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The Global Discourse on "Participation" and its Emergence in Biodiversity Protection

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Contents

Abstract

This paper inquires into the nature of "participation" as a cross-section set of principles now applied to many issues of global concern. It argues that "participation" is a type of "global discourse" that is central to current forms of global governance, as well as to debates on, and around, globalisation. It sheds light on the internal mechanics of the call for "ever-broader participation" by social actors in decisions that affect them – as well as on the normative and instrumental grounds from which this call draws its strength. Turning to the protection of biodiversity, it shows how the global wave of participatory principles reached the shores of this specific policy field, upon what rationales (both top-down and bottom-up) it came to be perceived as a "natural" approach within environmentalist circles, and the types of promises this social methodology implies. It then points to doubts that have emerged about the participatory approach and to the lack of analysis of both history and power structures in the analytical frameworks often used by international donors when designing and evaluating participatory projects.

1. The Global Wave of Participatory Principles

States, multilateral organisations, bilateral agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), foundations, think tanks, local or global activists and the media: the whole world seems to share a common enthusiasm for "participation", as reflected in the ever-increasing number of work procedures, international declarations and political commitments from all sides. The rationale for this move seems very compelling. Not only can participation be seen as an end in itself, by promoting democratic political values and greater social equity, but it also harbours the hope of creating governance arrangements that will stand the test of time. Participatory institutions, due to their supposed dynamic flexibility, can theoretically better adapt to changing conditions, new incoming stakeholders and rising challenges.

1.1. Early Origins

The concept of participation is based on a rich legacy of ideas and influences, among which Midgley (1986) identifies three core sources: Western ideologies at large; the 1950s movement of "community development"; and the professional field of social work.

First, Western ideologies and political theories. by arguing that ordinary citizens have a right to share in decision-making, community participation reveals its inspiration by democratic ideals. However, this inspiration is not based on classical notions of representative democracy but rather on a modern variant of liberal democratic theory first known as "neighbourhood democracy" (Dahl & Tufts, 1973). Many proponents of community participation are indeed sceptical of representative democracy and its capacity to provide meaningful opportunities for the masses who are to be involved in policymaking. Hence, the pleas for the creation of small-scale institutions to enable the realisation of political aspirations at the village and urban neighbourhood levels, notably in the developing world. Community participation is also infused with diffuse populist notions, such as the belief that virtue resides in the "simple people" and that "ordinary folks" are usually badly treated.

The "community development movement" of the 1950s and 1960s is another source of inspiration. Among the first proponents of "community development" were missionaries and colonial officers. The dual mandate to civilise while exploiting, and the need to establish durable political structures, encouraged the creation of early forms of community projects. For instance, an official 1944 report on mass education in the Colonies led the British government to establish such programmes in many African countries. However, contemporary advocates of community participation claim that these programmes failed because of their bureaucratic administration and superimposed direction, which ended up perpetuating the structure of oppression both, at the local and national levels.

Finally, the field of "social work" is also underscored by Midgley as an influential source for the Participation discourse. Since the mid-20th century, a rising interest had been paid to communities seeking to organise and mobilise their people to improve local amenities and offer a range of social services (e.g. Lindeman, 1921; Steiner, 1930; Lane, 1939). In the 1960s, community organisation ideas were

further developed to incorporate notions of social planning into community organisation procedures. While such ideas originally developed in the United States, they started to gain audience in Europe, too, where the development of community organisations was largely influenced by the American experience. However, this took a more radical twist in Europe, where some community activists urged that people take direct political action to demand changes and improvements, within Marxist frameworks of thought. Such ideas also gained considerable appeal in the Third World. In the 1970s, many non-governmental organisations adopted radical community work methods (Mardsen & Oklay, 1982). Some, such as the Commmunity Action Movement in Maharashtra, India, adopted an explicit Marxist ideology rejecting "welfarism" and promoting an outright political struggle based on class analysis.

While these various sources serve as background on later thinking, community participation emerged as a coherent approach only after the United Nations' popular participation programmes. The emphasis on popular participation in UN thinking was formalised with the publication of two major documents on this subject in the 1970s. The first, entitled "Popular Participation in Development", was published in 1971 and reviewed the emergence of ideas of

"community development" over the preceding 25 years in the Third World. The second, "Popular Participation in Decision Making for Development", appeared in 1975 and offered a formal definition of the concept, with reference to various implementation methods. This publication was followed by the creation of a research programme on popular participation, by the UN Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva (UNRISD) – a programme still running today.

Resolutions adopted at the World Conference on International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975, further reinforced the idea of participation. It was pointed out that women had been largely excluded from participating in both political and development processes. The UN then convened a meeting in 1978 to refine its concept of "popular participation", but a more significant contribution came from UNICEF and the World Health Organisation in their common Declaration on Primary Health Care, at the Alma Ata conference in 1977. "Participation in health" was featured prominently and has since become a major preoccupation in the field of global health policy. During the 1970s, the idea of community participation also attracted the attention of the housing and urban development sector (e.g. Turner, 1968) and was integrated into the World Bank's policies by 1975. Step-by-step, "participation" was becoming a global discourse.

1.2. "Participation" in Current Global Policy Discourses

The world is witnessing the emergence of a global ethic in which participatory principles feature prominently. Over the past decades, broad-based participation has imposed itself as a coherent and constant theme in international policy agreements. This dynamic emerged most visibly in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a document widely regarded as the founding charter of "sustainable development". It contains a list of 27 principles, 3 of which are dedicated to participation: Principle 10 emphasizes that "environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens"; Principle 20 advocates for the full participation of women, while Principle

22 refers to indigenous peoples and their communities.
The Rio conference also led to the approval of Agenda 21, a comprehensive blueprint of action "for the 21st century" to be implemented globally, nationally and locally by UN organisations and the world's governments. The text of Agenda 21, for which negotiations began in 1989, is a massive, 351-page document loaded with references to participation and participatory approaches. While the notions of "empowerment" and "democracy" are hardly referred to (respectively, 7 and 5 occurrences), "participation" is mentioned 195 times [1].

[1] This comparison includes derivative words, such as "democratic", "empowering", "participatory".

Not only does the Preamble of Agenda 21 advocate for the "broadest public participation", but the theme is also central in two out of three of the document's main sections. Section 2 concerns itself with "conservation and management of resources for development", with a systematic emphasis on participatory principles. Section 3 is focused on "strengthening the role" of a wide range of groups, with a specific chapter devoted to each of the following: women, children and youth; indigenous people and their communities; non governmental organisations; local authorities; workers and trade unions; businesses and industries; and scientific communities. What is more, throughout the document, numerous references are made to "user groups" and "stakeholders", in general, and their need to "participate". The intent to involve local communities is made very clear- for instance, in forest, water, disaster and waste management, as well as in the early warning systems for environmental crisis.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in 2000, is another key document of the international community that places "participatory governance" at the forefront of its message. At the very opening, participation appears in the section devoted to core "values and principles", under the ambitious heading of "freedom". Later, in Section Five on "democracy, human rights and good governance", it reaffirms the commitment of the signatory states "to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all countries". Among the eight related Millennium Development Goals that the international community pledged to reach before 2015, two are directly referring to the principle of participation: Objective 2 refers to the empowerment of women, while Objective 8 is a plea for a multilevel, global partnership involving all possible types of actors.

