Participation and Accountability in Development Management

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This article critically reviews the role of participatory theory in managing development projects and programmes in poor countries. Participation has emerged in response to global demands for greater individual and social control over the activities of state and private agencies, and especially to the manifest failures of traditional ‘top-down’ management systems in LDCs. Claims made on behalf of these participatory methodologies are critically reviewed and a distinction is drawn between strong and weak versions of the theory. Empirical evidence is then considered to evaluate the effectiveness of these methodologies, using long-standing insights of social science theory to show that participation can succeed for specific kinds of projects and programmes in favourable circumstances, but is unsuitable for many others. It commonly fails in contexts where local conditions make co-operative and collective action very difficult, or where it is manipulated by implementing agencies to justify their own actions or poor performance.

Neither the strong nor the weak understandings of participation in current literature take full account of the fact that these problems can only be avoided by combining hierarchy and expertise with participation in management systems. Participation will only be successful in producing good organisational performance when it is operationalised through institutional arrangements which maximise the accountability of agencies to...
users. These arrangements must be adjusted to the technical imperatives of the service to be provided and the levels of human and social capital in the society. They must give people using the service leverage over agencies through open systems governed by exit, voice or reciprocity.

The aims of membership participation need to be realistic … there are many different kinds of participation, not all of them relevant or effective for all tasks. It makes no sense to think in terms of achieving maximum participation, since participating in decision-making or implementation, for example, entails costs as well as benefits to individuals

[Esman and Uphoff, 1982: 82].

I. THE PARTICIPATORY PRINCIPLE IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Theories of development management have changed dramatically since the 1950s. Over the past 30 years we have placed our faith in state controls, markets, and now in ‘bottom-up’ systems based on participation and empowerment. Orthodox public administration theory advocated ‘hierarchies of authority, divisions of labour, adherence to rules and spans of control’, but these are now thought to deny ‘the flexibility and responsiveness that provide the necessary conditions for effective management’ [Ransom and Stewart, 1994: 37]. The search for participatory solutions began with the leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs) [Burk, 1993; Chambers, 1983; Korten, 1987], but has now been taken on by the major donors and many national governments [OECD, 1997a, 1997b; UNDP, 1993, 1995; World Bank, 1992 1994, 1996].

This shift is part of a wider movement which has transformed orthodox thinking about public sector management over the past fifteen years. Decision-making based on participation, rather than imposition, is now central to the idea of modernity, and a key objective of development theory, producing a wide-ranging campaign for democratic reforms to eliminate arbitrary authority in all its forms. The demand for participatory development is an integral part of this campaign for personal and social emancipation. The fact that these demands have now moved from a radical fringe occupied by nineteenth and twentieth century libertarian socialists like Kropotkin, and Paolo Freire [1972, 1975], to the mainstream donor agencies, clearly represents a ‘profound … revolution’ in development theory. Thirty years ago the demand for participation separated left from right; now many conservatives also support personal freedom and choice, claiming that hierarchical firms and public bureaucracies can be subjected to democratic forms of control. These changes underpin the political
convergence that has occurred over the past decade, which depends on the assumption that non-adversarial solutions can be found to problems of class, gender and ethnic conflict, which once dominated national and global politics.

The demand for participation and empowerment takes many forms. Neo-liberals associate it with open markets and the elimination of monopolies [Hayek, 1944, 1960; Friedman, 1962]; management theorists with the need for democratic decision making and flatter hierarchies within firms [Kanter, 1985; Womack and Jones, 1990]. Radicals expect a growth in ‘quasi self-employment’ within firms stemming from control over specialist knowledge so that the worker becomes ‘virtually an autonomous agent’ [Hodgson, 1999: 208/9]. The concerns and objectives of participatory development theory are part of this wider discourse, but are primarily driven by the need to legitimate and improve the management of donor funded or influenced projects and programmes, and more especially those designed to deliver goods and services to the poor. These views resonate strongly with indigenous demands for greater involvement in decision making processes of all kinds, but most of the theory reviewed here has emerged out of the concerns of public and private sector donors and governments. This article takes a critical look at the way in which ideas and normative goals derived from this wider debate have influenced approaches to these problems.

First, I re-examine the relationship between strong and weak versions of participatory theory, to identify the claims made on its behalf by its proponents; then review recent experiences of participatory practice, demonstrating that it can succeed, but commonly fails to live up to these expectations; and then argue that many of these difficulties stem from the theory’s failure to take full account of the long-standing insights of new and old institutional theory. I conclude by using these insights to argue that these problems can best be overcome by developing more effective mechanisms for organisational accountability designed to strengthen both agency capacity and the leverage and welfare of the poor, the users of these services.

