

THE RATCHED-McMURPHY MODEL REVISITED: A CRITIQUE OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT MODELS, STRATEGIES, AND PROJECTS

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In recent years, development theorists, planners, and practitioners have placed much greater stress on the crucial importance of popular participation in promoting rural development. Twenty years ago it was fashionable to talk about national planning; today it is fashionable to talk about participatory development. As in the past, the wealthy, the well-educated, and the professionals define the contents of participatory development and how it should be applied to and by the rural masses. Socialist theorists attack the bourgeois state and pontificate on the transition to socialism; the capitalists denounce state intervention and invoke the magic of the market; the peasants look toward the sky and pray for rain; and the cows amble in search of grass unaware of their crucial role in the participatory development process.

In the real world, the "Haves" like to see themselves as beneficent and have others see the world the same way in which they do. Academics, government planners and officials, development consultants and specialists involved in the business of development all claim to be working to improve the lot of the Third World masses. Yet the masses are rarely consulted about their needs and aspirations or queried about ways they think that one should go about the development process.

THE RATCHED-McMURPHY MODEL

In an earlier paper (Gellar, 1979), I discussed the Ratched-McMurphy model as an appropriate one for analyzing power relationships in the International Economic Order. The model was adapted from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, an award-winning movie based on Ken Kesey's popular novel. Nurse Ratched, who runs a ward in a mental hospital with an iron hand, is the guardian of the established order. As a professional, she insists that she has the right to define the inmates' problems and to assign prescriptions to solve them. Thus, she defines sanity/development, insanity/underdevelopment, and tells the inmates what they have to do to overcome their unfortunate state. She has resources and power to coax and coerce her charges to accept her recommendations and methods. She is, of course, doing it all for them. Nurse Ratched believes in discussing issues with the inmates in "democratically" run therapy sessions. However, Nurse Ratched sets the agenda, controls the discussion, and resists any questioning of her

approach. She really wants everyone to participate. She gets annoyed when her wards don't want to participate. She is pleased when inmates like Harding accept her definitions, her methodology, and her authority.

R. P. McMurphy, Nurse Ratched's nemesis, is a fiercely independent rebel who refuses to be domesticated by the powers that be. Shortly after entering the ward to escape prison, McMurphy enters into combat with Nurse Ratched because he questions the validity of her definitions of the inmates' problems and her prescriptions which are applied to everyone in the ward regardless of their state. Thus, everyone has to take tranquilizing pills, listen to dull music, and engage in therapy sessions. McMurphy sizes up the situation of the inmates and proposes different solutions for their problems. He incites them to play cards and gamble — non-productive activities — and suggests that watching the World Series on television will do more good for their morale and mental health than being badgered by Nurse Ratched in therapy sessions. By proposing other forms of non-sanctioned self-help activities and encouraging his fellow grassroots inmates to stand up for themselves, McMurphy incurs the wrath of Nurse Ratched who feels obliged to domesticate or destroy McMurphy in order to reestablish her unquestioned authority and regain control of the ward. In the end, McMurphy's stubborn resistance leads to his martyrdom. However, his struggle has not been in vain. Nurse Ratched is no longer the omnipotent power she was before McMurphy's arrival. Chief Bromden, the symbol of America's most oppressed and exploited people, has escaped; a few inmates have chosen to leave the ward while some of those who remain insist on retaining some control over their lives.

While most academics, government officials, planners, and development experts involved in development work, especially those espousing participatory development approaches, are surely not as malevolent as Nurse Ratched, they are certainly closer to Nurse Ratched in the way in which they plan, design, and implement participatory development strategies and projects than to the rural populations they are supposed to serve.

IDEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL REASONS FOR THE GROWING INTEREST IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Participatory development strategies have become more popular in recent years because of growing dissatisfaction with the efficacy of the state in meeting people's need for bread and freedom. Ideologies of the Left and the Right reflect this

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growing anti-state bias. The French Left, for the most part, has rejected Stalinism and Democratic Centralism as guiding principles and now promotes self-management (*autogestion*), local autonomy, and administrative deconcentration.¹ Self-management has been advocated as a means of insuring greater popular participation and control of economic institutions. Although *autogestion* usually applies to workers' control in industrialized countries, the concept can also be applied to rural economic institutions in Africa (Colin, 1977; and Dia et al, 1975).

Ideologies stressing self-reliance have also been growing in influence in the West, especially among middle class intellectuals heavily involved in environmental issues. Self-reliance strategies are anti-capitalist but not necessarily socialist and stress participation and solidarity as fundamental principles. Self-reliance ideologies are presented as alternatives to "social darwinist competitive capitalism" or "totalitarian repressive socialism" (Galtung, O'Brien, and Preiswerk, 1980) and insist that production should be geared to meeting the basic needs of those most in need. In Africa, Julius Nyerere has been an eloquent advocate of self-reliance development strategies (Nyerere, 1968).