In the field of education, also, the international discourse clearly emphasises the importance of community participation (Singleton, 2005). Participatory approaches were brought straight to the forefront in Jomtien, at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA). Since then,

they have been re-affirmed by the 1,100 representatives meeting in Dakar in 2000 at the follow-up conference. An analysis of the EFA National Action Plan further shows the rhetoric on domestic education policy to be strongly committed to the same principles. The most critical partners are often said to be those "directly affected by education policies" such as teachers, students, parents and other members of the community.

Turning to international aid, and one of its major memorandums of understanding, the Monterrey Consensus, signed in March 2002, confirmed the pre-eminence of "participation" and posited it among such fundamental values as justice, equity and democracy (section I.9).

As a follow-up to the Rio Earth Summit, 191 governments gathered in September 2002 in Johannesburg for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The aim was to assess progress since 1992 and reinvigorate global commitment. The result was a 54-page agreement called the "Johannesburg Plan of Implementation", which set out new commitments and priorities in areas as diverse as poverty eradication, health, trade, education, global finance, debt reduction, technology transfers, scientific research and natural resource management. Again, while "democracy" is only mentioned 7 times, "human rights" 6 and "empowerment" 2 times, "participation" is explicitly referred to 34 times; especially in regard to "communities", it is mentioned 41 times [2]. Thus, while the Plan of Implementation covers virtually all aspects of global governance, its cross-cutting theme is very much participation, and the "involvement of all stakeholders", which is also manifested by the 53 occurrences of the word "partnership".

Beyond international commitments, addressing the policy and operational levels, the United Nations and its sectoral agencies regularly re-commit to participatory principles, as do the UN Environmental Programme, the UN Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation and the Global Environment Facility. The World Bank is no exception and has, officially, strong policy

2 Here, we do not take into account occurrences ot the experssion "international community".

guidelines on stakeholder participation in project design and implementation. All these organisations devote significant resources to monitor and update their participatory methodologies, as well as to make them known to the wider public. Thus, participation may be said to also be part of a communications strategy, countering claims that such large international organisations are deaf to local voices and demands. Omnipresent UN efforts to increase "partnerships" in all spheres of global policymaking also reflect this dynamic.

Beyond applying the methodological and ethical requirements of participation to themselves, such organisations often go much further and impose them on the governments they work with. For instance, Risley (2007) shows that the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and a diverse array of international organisations have encouraged participatory reforms in Latin America by financing programs that stipulate citizen involvement in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

Participation is also a "global discourse" in the sense that it is widely supported and referred to by non-governmental organisations, big and small, international and local (O'Riordan & Voisey, 1997, 1998). Its rhetoric is intrinsic to the discourses of local associations, as it provides the basis for their inclusion in policy processes and access to financial resources. This can be seen in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where community-based NGOs rely heavily on participatory discourses to attract attention from national policymakers and international donors. As for international NGOs, their charters and stated principles, as well as their policy recommendations, methodological guidelines and project proposals, more and more rely on a participatory discourse. This is especially the case in the environmental sphere, for instance, in the policy declarations and project presentations of large organisations, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) or the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

In 2006, eleven international NGOs (INGOs) involved in human rights, environmental and social development, decided to co-sign a common "INGO Accountability Charter". Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Save the Children and Transparency International were among the signatories. This was the first time that such organisations had outlined a common set of principles and commitments concerning accountability and transparency. In this document, strong emphasis is placed upon participatory and multi-stakeholder engagement, as signatories commit to "seek to work in genuine partnership with local communities".

1.3. "Participation" in the Politics of Globalisation

"Participation" is a heavily used word in discussions on, and around, globalisation (Green & Chamber, 2006). It tops the list of concept when it comes to praising or criticising globalisation and thinking about necessary actions to take. This reveals that not only is this discourse part of current global governance itself, but that is also totally infused into the politics of globalisation. Enthusiasts, reformers and radical critics of globalisation all rely on a form of discourse centered on "participation".

Neo-liberal enthusiasts of globalisation represent globalisation as an essentially "emancipatory" and "participatory" dynamic that brings increased inclusiveness to global markets for hitherto marginalised actors. Integration is eroding the power and legitimacy of states, but it emancipates, in turn, a whole range of sub-state and non-state actors that are gaining greater influence and voice. In this narrative of globalisation, markets are the core source of opportunities and positive change for developing countries, local communities and individuals alike. "Participation" is primarily about participating in markets, and the good news is that they are increasingly open to everybody: the North/South dichotomy is being replaced by a "flat world" of entrepreneurs (Friedman, 2005), a level playing field where all competitors have equal opportunities. If they are to "participate" in the modern world, the poorest regions and communities need more globalisation, not less. As Held & McGrew (2002) note, "governance of this neo-liberal order is conducted

principally through the discipline of the world markets, combined with minimal forms of international governance designed to promote global economic integration through the dismantling of barriers to commerce and investments". Neo-liberal enthusiasts are also at ease with the trend of increased participation by civil society organisations at the local level, as this addresses their agendas about limiting the influence of the state by letting private initiative take responsibility for an increasing number of previously public-dominated areas of policymaking.

Reformers see as many threats as opportunities in globalisation. They call for collective action to frame globalisation and make, for this central use of the concept of "participation". They want to bring about a more cooperative world and ethics based upon the principles of consultation, transparency and accountability. Many of them advocate for the creation of new global institutions. Their main concern is to ensure democratic governance in global affairs. Central to their ethics is the principle of "participation in governance at all levels from the local to the global" (Held & McGrew, 2002, p.104). They are also concerned about the provision of "global public goods" (as defined by Kaul et al, 1999) that is weakened by three "gaps". First is the "jurisdictional gap" (the discrepancy between cross-border externalities and the limited units of national policymaking); second is the "participation gap" (the failure to give an adequate say to even major global actors); third, is the incentive gap (which makes many states seek to free-ride in collective efforts). To bridge the participatory gap, reformers emphasise that decision-making should always simultaneously give a voice to governments, civil society and businesses. Actors in politics, business and civil society must become active participants in the setting of public agendas, in their formulation and deliberations.