I have always argued that greater participation was central to social development, but also that it will only work in practice where it can be reconciled with expertise, low cost decision making, and discipline in organisational systems. Thus this article is not intended to deny the need for participation, but to challenge some rather simplistic assumptions that some of its proponents make about the nature of the relationships that should prevail between agencies and their users. I therefore identify mechanisms which will strengthen the leverage exercised by users without threatening organisational efficiency. Participatory theory addresses both the internal
and external aspects of organisational behaviour. The former concerns the nature of the relationship between managers and workers, and favours the use of co-operative rather than hierarchical management systems. I have dealt with these issues elsewhere [Brett, 1996], so this article will concentrate on the external problem, that is to say, the way in which agencies that provide services relate to their users.

II. PARTICIPATORY THEORY AND AGENCY POWER: COMPETING PARADIGMS

Post-colonial development programmes were usually implemented by government departments and parastatal agencies based on traditional Weberian bureaucratic theory. This emphasised expertise, monocratic (or top-down) hierarchy, and administrative autonomy [Weber, 1968]. By the 1970s their performance and responsiveness was being widely criticised from the right and the left. The former [Bauer, 1972; Lall, 1983], called for a shift in power from monopolistic state agencies to individual consumers, by introducing market competition. The latter [Illich, 1971; Freire, 1972, 1975; Chambers, 1983], demanded greater participation to create democratic movements to empower ‘the deprived and the excluded’ and enable them to challenge the ‘exploitative elites’ that dominated them through monopolistic political and economic structures [Ghai, 1988: 4/5]. They wanted to enable oppressed and marginalised people to ‘do their own analysis, to take command, to gain in confidence and to take their own decisions’ [Chambers, 1995: 30].

Neo-liberal market theory dominated policy and institutional reform programmes in the 1980s. By the 1990s, however, it was clear that many services must depend on public sector provision, and that better performance would require greater democratic accountability. This, together with the collapse of class-based political movements after 1989, transformed participatory theory from an expression of radical opposition to dominant elites, into a means of mobilising whole communities to monitor donor programmes and provide collective services. It was first taken up by service delivery NGOs, then by the leading donor agencies. This displaced earlier approaches to emancipation based on the need for class struggle, and replaced them with non-adversarial community development theory. Here participation is not a way to resist oppression. Instead it assumed social homogeneity, ‘and along with it a population’s structured capacity to co-operate with those designing and implementing a project’ [Eyben and Ladbury, 1995: 194].

Critical voices are still raised against this view [Rahnema, 1992; Chambers, 1995; Deschler and Sock, 1995], but it now dominates the theory and practice of most service delivery agencies. We will return to
these arguments, and to more orthodox criticisms later. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to lay out, very briefly, the basic assumptions on which the practice of service delivery agencies is based, and to identify important differences in the way participation is understood.

Definitions of participation differ, and this alters the way observers perceive and evaluate it in practice. Theorists agree that it is ‘a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, influence decisions that affect them’ [World Bank, 1992: 177], as opposed to one where decisions are imposed on them by hierarchical outside agencies. However, theorists disagree about how this influence should be exerted and how strong it should be. All organisational systems have to take some account of the needs and responses of their users since even the weak may have weapons they can use against the strong [Scott, 1985]. However the central problem addressed by participatory theory is the nature of that influence and, more especially, finding ways to create mechanisms to allow agencies to incorporate client’s opinions into planning and implementation directly rather than indirectly, as is the case in orthodox bureaucratic systems.

Many classification systems of different types of participation have been developed, which all focus on the balance of power over decisions exercised by managers or planners as opposed to users of a service. Michener reviews some of these, looking at issues relating to types of participation, its relationship to the project cycle, and to the variety of stakeholders involved.\textsuperscript{11} Her review suggests that the critical issue here is the distinction between strong and weak definitions of the process, based on the degree of control which users can exercise over agencies. Weak participation involves ‘Consulting or Informing’, strong participation means ‘Partnership or Ceding Control’.\textsuperscript{12} In practice agencies managing complex projects find it hard to move from the weak end of this continuum, and tend to assume that ‘at the minimum, [participation means that] intended beneficiaries [will be] consulted during the project design so as to take into account their felt needs, aspirations and capabilities’.\textsuperscript{13} The strong version implies:

\textit{an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilise resources, and assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon.}\textsuperscript{14}

In practice all interventions operate along the continuum which stretches from weak to strong, but choosing to emphasise one as opposed to the other does have significant practical implications for agency behaviour as we will see.
Strong theorists see participation as an end and a means – a way to expand people’s capabilities, increase their self esteem, and improve performance by obliging agencies to involve users in decision-making through participatory research, and by subjecting their activities to direct popular control. This implies fundamental changes in decision-making processes, and in the power exercised by users over agencies, thus challenging the need for top-down systems with their emphasis on professional expertise, and their tendency to negate the ‘richness and value’ of ‘indigenous technical knowledge’ [Chambers, 1994: 956]. This theory descends directly from radical libertarianism, still retaining the belief that ‘local elites … [and] government, parastatal and private sector programmes and campaigns’ usually operate to exploit the ‘powerless poor’. It is therefore looking to mechanisms of direct democracy to overcome the weaknesses implicit in traditional electoral politics, and equally suspicious of the role of the private sector.