Several United Nations agencies — UNESCO, the ILO, and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development — have supported a good deal of research and sponsored many conferences on participatory development strategies which have stressed the need to incorporate the marginalized segments of the population into the development process (Pearse and Stiefel, 1979). In this sense, participation is also a means to empower peasants, workers, and minority groups and not simply an instrument for development.

On the Left, the emphasis has been on participation of classes and communities. On the right, participatory development ideologies have generally called for less state intervention in the economy and stressed individual decision-making. Once applied primarily to the Anglo-Saxon world, public choice theory is now being used to analyze development problems in the Third World (Russell and Nicholson, 1981). Public choice theory assumes that individuals will generally act out of self-interest. This means that they will be reluctant to participate in collective decision-making because the costs will ordinarily exceed the benefits. While public choice theory provides a useful tool for analyzing why people don't participate in development projects the way national governments and donors would like them to, the theory is inherently pessimistic about the prospects for close community collaboration in participatory development projects, largely because of its focus on individual self-interest.

Ideologies stressing getting government off the backs of people and leaving more room for private initiative in the marketplace, as we well know, have become increasingly popular. The United States has a president and an administration who believe in the "magic of the market." Reflecting the tenor of the times, many USAID officials are scurrying for projects which promote private sector initiative. Market-oriented development strategies are less concerned with fostering popular participation in development than they are in reducing state intervention and regulation of the economy. The Berg Report or *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* (World Bank, 1981) is an extremely articulate example of the market-oriented development ideologies

now in vogue among Western donors and being crammed down the throats of many African nations these days.

WHY PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS RARELY WORK

Until the mid-1970s, the development administration literature was primarily concerned with improving national planning techniques and the efficiency of government development agencies. As to participation, the main focus was on getting the local populations involved in the implementation of government inspired projects.² Little attention was paid to encouraging popular participation in project design and evaluation or to insure that all segments of the population in the project area shared in the benefits.

Today, there is a growing consensus that the top-down managerial approaches of the past have not worked, hence the call for a new approach which will insure greater participation in project design, implementation, and evaluation. In the African context, one can cite several reasons why top-down approaches still prevail: (1) the colonial administrative legacy which creates an attitude of superiority of development officials and administrators vis-a-vis the peasantry (Bugnicourt, 1979); (2) the tendency of state bureaucracies to seek to expand their turf and dominate local development initiatives; (3) the authoritarian and hierarchical managerial style of most development bureaucracies; (4) the fact that most government projects are initiated in the capital and determined largely on the basis of national rather than local development priorities; (5) the high degree of dependency of African governments on foreign donors which means that more time is spent in negotiating the terms of the project between donors and high-ranking African officials than between the government and the rural populations involved; and, (6) the non-participation of the local populations in planning and designing projects.

Governments and donors rarely look at the formulation of projects from the perspective of the peasant. One of the few attempts to present the peasant's perspective can be found in a fascinating article by Bernard Lecomte (1978) based on his long experience in development work in Francophone Africa and revealing interviews with peasants in Burkina Faso. Lecomte notes that most development projects are the work of actors who are outside the rural milieu in which the project takes place. Thus, the project is not the work of the village or local organization. Projects are generally limited to a particular sector — e.g., irrigated agriculture — or a particular crop — e.g., tomatoes. Lecomte quotes village chiefs who complain that the outsiders never ask them for advice or for ideas about projects. Instead, they come with the project already formulated and ask the local populations to participate. The development officials rarely consider a request initiated by the people. They always say "it is not the right moment for it" or "we don't have the time to consider it." Village surveys usually treat the local populations as objects and villagers are not usually given the opportunity to conduct their own "survey" of the technicians responsible for formulating the project. There is little negotiation as officials don't let the peasants proceed in their own way and censor ideas contrary to the project. Moreover, the management techniques formulated by the technicians are usually based on external models which don't work in an African village context. Anyone who has worked any time in Africa on project design teams knows exactly what Lecomte is talking about.

MAKING PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS WORK

One of the major reasons why participatory development projects are not popular with donors is because they are generally small-scale projects which require a good deal of time to launch and to obtain tangible material results. It is hard to tell the office back in Washington or Paris, that it could take more than two years of dialogue and negotiations with the local populations before one could start construction on a 100 hectare irrigated perimeter that might have a reasonable chance of success.