Radical critics of globalisation, finally, maintain a love-hate relationship with the global discourse on participation. On the one hand, they support its fundamental premises and ethical objectives: the need for increased inclusiveness, deliberative democratic practices and the empowerment of local actors. On the other hand, they argue that when participation is implemented institutionally, often with the help of global actors - such as international NGOs or public donors - it usually reinforces current structures of power and domination, at both the local and global levels. Radical critics

thus have another view of what "participation" should mean and should be doing. Their vision brings participation closer to grassroots activism, political activism or subversion than to a neatly defined institutional framework and set of procedures whereby conflicts and tensions are supposedly mitigated through discussion. A non-institutionalised type of "participation" lies at the heart of the political programme of these radicals (Held & McGrew, 2002, pp.112-115). In their view, participation should aim at the emergence of "inclusive, self-governing communities". It should concern itself with the conditions necessary to "empower people to take control of their own lives and to create communities based on ideas of equality, the common good and harmony with the natural environment". For this to happen, agents of change are not traditional global actors, such as large international organisations and NGOs. They are rather to be found in critical social movements, such as the environmental, women's or anti-globalisation movements that challenge the authority of states and global governance institutions. Through the "politics of resistance and empowerment", such movements are expected to create a new bottom-up world order. This model of change is connected to a deep commitment to ideals about community politics, as well as to direct and participatory democracy. It also draws on Marxist critiques of liberal democracy, as shown in constant references to the language of equality, solidarity, emancipation and the reversal of the power status quos.

The rising concern about participation by local communities in global governance is well exemplified by the following academic quote (Alger, 1999) - archetypal of the common-sense of today's neoliberals, reformers and radicals alike: "[In the new global era, the survival of democracy] requires that local people: (1) be aware of the impact of a variety of world systems on their community, and on their own daily lives; (2) know where decisions are being made in their community in response to these challenges; (3) and know how they can participate in the decisions that are most important to them individually, to their families, and to the local organisations that they deem important. At the same time, they need to know who is representing them in provincial, state and international organisations working on these issues, and how they can participate in choosing these people and affecting their policies."

1.4. The Mechanics of a Global Discourse

The discourse on participation is based on a "system of significations" by which objects are distinguished from one another - as de Saussure (1913) would have it. This discourse constructs categories and defines the relationships among them, as well as action programmes that are implicitly regarded as being "natural".

"Participation" is positioned at the crossroads of two binary, oppositional of concepts, in which one of the terms is clearly preferable to the other. The first opposition is "inclusion versus exclusion". While "inclusion" has a positive connotation, exclusion implies an immediate negative tone: it is always good to be "included", and whoever excludes is suspicious. The same holds true for the other binary opposition, of being "active" versus being "passive". The positive connotation of "activeness" is connected to notions such as being energetic and creative, as compared to being lethargic and apathetic. Overall, participation places itself on the right side of an implicit value scale that provides it with an immediate positiveness.

Participation creates at least two series of objects: a group of potential participants and something to participate in. The former are construed as non-participating or under-partici-pating. Given the immediate positiveness of "participation" (as compared to "exclusion"), a connection is made with concerns about the legitimacy or effectiveness of whatever is at stake. This is reinforced by the use of the concept of "stakeholders", namely people and groups that are affected by what is discussed. In the context of a liberal ideology, widely shared by western societies, the claim of stakehol-ders to being involved comes as a natural implication of their status as "impacted parties". This flows, for instance, from the "no harm" principle of John Stuart Mill (1859), who argues that the one fundamental limitation of individual liberty is to not harm others [3]. This calls for compensation, or involvement in decisions, if harm is being done or more generally if any impact is made by one person on another. In a liberal ideology, "stakeholders" are essentially "rights-holders". What is thus intrinsic to the notion of "participa-tion" is that something needs to be changed and fixed for

the better, and that someone has a legitimate claim to this.

The participation discourse further tends to picture social relations as a binary relationship between "uppers", who hold resources or power, and "lowers" who are left without. It follows that participation should be about reversing this situation so that "lowers" are "empowered" and "uppers" relatively "disempowered". Kothari (2001) further points to participation as a paradigm whereby "the micro is set against the macro, the margins against the centre, the local against the elite". In his view, this "almost exclusive focus on the micro-level, on people who are considered power-less and marginal, [reproduces] the simplistic notion that the sites of social power and control are to be found solely at the macro and central levels". This reading simplifies power relations and neglects them at the local level. Consequently, there is a risk that concerns about "participa-tion" omit various forms of power-structure phenomena – overlooking a range of social interactions at the local level itself, among or within groups.

Now, regarding the "thing" that is to be "participated in", it is interesting to note that the "thing" stands as pre-existing in the concept of "participation", creating the feeling that people or groups are to be included in something that is already there – and that merely needs "more participation". Here, the internal ambiguity of the notion is manifest. Telling groups that they deserve to "participate" sounds as though it is already known what it is that they have to participate in, leaving limited room for them to change or shape "it", accor-ding to their own preferences and needs.

One may argue that the difference between "participation" and "empowerment" lies precisely there. While the latter clearly speaks about power, and the need to reshape part of the social order, "participation" stands out as a watered-down version that avoids addressing power relations as openly, and does not bring the status quo into question as

3. "The sole end for which manking are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection (...) The only part of the conduct of anyone for which he is amenable to society is that which concerns others (Mill, 1859, reprinted 1974 : 69)

bluntly. One could thus say, referring to Cox's conceptual distinction (Cox, 1981), that "empowerment" falls into the category of critical theory (that addresses power relations and structures) while "participation" relates to problem-solving concerns (that try to optimise a solution without touching the larger power framework).

The mechanics of the discourse can also be studied by looking at the predicates that characterise "participation" in international declarations and texts. In such documents, participation is typically determined by epithets that carry three ranges of meanings. First comes effectiveness, with epithets such as "effective", "active" or "adequate" participation. Second are the concerns over inclusiveness, as participation should be "increasing", "full", "broad-based", "popular", "of all stakeholders", "decentralised" and "at all levels". Third is legitimacy, as participation needs to be "equitable" and "transparent". Participation is thus construed as embodying the core ideals of modern social life, as effective, inclusive and politically legitimate.

Turning to what is said to be in need of "participation", three ranges of issues emerge. First are the "economic, social and commercial benefits", which shows that participation is an attempt to address concerns about the wider distribution of social welfare. Second are "planning", "decision-making", "implementation procedures", "assessment" and "evaluation", which reveals that participation is not only about the benefits but also about the processes that lead to them, through public policies. Finally, participation is said to be needed in "discussions" and "debates", pointing to the ethos of open discussion. In statements of global policy, the word "participation" is always used to stress the importance and urgency of promoting more of it. It is employed in reference to an array of actors of varying natures and sizes. It can be applied, for instance, to entire countries that need more "say" in the global political economy - such as developing countries in the governance of the International Monetary Fund. But it is even more often used in relation to more limited entities, such as NGOs, local associations, community-based organisations, women's groups, workers' unions, private enterprises, indigenous groups or individual citizens. Although the list is virtually endless, it is strongly geared towards civil society organisations, especially local ones, and much less towards public authorities, who are implicitly the ones who need to relinquish more power. Participation is thus essentially a call to include civil society (and local authorities to a lesser extent) in all types of governance projects, or in other words, to foster a new "alliance between the State and civil society" (Risley, 2007).

