another debacle after the experience they had had earlier? Why cows, and not pigs or poultry? Why not agricultural extension assistance with their gardens? Why not new infrastructure for transportation to the market, or food storage facilities? What about health care, literacy, income generation, or any number of innovative approaches to rural development?

Once they began asking these questions, the answers were deceptively simple: Cows were all the people knew of development. Since outsiders brought cows, the question for villagers, as they saw it, was only: Did they or did they not want more cows? In the end, said most villagers, at least the animals could be a source of meat or something to sell to passing traders. Better to take them than not.

Fortunately for the villagers, the visiting team grasped the fact that participatory development involves more than simply asking people what they want and then providing it, regardless of the probable consequences or prospects for success. They declined the request for cows and set out instead to engage villagers in a thorough process of self-assessment in order to ascertain what would benefit them over the long-term. One researcher came to live in the village, reporting regularly to the supervising team at the university and assisted by a student-team of two women and two men. Several team members spoke the local dialect. The new field team held a series of meetings with segments of the community. Team members also talked at length to individual villagers, and they mapped out the village economy.

What they discovered was that many households supplemented what they produced for personal consumption with the sale of fruit and vegetables in the nearest district market, several days journey from the village. Produce was sold in small lots, almost always by individual

producers who had no knowledge of weights or prices. Invariably, they were cheated and came back with far less than their goods were worth. What was needed, at least initially, was not production assistance to grow more, but rather marketing assistance to get more out of what they had. This knowledge provided the basis for the village's first participatory development project.

The project began with a training component, as the development agents set out to teach villagers about weights and measures. Once again, however, the outsiders ran head-on into the limits of their own assumptions. Residents lacked numeracy, a precondition for mastering the complex system of weighing and pricing through which they were being cheated in the marketplace.

Once this became clear, the team restructured the training component of the project to prepare villagers on several levels, starting with instruction in simple mathematics. Then the team acquired scales, not only for practicing concepts, but for weighing produce prior to taking it to the market. Next, they worked with villagers to establish small marketing cooperatives, largely on the basis of extended family units, in which four or five people pooled their produce before sending it to town for sale. Finally, they helped to estimate payment options for these produce lots, relating weights to potential unit prices, before villagers confronted the fast-talking middlemen in the town.

However, their entry into the local market also brought new problems and challenges. Once villagers mastered the system, they discovered that prices continued to fluctuate, sometimes wildly. Their conclusion was swift—they were being cheated again!

Yet a closer investigation revealed that the problem lay elsewhere. The local market was responding occasionally—and, from the standpoint of local producers, unpredictably—to the downward pressure of oversupply from outside the region, as, for example, when a boatload of onions or dried fish arrived from the prosperous island of Surabaya and caused a sudden collapse of local prices. This had devastating consequences for those coming to depend on income from these sources.

With these new challenges came several important lessons: It is not enough to consult beneficiaries and then to act on their behalf, however well-intentioned. Nor is it usually enough to engage people in a development process if the conceptual orientation and the language of that process do not relate to their experience, and if they lack the tools to effectively assess their needs and to know what options are available to them to bring about constructive change.

Even then, there is more. The most remote Southern communities exist today in a global context, about which their members and those who would act to support their development must know—at least in bare outline—if they are not to waste both their time and their increasingly scarce resources. Project participants need information and perspective on the economic and political context in which their project is operating.

People's participation is not only about the more efficient and more equitable distribution of material resources—it is also about the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the process of learning itself in the service of people's self-development. Key aspects of this knowledge start within rural communities and extend outward in ever-widening circles, like ripples in a pond, which determine the limits and the possibilities for development at the local level. For this process to be effective, knowledge located outside needs to be transferred into the community, just as knowledge within the community needs to reach the development agents and sponsoring agencies.

While development agencies need greater and deeper access to community knowledge in order to play a more effective role there, rural villagers need increased access to tools and information that these agencies can provide about the wider context in which they live and work in order to make informed and appropriate decisions about their development. This is where the development agent comes in—as a bridge linking these parties together in a working partnership.