Donors would rather throw away a lot of money in a short period of time on large-scale projects that are bound to fail than spend smaller amounts of money on small-scale participatory development projects that provide modest returns on the investments but are more likely to succeed. The reason for this is simple. The unit cost of administering a large project is much lower than that of administering a small-scale project. If you are going to bring in a team of highly paid consultants to design a project, then it seems to make more sense for them to work on a large-scale capital intensive one. It also seems to make sense to get them in and out of the field as quickly as possible in order not to run up outrageously high consultant bills.

To make participatory development projects work, one needs the following ingredients: (1) sufficient understanding of the rural milieu in the project area; (2) a sufficiently long period of time to work out the project design in collaboration with the local populations; (3) project priorities that are determined by the participants; (4) a project that does not take the participants away from other activities which they consider to be socially or economically more desirable; (5) freedom for the participants to work out their own management system; and, (6) freedom of the participants to dispose of the benefits derived from the project as they see fit.

Peasants know their own milieu better than the visiting sociologist or anthropologist. Hence, project designers should find ways of tapping all that indigenous knowledge. Rather than bringing in expensive consultants to spend short periods of time in a strange milieu, it seems wiser to ask the development specialists to teach the local populations how to do their own research in their own languages.³ Peasants, for example, could describe their own production systems and survival strategies.⁴

Much of the time on most project designs is not spent with the populations for whom the project is intended. For projects to work, more time should be spent with the local populations. Projects requiring the introduction of new technologies and requiring important changes in land use obviously need more time to work out the details than projects familiar to the local populations having little impact on local social structures.

One of the most interesting participatory development success stories in the Senegal River Delta is that of Abdoulaye Diop, a Senegalese schoolteacher, who gave up his teaching career to return to his village to promote its development. (Diop, 1983) Diop knew his village well and its traditions. He began by organizing a youth group while a teenager in 1963 which eventually came to be known as the *Foyer des Jeunes de Ronkh*. It took him close to ten years to unify the village youth. He won the support of the elders by getting the youth to build a mosque which was their top priority. He organized collective fields to raise money. Eventually, enough people were mobilized and enough money raised to launch irrigated agricultural projects and to coax many youth from the area who had left to

work in the towns to return to their villages to work on the irrigated perimeters. While Diop received some financial support and technical assistance from the Senegalese government and private voluntary organizations, most of the effort came from within his association. The *Foyer des Jeunes de Ronkh* negotiated the terms of their relationships with SAED, the Senegalese extension service responsible for developing the Senegal River region. It had the courage to resist SAED when it felt that SAED was wrong. Its example inspired the establishment of hundreds of other associations in the Senegal River Delta and elsewhere in the country.

Diop's success had much to do with his fulfilling the criteria for making participatory development projects work cited earlier in this section.

It is too much to expect donors to give up all their old ways concerning the way in which they spend time and money. Aid officials are locked into a system which makes it difficult to spend much time with the people for whom they are planning participatory development projects. However, those responsible for project design and implementation can at least make a greater attempt to be less like Nurse Ratched. Rather than imposing their own agenda and methodology, they should try and do more to allow local populations to define their own development priorities, manage their own projects, and exercise some control over the consultants, local development officials, and technical assistance personnel working with them.⁵

NOTES

1. The decline of the French Communist Party owes much to its adherence to Stalinist lines and close ties with the Soviet Union. The Socialists have overtaken the Communists as the leading party of the Left by pushing for more local autonomy and self-management. Some French Marxists have argued that local autonomy and self-management give masses the illusion of power while the real levels of power remain in the hands of international capital (Bihl and Heinrich, 1979). The same argument can, of course, be transferred to a Third World setting.
2. For one of the most comprehensive attempts to define what is meant by participation and the different forms it takes, see (Uphoff, Cohen, and Goldsmith, 1979). The authors speak of participation in four areas: (1) design; (2) implementation; (3) evaluation; and (4) benefits. Most governments and donors are primarily concerned with getting people to participate to implement projects. For a detailed survey and analysis of the literature, see (Gellar, 1982).
3. In November 1982 in Thies, Senegal, a conference was held which brought together representatives of development agencies, consultants, and representatives of West African Peasant Associations to discuss the role that consultants could play in helping local groups do their own analysis and planning and serve as intermediaries in dealing with donors. Efforts are now being made to put some of these ideas into practice.
4. Quechua Indians in Bolivia wrote their own textbooks on this subject. There is no reason why this can't be tried in an African context. For more details, see (Hatch, 1981).
5. There are several development groups working in Sahelian Africa which work closely with peasants in formulating local development strategies and projects — e.g. ENDA, GRAAP, the Panafrican Development Institute, and Six S. For more details see (Gellar, 1982: 61-63).

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