1.5. The Production of a Common Sense

Participation is more than a conceptual mechanism. As a globally propelled discourse, it has managed to produce a shared, common sense (at least a rhetorical one) among an incredibly vast range of actors and issues. In producing a "common sense", two fundamental mechanisms can be used by any given discourse (Weldes, 1999): articulation and interpellation. Participation uses both.

1/ Articulation is the capacity of a discourse to promulgate itself based on pre-existing and unquestioned cultural elements that already make sense within a society, thus reinforcing its claims. Articulation is a powerful feature of the participation discourse, as it neatly addresses concerns that are widespread in modern societies, notably about social justice, democracy and human rights.

In her classic article introducing participation into the field of policy planning, Arnstein (1969) insists that "participation is all about social and political equality" and it means "giving power to those who do not have power". This commitment is not anarchic or destructive of the social order, since there must remain something to "participate in". Nevertheless, it works against the political status quo and hierarchical social structures, whether those of traditional societies or modern bureaucracies. In a moderate version, it carries a reformist political outlook advocating increased inclusion of varied

voices; and in a more radical version, participation can offer the vision of radically new political forms – essentially bottom-up, and close to a libertarian vision of direct democracy.

Thanks to this fluidity, participation easily relates to a wide spectrum of Western ideologies, from classical liberalism to orthodox Marxism and neo-Marxism, including supporters of Harbemas' deliberative democracy. This is reflected in the wide political spectrum of the current proponents of "more participation". It can further be argued that participation is a cornerstone of democratic theory. Participation may be viewed as one approach among others to decision-making, or as a deeper and inescapable ontological dimension of democracy. At least four different approaches to democracy can be distinguished. First, the constitutional approach (e.g. Rawls, Nozick) focuses on democracy as fundamentally protecting the rights of individuals within society. Second, the utilitarian approach (e.g. Bentham, Schumpeter) defines democracy as meant to fulfil most peoples' preferences (by preference aggregation). Third, the participatory approach (e.g. Rousseau) targets the establishment of the "common best of society" through the participation of the citizens. Finally, the deliberative approach (e.g. Habermas) focuses – like the participatory approach – on the deliberative side of democracy, but combines it with a constitutional perspective. The first two categories express the representative – or vertical – side of participation, while the last two represent the more deliberative – or horizontal – side of participation.

2/ Interpellation is the second key mechanism that produces a common sense. With interpellation, a discourse targets specific people or groups that therefore feel involved, immersed, understood and empowered. At a general social level, one may say that "participation" appeals to citizens by targeting and making promises to both the individuals (whose claims are legitimised) and the many upcoming identity-based communities. Thus, the discourse on participation takes advantage of two powerful social trends, individualism and communitarianism, which contribute to the reworking of modern societies. Discussions about "participation" contribute to the reinforcement and legitimisation of a social body split into interests and minority groups, the long list of which parallels the list of potential "stakeholders"

in any given project – whether it be women, indigenous communities, etc.

Interpellation is also strongly targeted to professionals working in the field of international development. Participation has indeed emerged as a key development discourse. Its amazing capacity to present itself as a type of "common sense" among policymakers is a feature it shares with all previous "development paradigms". As Mohan & Stokke (2000, p.252) put it, "participatory discourses present [themselves] as commonsensical given the failings of what has preceded [them]". The production of a "common sense" is the driving engine of development discourses that change but never die. Paradigm shifts are always construed as "natural", and participation is no exception. Lindauer & Pritchet (2002) show how the various development paradigms have been based on "big facts and big ideas" that seem to be obvious "lessons from experience". Thus, disappointment with the dirigiste State and top-down strategies were followed by a neo-liberal wave advocating market deregulation. Disillusions with the latter produced a shift towards institutional reforms, social concerns addressed in the form of decentralisation and the greater involvement of civil society.

"Participation" prolonged the neo-liberal attack against State centralisation while not endangering the tenets of the free market, and even infusing them with social and local flavour. The efforts of Amartya Sen (1985, 1999) to change the focus from material wealth to a broad "capability" approach also deeply influenced development professionals. Key to his perspective were strategies that "empower" poor people, an agenda taken up by many donor organisations as part of their response to critiques of top-down development. Participatory approaches have become so influential in development that some observers refer to this as the "new orthodoxy" (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001). By the early 1990s, every major development institution emphasised participatory principles, with the World Bank joining them in the middle of the decade. Its support for community participation has been manifested in the design and implementation of either community-based development (CBD) or community-driven development (CDD) projects. The number of projects in the Bank's portfolio that include a CBD/CDD component grew from 2% in 1989, to 25% in 2003 (World Bank, 2005).

2. Safeguarding Biodiversity: From Exclusion to Participation

The protection of global biodiversity is one of the policy fields that best exemplifies the worldwide trend towards participatory principles. "Community participation" and "stakeholder involvement" have become the new common sense for most professional environmentalists. Organisations that oppose working with local populations are now very rare, even among those closest to the customary "glass bell" approach to conservation. International agencies and funds, multilateral or bilateral, have turned to "participation" as a key principle of environmental management, which they promote throughout the world. The dynamics leading to community participation in biodiversity protection proved heavily "bottom-up" in nature: participation came as an answer to disappointing experiences

with "top-down" environmental management, arguing that participation can bring about a better human being-nature equilibrium, while allowing local stakeholders, more and more, the "right to have their say".

From the end of the 19th century onwards, the traditional Western version of environmental protection had long excluded local populations from management projects, politically, economically and physically. This section explains why, and how, the principles of "participation" challenged this tradition, which is engrained in Northern environmental thought. The participatory model that has emerged since the mid-1980s is then presented and critically reviewed.

2.1. "Fences and Fines" and their Discontents

It is often said that protected areas were first created by Northern countries. In fact, most societies throughout time have developed some form of environmental protection. As Gadgil (1996) argues, the scale of conservation efforts by a given society is closely related to the scale of its resource base. Hunter-gatherer, shifting cultivator or horticultural societies, for instance, typically developed conservation practices in small areas, between 1 and 10 hectares - rarely beyond 100 hectares. These practices were embedded in a religious worship of nature, which took place in sacred locations such as woods, ponds or rivers. Today, sacred groves are still in common use in countries such as India or Madagascar, where they support local communities while providing safe habitats for local species.

Protected areas later expanded with the growing impact of human societies upon nature. Agrarian societies developed

hunting reserves extending over thousands of hectares that only aristocrats were allowed to use, a non-egalitarian system that ensured negligible impact upon the environment. Later, industrial economies were the first to create large-scale national parks, encompassing hundreds or even thousands of square kilometres. As is well known, the first national parks were developed in the United States and in Europe. Yellowstone, the first ever, was created in the late 19th century, at a time when much of North America had been already devastated by white settlers - who thought that God had given them the right to exploit the land in any way they could (Bernard & Young, 1997).