People's participation is both a methodology and a strategic goal of development. As such, it is not something to be added onto or inserted into a development model. It is an alternative model that proposes both to improve people's standards of living and to give them a measure of control over the standards themselves. It starts with the identification and description of problems, needs and opportunities. This takes specific tools and a grasp of context—local, regional and sometimes even global—to be carried out effectively. It continues through grassroots involvement in the conception, planning and implementation of a solution, which also demands particular skills and information. And it carries on through the process of monitoring and evaluation, which lays the groundwork for the next phase of project identification and planning. In this respect, people's participation is an ongoing process of mobilization and self-organization that reshapes the community itself, as it is applied and developed through involvement with specific, discrete projects.

But suppose, in the case of the Irian Jaya village, that knowledge was flowing in both directions and the community was participating in the conception, planning and implementation of the project—a host of new questions arises. Through whom and to whom does the new information flow? Who, within the village, controls the newly generated surplus, and how is it used? How is the production process affected, particularly in terms of the gender division of labor, as women were in this case both the primary fruit and vegetable producers and those who took the produce to market? What effect does the improvement in the return on agricultural products from the distribution end have on land value, allocation, use, exchange and so on (and how is this structured in the first place)? How is the level and quality of village self-identity and organization affected? What new issues/needs will now come forward from sectors of the community who did not benefit from this development? What issues/needs from those who did not benefit equally? What other issues/needs, if any, might now come forward from disadvantaged or exploited sectors of the community unrelated to this project? Has self-awareness of need changed in the community as a result of this experience? If so, how, and among whom? Perhaps most importantly, will the outcome of future encounters with outside development agents be any different in light of this experience?

Who Participates?

The process of building popular participation into a community's self-development in order to transform its social relationships and not merely to ameliorate the misery of a few is complex and difficult. The degree and quality of community participation cannot be effectively measured in statistical tallies or sociological summaries alone—judging one's success, for example, by noting the percentage of the adult population of a village that attends a public meeting or by totaling up the opinions voiced by a survey sample. Which sectors of a village participate and how they do so may be far more important than how many do so, in gauging the success or failure of popular participation—and more difficult to assess. Invariably, if an active intervention is not made to avoid it, those at the bottom of the socio-economic and political ladders will remain where they were during and after new development projects are initiated, no matter how many members of the community are consulted or involved in project development.

Power relationships reproduce themselves, regardless of how "participatory" or "democratic" a setting is, unless a conscious, sustained effort is undertaken to alter them. Gather a community under a tree in the center of a village and invite them to select a committee to manage a new project, and the results are fairly predictable. The meeting will be dominated by those who traditionally exercise influence in the community, with the most skilled orators and debaters monopolizing the exchange. With few exceptions, these will be older men from the

dominant clan or ethnic group—often landowners, merchants, mayors or village headmen, who fall into the upper-end of the socio-economic spectrum as it exists in this particular community.

To know whether and in what way the poorer and less powerful members of a community are participating, we must have a clear picture of how power and influence are exercised within a village and how wealth and access to productive resources are distributed within the community. We need a clear idea of who fits into the primary social, economic, political and cultural categories and how these categories interact (or not) when it comes to making community decisions. For example, are members of a particular social group—village women, an ethnic minority, a sub-clan, a caste, landless tenant farmers, farm laborers—present but not truly engaged? Are the opinions they publicly voice truly their own? Do they say the same things when their husbands or wives or village elders or employers or other authority figures are not present?

The answers to questions like these can only be acquired through deeper investigation into the economic and social make-up of the communities where programs and projects are to be sited and by checking the observations at public gatherings against information and perspective gained through other means and in different venues. This is particularly true for class and gender issues.

The Intersection of Participatory Methodology with Gender and Class

Starting in the early 1970s, there was a growing awareness among those working in the field that standard approaches to rural development were not alleviating poverty. Economic growth was not promoting equity; in many cases, projects even widened the gap between rich and poor. In India during the "Green Revolution," for example, the introduction of new agricultural technologies increased over-all output while often worsening the conditions of the rural poor who lacked access to land, credit, input supplies, and extension services. The benefits went mainly to large landholders who expanded acreage by evicting tenants and buying or leasing land from small holders.[2]

In the 1970s, FAO sponsored a series of field workshops in eight Asian countries to assess the successes and failures of rural development projects before launching the Small Farmers Development Programme. Among the common findings were:

- The vast majority of the rural poor were not reached by existing programs.
- Few small farmers in the project areas were even aware of government programs. Often, those who were aware of them thought they were meant only for the more important people in a village.
- Very few were active members of any community organization.
- Most were heavily indebted to local money-lenders or rich relatives. Though they badly needed credit, most thought they were ineligible for it through established institutions.
- Most government extension staff relied on progressive farmers to disseminate improved practices to the rural poor, inadvertently following a trickle-down approach to development.
- Every country had pilot rural development projects that were initially successful but then collapsed when originating staff were withdrawn.
- Few programs were suited to the needs of landless laborers, women or poor youth.
- Most programs were planned from the top with little consultation with either field staff or the small farmers themselves.

