

Shirley A. White et al. *The Art of Facilitating Participation: Realising the Power of Grassroots Communication*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. Indian Rs 250.00. 367 pages.

Participatory development has gained considerable recognition and popularity in recent years as conventional approaches have been unable to tackle the widening disparities between scarce resources and endless needs and shorten the rich-poor gap. Their failure is traced to lack of participation of the beneficiaries.

Shirley A. White, the editor of this volume, has used contributions from a number of authors who describe their experience in facilitating participation through its major components.

The book is divided into three parts: the Art of Activation, the Art of Technique, and the Art of Building Community. The experiences of the authors are in a variety of areas—from facilitation to synergising participation, from catalyst communication to participatory rural communication appraisal, from participatory research to the participatory action research, from participatory rural appraisal to participatory learning, from the use of statistics in participatory development to use of the Internet and community radio in rural development, from role of women in agriculture to children in participatory research and so on. The book also tells a number of success and failure stories across the continents under world organisations like the USAID, UNDP, FAO, UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, SIDA and others.

The joint focus of the authors is how to facilitate grassroots participation of the people in decision-making and other activities that lead to their overall welfare. The editor thinks that “*effective facilitation is an art that engages the creative forces within persons*”.

Part I describes the art of activation. It comprises six chapters by nine different authors on issues such as engaging interest of the people, sparking their thinking, igniting the process of creativity and creating understanding of participation. Shirley A. White and K. Sadanandan Nair differentiate between facilitation and advocacy. They explain the catalyst communicator competencies with the help of a matrix.

Ndunge Kiiti and Erik Nielsen differentiate between a facilitator and an advocate: “*an advocate is often driven by an external agenda while the facilitator seeks to understand and help people determine their own agenda*”. Simone St. Anne is of the view “*people are the centre, the focal point, the beginning, the middle, and the end of participation*”. She believes that the facilitator must become an internal force to take the community towards collaborative creation. She lucidly spells out useful ways for practitioners of participatory development. Ricardo Ramirez is of the opinion that “*facilitative communication is critical to effective development*”. He places learning at the heart of communicative action. He explains the three roles for communication: make things visible, foster policy acceptance and facilitate platform processes. Peggy Koniz-Booher shares the challenges, problems, obstacles,

frustration, pitfalls, lessons learned and ultimate payoffs gained and experienced during her three-year assignment as an outside facilitator in the Dominican Republic. Jim Lees and Sonali Ojha point out that truly listening to a team of children in Mumbai, showing them genuine respect and care, believing in their abilities and trusting them yielded marvellous achievements.

Part 2 of the book illustrates the art of techniques. It comprises eight chapters by eleven different authors. The authors share their experiences and the techniques they employed. There are dialogues, cases, examples, the authors quote to draw an analysis of the techniques they employed. Dialogues between Ricardo Gomez and Orlando Fals Borda over various issues of facilitation and participation, particularly the problem of manipulation in participation, reveal that participation has become a fashion term in development. Orlando doubts real grassroots participation. NGOs are there mainly to attract funds in the name of participation that you see nowhere in their operations.

The book should have contained detailed analysis of pseudo-participation i.e. manipulated participation as at the moment programmes meant for the poor seldom target the intended beneficiaries, particularly developing countries like Pakistan. Kathleen E. Colverson narrates her experiences of working with women in Honduras. She emphasises on creating an environment of trust using open communication and developing networking and collaboration. The problem with the findings of the author is that these may not be generalised. Problems of women in the third world are more complex in nature. Social, cultural, religious and other taboos are the main hurdles in the way of women to participate in development initiatives.

Meredith Fowlie highlights the importance of partnership between farmers and scientists in undertaking participatory action research on issues pertaining to agriculture. Josh Galper narrates the importance of statistics and gives an overview of the statistical use in participatory action research and participatory development. Chike Anyaegbunam, Paolo Mafalopulos and Titus Moetsabi highlight the importance and comprehensively describe the utility of Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) as an effective tool in imparting training to development facilitators, in providing data on rural people's socio-economic conditions etc. Renuka Bery narrates the concept of effective participation in training. She advocates the principle of learning through discovery. She supports her advocacy with the help of an ancient Chinese proverb "*I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand*".

John L. Hochheimer addresses issues like facilitating new media systems, promoting democratic journalism, and creating community based media. He emphasises the need to strengthen the communication systems to foster linkages between the community and the outside world. He thinks that community radio paves the way to democratisation, empowerment and participatory development. Don Richardson discusses the Internet, its benefits, potential, and limitations. He believes that Internet can be instrumental in the development of people through

opening innovative ways and means of communication and information and establishment of networking and collaborations. He cites the examples of Internet use by village communities in Canada and USA.

Part 3 is about the art of community building which the authors consider as the outcome of participation. Marilyn W. Hoskins shares her experience in the areas of local welfare and trees, participatory forestry and forestry for local community development.

Joseph Ascroff and Ilias Hristodoulakis thrash out issues like health needs, UNICEF's child-to-child participatory strategy, participatory decision-making options and potential participants in decision-making and social marketing. They are of the view that participation in decision-making leads to empowerment of the participants. Anne Marie Johnston focuses on collaboration, states the types of collaboration (consensus-based collaboration, search-based collaboration), explains the facilitation role, and pinpoints the commonalties in collaborative conflict resolution. Anne believes that the collaborative models are advantageous over the conventional paternalistic and confrontational models as collaboration stimulates participatory analysis of the differences, initiates consensus building, facilitates the dispute settlement and leads the participants to appropriate solutions to their problems.

In conclusion Shirley raises questions, doubts and concerns over the existence of real grassroots participation. She focuses mainly on the challenges and emphasises the need to create an environment conducive to participation, build a culture of co-operation through the use of appropriate tools and techniques. She is of the opinion that participation is more important than even the goal—i.e. development.

This useful compilation is not without its limitations: the findings may not be amendable to generalisation; how to facilitate participation in an environment dominated by feudals or other influential groups; what to do in a situation where there are huge income and power disparities in a stratified society. These aspects are not discussed. Similarly the problems, barriers and obstacles to the participation of women in economic activities have not been thoroughly thrashed out.

The book no doubt covers important dimensions of participation but it has ignored to some extent an important aspect of participation i.e. cost of participation. Participation is an expensive item. There always exists the scope and need to explore ways to minimise its cost. The authors have rightly pointed out that authentic participation may still be an ideal phenomenon instead of a real one. The irony is that most of the NGOs are using participation as cosmetic labelling without substance. There is need to develop measures and parameters for gauging the degree of real grassroots participation.

The book is a good piece of work in the field of participation, very useful for development practitioners. The work of the team is highly commendable.

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