Against this backdrop, the Western conception of protected areas developed, built on a markedly misanthropic foundation. As McNeely (1997, p.1) states: "It assumes that people are destructive of a pristine nature that needs to be

protected against human depredation". "Wilderness", defined as the total absence of humans, became central to the notion of protected areas - romanticised as "the last preserves of places untouched by the outward expansion of the European imperium" (Cosgrove, 1995, p.3). This model was enshrined, as McElwee (2001) underscores, in the reference guidelines for park classification promoted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 1994). This system ranks parks on a 1 to 6 scale, depending on the degree of human "disturbance". Parks allowing for extractive use and residence (4 through 6) are often depicted by strict conservationists as less worthy than areas of stricter exclusion (rank 1 through 3). Arguably, this classification "oversimplifies the range of landscapes found in diverse areas of the world (…) and demonises those landscapes that are human-affected by ranking them lower on a scale" (McElwee 2001, p.3).

This outlook, closely linked to industrial development, nevertheless became indiscriminately applied to the rest of the world. The process started with colonial governments (whether British, French, Dutch or German) in administrated territories, such as Africa or Asia, but it continued with post-independence and dirigiste governments throughout the southern hemisphere. Consequently, for a long time, parks all over the world displayed the same structure of top-down, State-centered management projects. The "Western universal" was applied uniformly, setting boundaries around areas, and keeping people out as much as possible with "fences and fines".

This approach has been adopted by developing countries, either uncritically or following pressure from various Western actors. Protected areas in Southern countries are officially established by national governments; but in fact, they are often designed and run by international NGOs. Schmidtz (1997) recalls that environmentalists in Europe, Canada and the U.S. lobbied their own governments to use loan guarantees to pressure developing nations [4]. During the 1980s, NGOs displayed images of massive fires in the Amazon and other graphic catastrophes to build public support for global conservation. Influenced by such groups, the World Bank and other multilateral organisations started imposing in environmental pre-conditions for countries to

access loans (Kolk, 1998). The Western model was thus transposed "from industrialized countries with temperate climates to the Third World, whose remaining forests have been, and continue to be, inhabited by traditional populations. (…) Its effects have been devastating for the traditional populations - extractivists, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples" (Diegues, 2000, p.3).

Forced displacements were widely used to "cleanse" protected areas in countries such as India or Thailand, as well as in central Africa. Even recently, research shows that in six central African countries, five percent of the overall rural population has been displaced since 1990, imposing huge costs upon the "host" communities receiving people moved away against their will. In milder cases, the Western model has merely resulted in local resentment against parks and reserves, stemming from restrictions on income opportunities and natural resources which communities had utilised for generations (Wells & Brandon, 1992) [5].

With its top-down, centralised and exclusionary approach as applied in developing countries, the Western "orthodox" model has proved more socially destructive and less environmentally beneficial than was hoped by its promoters. Excluding communities living near, or within, natural areas has mostly proved politically and socially unsustainable (Lane, 2001). The "fence and fines" approach has heightened tensions between park managers and local communities, threatening their livelihoods and creating frustration and conflicts. Moreover, strict regulations without the means to enforce them have often led to "paper parks", which exist merely on maps, leaving everybody unhappy and leading communities to illegally extract resources they have used traditionally for centuries. This model was linked to the orthodox scientific paradigm that devalues indigenous knowledge (Kapoor, 2001), and carries the implicit view that local communities cannot develop rational environmental practices. These frustrations have laid the foundation for a new discourse.

[4]. See also MacDonald (2008). This book is a strong account of the role of Western conservationist NGOs in dictating policies.

[5] See also Dan Brockington, et al. (2008).

2.2. The Promises of "Participation"

In the 1980s, research started to emerge about numerous examples of community practices and traditional techniques that had proved sustainable over time (e.g. Perry & Dixon, 1986; Shiva, 1991; Alcorn, 1993). Shifting cultivation, for instance (a practice involving the clearing/burning and cultivation of forested areas in rotation) had been frequently banned by colonial and post-colonial governments. Yet, because it allows the plots left empty to recover nutrients and vegetation, it has been shown to enhance biodiversity (Leach & Mearns, 1996.). Similarly, traditional community forestry often entails communal labour's planting and maintaining of trees, and regulating access to resources according to socio-religious rules. This often proved more successful for reforestation than state or privately-run projects (Guha, 1989).

In any case, the weaknesses of State-centric policy were such that few options other than community-based conservation existed – as argued, for instance, by Wells & Brandon (1992) in their review of 23 conservation programmes. In development programmes, the mainstreaming of "participation" started in the 1970s, but it was only in the mid-1980s that it took off in environmental management. A new framework emerged under the name of "Integrated Conservation and Development Projects" (ICDPs). This tried to bridge the gap between conservation and socioeconomic concerns by providing local actors with alternative income opportunities that would have little impact on the environment. ICDPs later integrated wider concerns about participation in project design and management on the part of "communities" and an even broader range of "stakeholders".

This participatory approach has thus gained recognition in conservation endeavours only in recent decades. From its origins in local discontents, it is now promoted on a wide scale by NGOs, governments and international organisations. In biodiversity issues, the World Bank, the Worldwide Fund for Nature, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur

Foundation, as well as a host of bilateral donor agencies (including the American USAID, the Swedish SIDA, the Canadian CIDA or the French AFD) have all adopted this approach to a large extent.

The participatory approach to environmental management is based upon a range of tenets. It acknowledges the multiplicity of stakeholders. It decentralises decision-making power from government authorities to more inclusive governance structures. Rather than outside managers and authorities imposing ready-made programmes, stakeholders are supposed to undertake a process of collective learning and consensus-building to design their own programmes – such as the delineation of management zones and the composition of decision boards. Dialogue and democratisation embedded in community life are supposedly opposed to an expert and top-down culture. Whereas the orthodox approach functions as if reality is one, single, universal and objective, the new approach adopts a more "constructivist" outlook that sees reality as socially created and culturally specific (Kapoor, 2001). "Truth", "facts", "effects" and "causes" are no longer revealed through the sole eye of the external "expert", but supposedly constructed in an inter-subjective process drawing together multiple perspectives.

Expectations are high. Participation is supposed to reconcile - all at once - conservation, social justice and democratic ideals. In other words, it must enable the sustainable use of natural resources, greater distribution of economic benefits and political power, as well as respect for social and cultural concerns (Borrini-Feyerabend, 1996). It does not wipe away concerns about efficiency, effectiveness and impact, which used to be the sole focus of the orthodox approach; but these are made no more important, and sometimes less so, than expectations about the nature of the decision- making process. Efficiency "for whom" and "determined by whom" have become key questions (Kapoor, 2001). Effectiveness is expected to be strengthened through several channels.