- The status of small farmers was steadily declining from ownership to sharecropper and laborer, while that of large farmers with access to new technology, inputs and services was increasing, resulting in a widening gap between rich and poor.
- Most rural development programs were strengthening the capacity of government line agencies to deliver their inputs and services to the rural population in general, with little attention to reaching the poor or women or in helping these sectors to improve their capacity to compete for and utilise these inputs and services.[3]

At this time, researchers and analysts in many countries were arriving at similar conclusions. The common thread was a recognition that the absence of grassroots participation in these projects was a major cause of their failure. Yet there were major shortcomings in the flurry of attention to people's participation, especially with regard to women. Between 1974 and 1980, for example, only 4 percent of the projects funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, which was increasingly emphasizing "participation" in its stated project criteria, involved the participation of women. In half of these, women were minority participants.[4]

A gender critique of development policies and programs also began to take shape in the 1970s, marked initially by the publication of Danish development analyst Esther Boserup's influential work, *Women's Role in Economic Development*. This critique gained force during the UN Decade for Women between 1975 and 1985, climaxing at the third international women's conference in Nairobi. During this period, most development agencies began to incorporate attention to women's needs into their programs and projects, though with widely varying results.

The oldest and still the most common approach to gender-sensitive development, with its origins in relief work, is the "welfare" approach often identified with Women in Development (WID) programs. It identifies women as a particularly vulnerable group and sets aside funds (and sometimes entire projects) to improve their lot. It focuses on women primarily as mothers, pegging them as victims of poverty in need of special services like feeding centers and family planning programs.

In contrast, Women and Development (WAD) programs that arose in the mid-1970s focused on reducing inequalities between women and men and represented an "equity" approach to development. The more advanced version of this in the 1980s, termed Gender and Development (GAD), targeted gender relations directly, but it has evolved into an "anti-poverty" approach, which again tends to isolate poor women as a separate category of beneficiaries, though it emphasises women's productive role in society rather than their reproductive role within the family. This approach is often implemented through top-down, income-generating projects intended to give women access to the local economy without challenging social relations, and it is commonly practiced by Northern NGOs under the rubric of specially designated women's programs.

With the deterioration of the global economy in the 1980s and the widespread implementation of economic stabilization and structural adjustment programs throughout the South, a variation of this strategy, known as the "efficiency" approach, has gained prominence. This puts the stress more on development than on women and argues that all projects are far more efficient and effective where women actively participate. In an era of increasingly scarce resources for development programs and with the growing recognition of past development failures, this is growing in popularity and is frequently cited by multi-lateral agencies such as UNDP and the World Bank as undergirding their current approach to development.

However, an "empowerment" approach, with roots in women's organizations of the South, is also gaining increasing attention, focusing not on women as a strictly economic target but rather as a force for transforming social relations. In this framework, women's subordination is understood to be the result of both gender relations and broader political factors, such as colonial and neo-colonial oppression. Under these circumstances, what is needed is structural change in

gender and class relations, as well as economic growth.[5] Attempts to synthesise the strengths and insights of this approach with those of participatory methodologies are leading to a new radically new approach to development, whose intent is to unpack the very notion of what "development" is and to re-insert women, together with other exploited and oppressed social groups, into the process as "agents" of transformative change, rather than as "beneficiaries" of it.

In this conception, "development" is a multifaceted process of increasing not only standards of living but also control over and definition of those standards. Development has social, political and cultural dimensions, as well as economic components. It is a liberating process with qualitative and quantitative aspects that cannot be separated from each other—a process by which formerly excluded and dominated social groups not only transform their physical environment, but also gain power over their economic and political environment and over the knowledge, skills and other resources needed to sustain this transformation. A socio-economic and gender-sensitive approach to this process promotes equity and equality within the community that enjoys the fruits of these projects and programs and not only changes the position of social groups within the community but transforms the community itself.