- First, participation expands the information base tied into the programme design and helps to integrate local knowledge and experience.
- Second, participation strives for the widest possible consensus: programmes are supposed to accommodate the objectives of most, if not all, parties. This in turn is supposed to reduce conflicts, enhance mutual understanding and sense of ownership, commitment and accountability, as well as create a spirit of team-building and joint problem-solving (Zazueta, 1995).
- Third, participation helps foster communication among groups and also tries to address dysfunctional (or asymmetrical) power relationships among them.
- Fourth, it is also said to facilitate greater iterative programming through increased feedback leading to reorientation, if necessary (Plein, et al., 1998).
- Fifth, participation is expected to create institutions capable of evolving over time and responding to evolving challenges of the human being - nature equilibrium. Since they do not enshrine an immovable management plan, but rather an open governance arrangement, they are supposed to allow for the possibility of change and adaptation, for instance, to include new incoming stakeholders.

2.3. Doubts About Participation

For all its promises, the challenges of "participation" are great in biodiversity protection. Cooke & Kothari (2001) observe that there have been two levels of critiques. The first level is a rather "internal" critique of participation that seeks to overcome its technical limitations (e.g. Nelson & Wright, 1995; Guijt & Shah, 1998). The second level is a more fundamental critique that draws attention to the power-structure effects of participatory discourses.

On the first and more internal level, we can cite the following critiques:

- Participation involves costs and time in the process of fostering cooperative relationships between stakeholders (Borrini-Feyerabend, et al., 2000), as there is often a history of resentment among them against environmental projects.
- Second, participatory management is by nature a political process that can become "politicised" as it evolves, involving decisions about incorporating specific community members. It thus carries a risk of further fragmenting communities that typically are already divided into interest groups.
- More profoundly, the question of whether the gap between development and conservation can be bridged is not a settled matter in environmental thought, and may be considered as its main dividing line. Conservation may not be important to community members who might be more concerned with improving their everyday life immediately, or simply feeding their families. Rural communities often face challenges of poverty, population growth, weak public policies and lack of marketable skills and resources, which make biodiversity protection their last priority (see for instance Fisher, et al., 2008). Participation may thus lead communities to define goals that contradict conservation (Wells & Brandon, 1992). In some contexts, the ideals of participatory democracy may just not turn out to be congruent with biodiversity protection.

- Finally, the concept of "participation" in biodiversity protection entails an ambiguity between two slightly different visions. The first vision is participation centered on community, a properly decentralised and bottom-up management, possibly including marginalised groups such as women, indigenous people, migrants or cultural minorities. The second vision is a wider concept of stakeholder participation that more explicitly includes international NGOs, donor agencies, government officials, private sector organisations, etc. While external actors are often presented and supposed to be mere catalysts or facilitators, the notion of stakeholder inclusion may tend to hide or legitimise their de facto leading role.

Beyond the previous concerns, there is a growing body of literature that critically studies the implications of participatory principles and methodologies. Since the early 1990s,

assessments of public involvement in biodiversity management have started to report issues familiar in other fields revolving around inequalities of power and social conflict, between communities and external agencies but also within communities (West & Brechin, 1991; Wells & Brandon, 1992; Western & Wright, 1994). Case studies published more recently have confirmed the importance of the themes of power and conflict (Sharpe, 1998; Brown & Rosendo, 2000). In conservation, as in development, the challenges of participation have become evident.

Risley (2007), for instance, examines how the global agenda of citizen participation has been implemented in the sphere of environmental policymaking in Latin America, especially in Chile and Argentina. She argues that government officials have re-shaped the participatory mandate to achieve a better fit with their own political objectives. However, it is in the field of economic and social development that doubts about participatory practices have been the most studied.

A calm look at participation seems to lead to disturbing results and unintended effects. Harsh critics of participation have emerged, such as Kapoor (2002), Mohan (2001) and others brought together in the landmark volume by Cooke & Kothari (2001), "Participation: The New Tyranny?". As this title suggests, the emancipatory claims of participation are called into question. Rather than empowering local "stakeholders", critics argue that participation provides alternative methods for incorporating local stakeholders into the ready-made projects of external agencies or authorities that remain, in reality, unaccountable to those they are supposed to empower. In this light, participation is just another means of pursuing top-down agendas, while seemingly following an inclusionary ideal.

A review of 84 World Bank projects approved between 1989 and 2003 labelled as "community-driven" showed that this qualification was rather emphatic and grandiose when compared with what was actually happening on the ground (Uphoff, 2005). Such projects were hardly "community-driven": the project design, the kinds of things that could be done, within what time frame and on what financial terms, were all decided unilaterally by Bank staff. The projects

themselves were not open to local participatory inputs, only the "subprojects". The main decisions left to the communities were whether or not they would submit a proposal to gain access to Bank project funds for something they wanted to do (within the non-negotiable framework set by Bank or government personnel), and how they would carry out the work once it was approved. Indeed, the projects had in common an aspiration to delegating to communities, or their representatives, some responsibility for taking the initiative to plan and implement improvements in services at community level. But "community-driven" only meant community-initiated, -implemented or -managed within fully externally-set parameters.

One of the most debated techniques in participatory practices has been the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), as initially formulated by Chambers (1983). This approach is supposed to incorporate the knowledge and opinions of rural people in the planning and management of development projects. PRA has nevertheless been described as a "practice of surveillance", in which the poor are subjected to the disciplinary eye of external donors, without having any reciprocal right to examine or criticise them (Kothari, 2001). PRA is also said to wipe out "anything that is messy or does not fit the structured representations implied by participatory tools", while controlling the production of "the norm, the usual and the expected" (p.147). Kapoor (2002) further suggests that there could even be a use for PRAs by state organisations in co-opting or monitoring groups and communities seen as "threatening".

At a more general level, participatory projects have been criticised as typically undergoing a "Weberian process of routinisation" (Mosse, 2001, p.25), a mechanistic transformation that makes them essentially symbolic, while fostering traditional top-down management structures. Real decisions are taken at a much higher level and despite disaffection by locals, the project continues to exist due to the deployment of patronage by project staff (Hildyard, et al., 2001), often in their own self-interest.

Mosse (2001) further points out that even "participatory projects" tend to be developed within a top heavy institutional setting, involving national and local governments, as well as

international-aid bureaucracies. All these forces put pressure on project management and personnel to produce time-tabled and quantifiable outputs that big organisations can identify as measures of "progress". They include meeting spending targets and the timely delivery of quantifiable objectives. The whole monitoring structure is usually neatly set out in a "logical framework", a management tool that tries to make explicit the key causal chains and goals of a given project.

Participation can thus be translated into a managerial exercise based on "toolboxes" of procedures and techniques, less concerned with empowerment than "efficiency" (Cleaver, 2001). This can be seen, for instance, in the typical emphasis that participatory projects put on the creation of formal committees, which hardly compensate for the lack of direct interaction with, or among, existing social groups. In many instances, the critique goes, project activities are already designed before there have even been any public meetings to mobilise local people, and many stakeholder committees end up existing only on paper. When they genuinely exist, they

tend to be dominated by the more powerful components of local communities - and typically by men.