In linking development objectives to relationships that are characterised by complex forms of domination, subordination and exploitation, we profoundly redefine the meaning of development, shifting our focus from one limited to quantitative economic "growth" to one that includes social emancipation as well. Social and gender transformation become central not only to the methodology of development but to its end result, for the full and equal participation of formerly excluded members of a community in the initiation, design, implementation and outcomes of projects is in itself an important advance in social development. However, if this is to be self-sustaining, participation must rapidly translate into dynamic self-organization.

A commitment to sustainable organizations needs to be folded into all project efforts, not only to facilitate the direct, immediate participation of the poor and women, but also to ensure that these efforts support long-term engagement, education and action. Most rural communities have rich traditions of mutual aid that reflect non-institutional forms of common action. Though there may not be written rules, custom is likely to dictate strict adherence to procedures and clearly understood structures of decision-making and action. Discovering these traditions, whether or not they are consistently practiced today, can offer important starting points for extending or reviving common, interest-based action. Efforts should be made to identify, support and extend them where they exist and to support the efforts of the poor and women to organise in new ways. One role outside agents can play is in familiarizing community members—women and men—with similar efforts elsewhere, and in linking these community-based organizations with each other in order to facilitate the growth of regional, national, and even international networks.

The Challenge

The rural poor do not participate in development on an equal basis with the rich, nor do women participate on an equal basis with men, due mainly to their pre-existing, subordinate positions in the society. This is, of course, also true for dominated ethnic groups and others whose exclusion or subjection within a society is reproduced in development projects and programs. Any approach to development within a specific community inevitably reflects these inequalities. Efforts to challenge them are likely to come up against a number of powerful constraints:

• The political conditions and power structures of the country and the community, which may vary from those of a decentralised, laissez-faire system to those of a highly centralised,

planned economy. Under these circumstances, government responses at the national and local levels may range from indifference to outright hostility to full support.

- Legislative obstacles, put in place by those in power or with access to power, which may prohibit the poor from organizing themselves or limit the right of women and other social groups to participate in public political activities.
- Administrative opposition, which occurs when highly centralised bureaucracies control decision-making, resource allocation and information and either formally discourage popular participation or impede it through the imposition of complex procedures.
- Socio-cultural impediments, that may include deeply-ingrained mentalities of dependence and frustration, as well as distrust of outsiders based upon past disappointments or destructive experiences. Conflicting perceptions of interest among various social groups—based, for example, among different class, caste, gender, ethnic or religious constituencies—can also disrupt participation if not approached with care and sensitivity. In some countries, women do not hold title to the land they farm and are therefore ineligible for credit.
- The limitations imposed by daily life, which may include the isolation and scattered habitat of the rural poor, their low levels of living and their heavy workloads, especially among women, as well as weak health conditions, low levels of education and a general lack of experience with organised activities such as these.

The chief constraint on transformative people's participation in most countries is political will, but political constraints on popular organizing can change suddenly. This occurred in Grenada after a U.S.-led intervention in 1983 installed a new government which moved swiftly to dismantle the network of subsidised cooperatives set up by the previous regime, or as happened in Nicaragua after the 1990 elections brought to power a government that immediately limited credit and canceled subsidies for agricultural cooperatives established by the former regime, causing many to close within months. In similar fashion but with opposite results, the collapse of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1987, the ouster of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in 1991, and the transition from military rule in Brazil in the 1980s led in each case to an explosion of new community groups, trade unions, and sectoral organizations representing landless peasants, urban poor, women, indigenous minorities and others, as laws governing such organizations changed.

External events and socio-cultural factors may also combine to create new constraints on popular participation in village-level development projects. The outbreak of ethnic-related conflict in Rwanda in 1994 generated massive human migrations that disrupted all development programs there, while injecting divisive (and heretofore incidental) ethnic factors into participation in individual projects. In mid-1994, an eruption of controversy in Bangladesh over the writings of a local feminist temporarily constrained women's groups from carrying forward gender-based development initiatives throughout that country. The signing of a peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993 triggered a sudden shift in foreign funding for projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip away from local NGOs to the newly constituted Palestinian National Authority, causing many projects to collapse. The Jerusalem-based Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, for example, was forced to close three of its nineteen rural clinics, while the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee lost nearly one-fourth of its annual $3 million budget.

While it is not possible at the local level to avoid the effects of such externally-generated constraints, development agents can assist villagers to anticipate their impact and support efforts to cope with them. In the Palestinian territories, for example, indigenous NGOs organised a broad network in 1994 that quickly came to include over 400 popular organizations, service groups, and charitable societies to make their case for continued funding for village-level

development projects from donor agencies and governments, including their own new National Authority. Key donor agencies with in-country field staff assisted in this mobilization, responding to Palestinian initiatives.

Donor agencies can also facilitate and fund South-South exchanges that give members of affected communities the opportunity to share experiences and to learn from each other. The Centro de Estudios Internacionales in Nicaragua and the South African Foundation for Contemporary Research, for eample, have sponsored a series of exchange visits by development agents from their respective countries, while Latin American women have organised a network to broaden their perspective—and their impact—on development issues and projects within their respective countries.

Another kind of constraint occurs where political movements, parties or governments set up formal structures to represent the rural poor and women without involving them in a direct, sustained and meaningful way, except as objects of centrally-directed campaigns and projects. In Nicaragua during the 1980s under the government of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, for example, the party-sponsored national women's organization Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa (AMNLAE) operated social services, literacy campaigns and income-generating projects for women but, especially in the late 1980s, under the pressures of the U.S.—backed *Contra* war, it resisted efforts by members to organise activities around gender-specific issues, such as male violence, reproductive rights, pregnancy, or marriage and divorce, and it sought to maintain tight control over all rural projects. In the early 1990s, many frustrated AMNLAE members left the organization to form autonomous women's organizations.[6] In Brazil, a highly organised rural and urban women's movement pressured the transitional regime in 1985 to set up a government-funded *Conselho Nacional dos Dieitos da Mulher* (National Council on Women's Rights) that included women legislators and grassroots organisers and that was intended as the precursor of a full-scale Ministry of the Status of Women. Yet four years later the original councilors and most of the CNDM staff resigned, amid charges of politicization and manipulation by the government and with little to show for the time and effort invested in the committee.[7]

The initial challenge for the development agent is to assess local structures which purport to represent women, the rural poor, and other dominated groups. Once engaged in this process, the outside agent is likely to run head-on into perceived conflicts of interest among dominated and exploited groups, such as peasant associations, trade unions, and women's organizations, or worse, into rivalries among competing groups based in the same population. In Brazil in the 1980s, community-based women's organizations divided over their positions on reproductive rights and began competing with each other for project funding, often for projects in the same communities. In the West Bank and Gaza each of the four major political factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization set up competing organizations of farmers, women, workers, and youth to organise village-level development projects and services.

The over-arching challenge is to foster conditions in which rivalries can be subsumed to some degree within an alliance for community change that benefits the oppressed and exploited members of the community in tangible ways. The five leading Palestinian women's committees found, for example, that they generated greater resources than before for each of their day-care projects after they formed a Higher Women's Council in the late 1980s to do joint fundraising. However, continuing political differences between the sponsoring parties undermined this cooperation until three of the committees insisted on organizational autonomy and formed the Women's Affairs Technical Committee to carry out joint advocacy work for women in the national political arena, as well as to coordinate project work.

People's participation enhances economic equity and social equality, and it encourages democratization in other realms. For this reason, it is inherently challenging to pre-existing power structures, both within a community and between the community and its broader surroundings, particularly when it is centered directly on socio-economic and gender issues. If effective, it is bound to trigger opposition. For example, when peasants in one Indian village, acting on the advice of a development agent, formed a credit union to break the cycle of perennial debt that had caused a number of them to lose their land, moneylenders charged the organisers with being "communists" and threatened them with dire consequences. After development agents in another community encouraged farmers to start a pig-selling group to increase their bargaining power, local middlemen, fearing this would cut into their profits, beat up the leader and warned him that if he continued his activities, he would be further punished.[8]

This aspect of participatory development becomes all the more sensitive in instances where large sums of money are at stake, as is often the case with large-scale projects sponsored by multilateral agencies. Knowing this, the development agent must pay extremely close attention to the social and political environment and use caution in challenging traditional seats of authority before such challenges can be defended and sustained. This is important not only for the prospect of success for the project but also for the sake of those who respond positively to the invitation to participate in new ways in reshaping their communities and, in doing so, become vulnerable to recriminations after the outside agent leaves the scene. For example, residents of a remote village in the southern Philippine island of Palawan were attacked by powerful timber smugglers after a visiting development agent went to local authorities to report finding a large cache of illegal hardwood logs taken from a nearby rainforest. Development agents themselves can also become targets, as occurred when field workers for Nijera Kori, a Bangladesh NGO, were badly beaten and one was killed after farmers' groups with whom they were working protested against corrupt local officials.