Drawing on social psychology, Cooke (2001) adds further concerns. He points to four typical types of group dysfunctions that may affect participatory processes: 1) risk shift (the tendency of groups to take more risks than individuals); 2) the "Abilene paradox" (group actions often contradict what the members really want, due to a lack of communication among themselves); 3) coercive persuasion (close to collective brainwashing); 4) and "group thinking". The latter phenomenon refers to the fact that groups can reach a false consensus when they are led by an "esprit de corps" with features such as : over-confidence about the power and capabilities of the group; a proclivity to "rationalise away" discouraging feedback; an unquestioning acceptance of the morality of the group; negative stereotyping of external groups; self-censorship of any doubts and pressure against anybody who does express doubt; the tendency of some members to take on the role of guarding the group against negative information; and, as a consequence of all this, a sense of false unanimity regarding the goals.

2.4. The Blind Spots of Project Evaluations

Current evaluations of participatory projects in biodiversity protection, as in other development areas, raise a set of problematic issues that are not easy to address. The World Bank, for instance, recognises that it has no explicit benchmark against which the design and performance of its "community-based" or "community-driven" projects can be assessed (World Bank, 2005). To substantiate their judgement, evaluators are left with a single chapter on community participation in the World Bank's PRSP Sourcebook (World Bank, 2003) and a mere website as their main sources of guidance. The situation is not much different in other donor institutions. Despite the importance given to participation, there is still no robust evaluation framework available to donors to assess participatory processes in their specificity. For instance, none of the usual tools consider the dimensions of participation itself, thus providing limited evidence on the extent to which these projects have achieved their objectives through the participatory process. Here we

draw up a list of ten sub-issues that undermine current evaluation grids of "community participation".

2.4.1. Biased reassessment of goals – downplaying participation as an end in itself.

The first source of difficulty comes from the "objectives" of participatory projects. While initial project documents often feature participation as an end in itself, at least to some degree, evaluations tend to forget this claim and analyse participation - at best - on strictly instrumental grounds – looking at the project's effectiveness and efficiency in reaching other objectives. Even more evaluations do not analyse participatory processes themselves, and do not try to identify the specific contribution and added value of the participatory approach, as compared to other (often less costly) alternatives. Finally, most evaluations leave unstudied

the conflict between the drive towards specific pre-existing goals (leading to views of participation as a means for biodiversity protection) and the participatory ideal itself (as a form of democratic ownership that leaves goals open to a collective definition). Some communities may deliberately refuse to safeguard their environment, for instance, for the sake of their immediate needs.

2.4.2. Difficulty with quasi-unobservable or qualitative data, as well as social perceptions.

A key challenge in the evaluation of participatory projects is the difficulty of accessing a range of qualitative data that may only be deduced, at best, from direct and prolonged contact with, and observation of, local stakeholders. Power relations, changes in social interactions, feelings of empowerment and of disempowerment are a difficult kind of data to gather, even given intense fieldwork by dedicated researchers.

First, social perceptions must be construed on the basis of often contradictory information. Locals themselves frequently have diverging views on what has been happening within a participatory endeavour. They thus tell the same story in different ways that are difficult to re-assemble into a single picture by an external observer. It is not easy for an evaluator or a researcher to draw firm conclusions, even on the basis of privileged type of data like open-hearted interviews, meant to provide an inner understanding of people's experiences. For instance, what locals may have thought of the personality and work of a foreign expert who came to facilitate a participatory process, typically differs widely from one person to another, some being laudatory and others harshly critical. In such situations, it is not clear where the "truth" lies or what it even "means". Mixing perception pools, interviews and focus groups can be useful and goes some way toward disentangling social perceptions, but it is very costly and beyond the reach of typical evaluations.

Second, another range of problems limiting the accuracy of donor evaluations of participatory projects is the importance of "quasi-unobservable data". Community participation is largely about changing power interactions through new kinds of formal and informal institutions. While it is easy to

monitor physical capital, the evolution of social capital is much more difficult to trace. The construction of new assets, such as roads or bridges, cannot escape observation; meanwhile, a poor fisher who for the first time dares to stand up and voice his discontent in front of a Minister is something elusive and intangible, but just as significant. The creation of new social interactions and informal institutions are not things that donors can "inaugurate", but they reflect nevertheless the true objective of the participatory endeavour. It is often almost impossible for an evaluator to be at the right place and at the right time to observe changes. Even if he or she were there, this presence can spoil the interaction itself: as in quantum mechanics or in classical anthropology, observation modifies what is being observed.

Third, these problems explain why the whole mechanism of project design, monitoring and evaluation is strongly biased towards quantitative and observable data. Indeed, it is often assumed in project documents, and even evaluations, that reaching some of the quantitative goals will automatically fulfil the qualitative ones. For example, holding a certain number of training courses is expected to enhance the human-resource capacities of the community. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems do not really allow for the assessment of the capacity-enhancing impact of participatory interventions.

A review of World Bank participatory projects (World Bank, 2005) found that, until the mid-1990s, most of their indicators were output-related, rather than outcome-related. Some projects had very little monitoring of any kind. There has been progressive improvement, and more projects approved in later years have outcome and impact indicators. However, most indicators continue to be quantitative rather than qualitative. They are very few process-oriented indicators and almost none addressing the impact of capacity-building efforts.

2.4.3. Truncated analysis of participatory processes.

Strangely enough, the actual extent of community influence in participatory projects is almost always under-analysed in evaluations. Part of the reason is, to be sure, the difficulty

of accessing the appropriate data, but this should at least be openly acknowledged, which is rarely the case. Moreover, barely any references are ever made to even simple and valuable tools, like the "ladder or rungs of participation" (Arnstein, 1969) that help describe degrees of community involvement. Evaluation should acknowledge the many dimensions and possible levels of participation. It may take place, or not, at the level of information-gathering, consultation, decision-making or the initiation of action itself. Available evaluation frameworks tend to be focused solely on one or the other dimension, instead of surveying the full range. They miss the chance of providing a comprehensive assessment of involvement processes and outcomes.

2.4.4. Lack of conceptual tools to depict power-structure relations.

The lack of attention paid to power structure relations is not solely due to the difficulty of accessing and observing micro-social interactions. It is also due to a conceptual gap that leaves evaluators ill-equipped to depict social struc-tures in the first place. Although "community participation" is about a redistribution of power, no evaluation framework today offers a set of concepts that enable evaluators to sur-vey a comprehensive range of power structures within local societies. These structures being left unidentified, how could one then assess the impact of projects upon them?

2.4.5. Lack of baseline surveys on social and power structures.

The lack of conceptual tools to depict power-structure effects is both manifested and reinforced by the typical absence in project designs of baseline surveys of social structures. Ex-post observers who try to be comprehensive are thus left using a pragmatic approach, drawing on a variety of field-level sources to gain insights into the projects' power impacts, based on people's perception of changes and what the observers can learn from local history. A recent review of World Bank community projects revealed that less than 10 percent of them established a

baseline against which to assess the impact of their interventions - and these are not even surveys of power structures but of poverty levels, an important but arguably insufficient dimension when talking about "community participation".

2.4.6. Inadequate concept of the "community".

Another problem is that the concept of "community" that underlies many participatory projects - as well as their evaluation - is often biased, which means that observers pay limited attention to the specific social relations involved. The World Bank itself admits (World Bank, 2005, Chapter 1, endnote 1) that its projects conceive of "community" as a "unified and organic whole". As Uphoff (2005) comments, this suggests that even a leading donor like the Bank has learned little from the hundreds of social science assessments of "community" written over the past half century [6]. These writings have stressed the pitfalls of internal divisions and conflicting interests, even among any given set of households in a residential area. Even where there is ethnic homogeneity, community members usually have personalistic, political, social or other bases on which to factionalise. Some communities will have a high degree of solidarity and significant potential for collective action, but this is a variable, rather than a defining characteristic.

The World Bank has produced a handbook on measuring social capital (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002) that is being used in a limited number of its projects. This Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) assesses social capital at three different levels: household, community and organi-sational. Many of the items in the SOCAT are based on concepts that have existed in the sociology and community psychology literature for some time, such as the sense of community, community attachment, collective efficacy, community confidence in problem-solving together (e.g. Chavis & Pretty, 2000). It relies, for instance, on household

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[6]. It also begs the question of why the World Bank and other agencies seem to choose not to learn from failures and inadequate methodologies.

questionnaires that ask groups and associations about: Potential membership, their characteristics, their decision-making style and the effectiveness of their leadership; the extent to which respondents think they have gained skills from being members of such groups; various questions about how this village/neighbourhood would respond to scenarios affecting the whole village and neighbourhood; how differences in gender/wealth/age cause social divides; collective actions taken to address community issues; community spirit in terms of participation in its own affairs; the extent to which people feel they can make a difference in local events; whom they would turn to for help in various scenarios; trust and cooperation; how conflicts and disagreements are usually handled at a village/neighbourhood level. These are useful data but questions have been raised about whether this collection of separate constructs can be called "social capital" (Hawe, 2007).

2.4.7. Positive bias in evaluations.

As Chambers (2005) points out, evaluations of participatory projects involving interviews with government staff, and the NGO beneficiaries of donor funding, are vulnerable to positive biases. The financial and political power of donors, the careful respect with which they are often treated, and the tendency to try to please them with favourable feedback, all present systemic challenges in terms of knowing what is really happening. However careful the research implemented (or even ordered) by the donors, there will always be doubts about the possibility of encountering prudent, deferential, self-serving or even obsequious responses. Given this situation, an academic researcher may be better positioned to conduct evaluations.

2.4.8. No clear evidence about the relation between participation and effectiveness.

As Balan (2008) points out, the conclusion of many evaluations of participatory projects seems to be that a project delivers many things that both recipients and project implementers consider beneficial; however, what can actually and specifically be ascribed to participation is unclear. This is partly because stakeholders' perceptions of what is meant by participation vary. But this is also related to inadequacies in the design of the donors' project monitoring and evaluation systems. The latter typically do not allow monitoring of changes in community capacity and participation levels, across the project life cycle. A convincing evaluation of participatory projects would need to validate (or invalidate) the participatory model itself: the relationship between the process of participation and the impact the project has made. The correlation, if any, between the quality of participation and impact is very often missed (Chambers, 2005). The lack of evidence on the effectiveness of participatory approaches is now well documented (Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Hawe, 2007). This would require in turn a careful treatment of baselines, possibly control groups - rather than weakly-defined and weakly-grounded counterfactuals – as well as follow-up data over a long period of time. This is all very costly and very difficult to put into practice; but without such efforts, even if studies are carried out, it is very difficult to tell whether participatory projects are real achievements.

2.4.9. Partial cost assessment.

Donors do not systematically assess the costs and benefits of undertaking community participatory projects as compared to other alternatives. In the environmental sphere, this may be related to a feeling that there are, anyhow, no serious alternatives to participatory management, given the failures of exclusionary policies. However, debates are re-emerging on the value of "fencing and fining" (e.g. Hayward & Kerley, 2009) that may call for a new reassessment of options. Participatory projects are more expensive than others for the donors to prepare and supervise. There are also substantial costs in the time spent by the recipient of funds to put a participatory approach in place. While such projects may help lower the cost to governments for reaching certain policy objectives, the communities tend to bear an increased part of the cost. Although "participation" has come to be accepted as a mantra of environmental management, insufficient focus on costs and benefits prevents convincing comparisons with non-participatory project, such as investment in, and reinforcement of, public authorities and policies.

2.4.10. Hidden negative externalities.

Even one of the founding fathers of participatory approaches to development, Chambers (2005), claims that evaluations of such projects tend to be overly positive. This is notably because they leave out "hidden negative externalities". Such effects may be half-hidden to conventional research, but this does not make them any less real or plausible. Looking at 84 World Bank projects supporting "community initiatives", Chambers drew out the following list of hidden effects, of which some may apply to biodiversity protection projects that involve funds flowing to communities. Giving out grants to "community initiatives" may be associated with the following risks:

- Risks and costs associated with top-down, time-bound and disbursement-driven projects. These give scope for corruption, as well as the proliferation of "opportunistic NGOs" that are solely created to capture funds.
- Undermining other more participatory, less target- and disbursement-driven initiatives supported by other organisations in neighbouring areas. As Chambers puts is: "Why should we do it ourselves when our neighbours are getting so much done for them or for free?" (Chambers, 2005, p.152).
- Diversion of work by progressive international and national NGOs away from rights-based and empowering activities that would do more for marginalised people than the provision of infrastructure or of formal institutions. Thirty-six per cent of the reviewed World Bank projects had

some form of NGO involvement. This pre-emption may drag NGOs back into activities they were attempting to move away from, and may reduce their "additionality", leaving poor people as net losers.
- Diversion of government recurrent funds, staff and materials from other places and services to the new, more visible participatory projects. This would entail hidden costs for services in those other places. Resources are most likely to be diverted to communities that are accessible for government and donor staff inspection, in order to track program success. When government staff and recurrent funds are limited (that is, most of the time) this may exclude even-poorer communities that are less accessible.
- The long-term disempowering effects of dependence and disillusion created at the community level by participatory projects that are externally funded and supported. Through participatory projects, communities may become, as so many have, according to Chambers, less self-reliant and more inclined to lobby, beg and wait.

Evaluations of participatory projects in biodiversity protection tend to be deficient from all of these ten critical viewpoints. This does not mean, however, that they are not useful to practitioners or do not provide accountability regarding the use of taxpayers' money. Evaluations usually do their job when it comes to assessing, for instance, the economic or environmental contribution of participatory projects. However, they leave little room for understanding the specificity of "participation" and what it "does" to the community at stake.

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