Opposition to gender-sensitive planning can take many forms, from ridicule to resistance. Often it gets personal, with women or men who advocate gender equality being singled out for criticism or attack. There is a great need to provide support for those who take the risk of standing up for equality and change, to carry out education among those who are perhaps confused and uneasy but not adamantly opposed to it, to win allies within the community who have standing and respect from their peers, and to find ways to demonstrate widespread acceptance elsewhere.

Another major challenge—and a potential danger—is that posed by ethnic-based organization and advocacy work, a rapidly growing phenomenon throughout the post-cold war world. It is important to be clear from the outset that what is being proposed is an inclusive model that rejects ethnic, racial, or other forms of exclusivity rooted in or aimed at structural domination of one group over another.

Meanwhile, development agencies bring their own constraints to full people's participation. The most serious of these are time pressure and a lack of flexibility in the field. There is often a demand from the sponsoring institution and the supporting government to produce quick results, undermining the entire participatory process. Many sponsoring agencies are also structured for centralised planning, decision-making and implementation, particularly when it comes to budget allocations for prospective projects. Finally, most agencies lack field staff with extensive experience in people's participation, though with time this is likely to improve, as many are now facing the need to develop staff in this area.

Conclusion

The central challenge to the development agent, whether acting alone or as part of a team, is to engage key sectors of the local population in the process and then to nurture this engagement until it blossoms into direct, active participation at as many levels as are possible under the particular circumstances and constraints where he/she is working. As such, the development agent is more a catalyst or a facilitator than an independent initiator—presenting ideas but not issuing orders, encouraging local initiatives but not organizing people around his or her preconceived ideas of what is best for them.

There are no simple formulas for this process, as it may vary widely from one situation to another, based upon the specific economic, social, political and cultural circumstances at play in a community—or upon such unpredictable factors as the chance exposure of one community member to a successful project in another village or the impact of recent climate patterns on village agriculture.

Social and gender-sensitive people's participation is interactive. For it to develop successfully, the development agent must participate in the community, getting to know it from the inside out to the greatest degree possible, as members of the community participate in the process of project identification and formulation. For its part, the community needs to get to know the outside agent and what he or she brings to the process from prior education and experience, as well as from the mandate of the sponsoring organization. This takes time, for which there is no substitute, no matter how sophisticated the "tools" of the development agent. It also demands patience, attention and flexibility, with development agents spending far more of their time listening than lecturing, especially in the early stages, and adapting their ideas of what's best for a community to those developed by disadvantaged groups within the community itself.

Guiding people's initial efforts at self-analysis and priority-setting may be the most important contribution the development agent makes. In this process, it is not only communication that is needed between the outsider and the disempowered or oppressed sectors of a community, but also trust—which must be earned, not learned. Under these circumstances, success will come when the development agent is no longer needed to nurture the process.

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Endnotes

[1] This account comes from a development agent with extensive experience in this village who asked to remain anonymous.

[2] See "Structural characteristics determine who benefits," *Rural Development*, No. 15, Rome: FAO, January 1994, p.15.

[3] See Antonio J. Ledesma, *A Tree Grows in Village Asia*, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines: South East Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute, Xavier University College of Agriculture, 1991, pp.1-3. Most rural development projects also ignored the possibility of exacerbating environmental risks, and few took into account the question of long-term resource sustainability (impact on the water table, decreasing fertility and so on).

[4] See UNDP (1982) *Integration of Women in Development*, New York: UNDP.

[5] See Moser (1993), pp. 55-79, for a detailed explication of the relation between <u>strategic</u> and <u>practical</u> interests in gender planning.

[6] See Randall (1994) for a series of narratives by women who were active in the FSLN in the 1980s and are now playing leading roles in the autonomous women's movement.

[7] See Alvarez (1990) for an account of the debates within the Brazilian women's movement on whether and how to participate in government, as well as an analysis of the movement during the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s.

[8] An account of this incident appears in K. Bhasin (1979).