This approach has led to attempts to substitute local co-operative organisations for state or private agencies, since it is only here that users can actually exercise direct control over decision making and implementation. This has been very influential in attempts to manage open access resources [Ostrom, 1990], and encouraged the use of co-operatives rather than private firms for income generating projects [Brett, 1996]. A second, less radical response has been Participatory Rural Appraisal (now Participatory Learning and Action, (PRA/PLA)), an approach designed to ‘enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act’ [Chambers, 1994: 953; also PLA Notes, 1988–]. These processes should lead to programmes which take better account of local realities and needs than those imposed by distant state agencies.

Many implementing agencies attempt to justify their programmes by claiming that they are based on mechanisms that do offer users significant levels of control. However, the scale and hierarchical nature of their organisational systems often oblige them to use weak participation, which only involves the need to inform and consult users to improve project design and management. However, they believe that even weak participation will generate many advantages. These include better information about local needs, capabilities, and the impact of programmes, ways of adapting programmes to local conditions, delivering demand-responsive services, mobilising local resources, improving utilisation and maintenance of state facilities, and ways of increasing public recognition of governmental achievements and legitimacy. Against this they also recognise that such programmes can incur high transaction costs, raise excessive expectations, substitute inappropriate local for technical knowledge, and allow local elites to capture development resources [World Bank, 1992: 4].
Both strong and weak participatory approaches are driven by the best of intentions, have led to welcome efforts to adapt projects to local needs, and have generated useful new methodologies in the process. However recent research suggests that advocates of both approaches are confronting many serious problems in practice. I will first look at some of these, then consider how some of these difficulties could be overcome.

III. PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: POSSIBILITIES AND PROBLEMS

An evaluation of participatory practice needs to proceed with care, since its objectives are so complex and the problems that confront it so great. We can say with some certainty that some kinds of service are compatible with collective management where conditions for participation are favourable, and that agencies which consult their users are far more likely to succeed than those which do not. On the other hand, we can also say that the stronger varieties of participatory theory have often raised impossible expectations, while the weaker versions can be used to generate unproductive and ritualistic activities, and disguise organisational inertia and indecision. This section will present some empirical evidence and analytical arguments designed to question the more extreme claims made in favour of participatory theory. It attempts to demonstrate that participation should not be treated as a new and revolutionary ‘paradigm’ but as one element in a general approach to development management which recognises the need for hierarchy, expertise and discipline in service delivery systems, as well as ‘bottom up’ controls. We will first review some official evaluations of participatory practice, then look at examples of success, and finally at the limitations of current theory and practice.

(a) Does Participation Work? Problems of Measurement and Evaluation

The official evidence being used to justify the current enthusiasm for participatory programmes is not impressive. A major OECD review of the approach considered documents from eight major bilateral agencies and concluded that ‘evaluations specifically focusing on participation in development activities are few and there is little evidence of participation in evaluation’ [OECD, 1997b]. It felt that NGOs were making greater efforts in this regard, but the reports suggested that ‘the performance and impact of NGO projects varies greatly’. Finnish and Swedish evaluations concluded that ‘even where short to medium-term performance is good, sustainability is weak as are participatory elements’ [ibid., 95]. The main piece of positive evidence which could be cited came from the World Bank’s major participatory study in 1994. This made strong claims for the enhancement
of many irrigation projects [Narayan, 1994] by including participatory methods, and referred to an internal study, which indicated:

that the costs, in terms of time and money spent, tend to be relatively higher for participatory projects in the course of their earlier phases. The initial investments in participation, however, tend to pay off in terms of increased efficiency and sustainability and in saving time in subsequent phases (Cited in OECD [1997d: 90]).

This study, however, was based solely on interviews with Bank staff on 21 projects, and only related to the additional costs in staff time and effort [Hentschel, 1994]. The evidence of long term benefits was based on expectations, not achievements, since the programmes were all in their early stages. Elsewhere Finsterbush and Van Wicklin show that participatory processes can improve performance, but that the poorest people have fewest of the necessary skills, so success is directly correlated with the level of development. Thus it makes a higher contribution to project effectiveness in rich than poor countries [Finsterbusch and van Wicklin, 1987: 17]. This raises questions about the special suitability of participatory processes for poverty focused projects.

Given that the OECD review also suggests that the evaluation processes being used, generally left much to be desired [OECD, 1997a: 90–98], these official reports do not yet offer convincing evidence to substantiate the strong claims made about current participatory methodologies. Casting our net more widely, we can find some evidence which does validate these claims, but a lot more that suggests the need for great caution.

(b) The Benefits of Participatory Processes

Support for participation stems from the failure of state systems where political failure has induced inertia, rent-seeking or corruption; and the failure of private markets where unequal asset distribution and monopoly power has exposed the poor to exploitative prices, low wage jobs or marginal forms of self-employment. Participatory projects and methodologies are a legitimate response to these problems. There is clear evidence that they have indeed helped to reduce poverty and exclusion where some stringent conditions have been met, by giving local communities direct control over some services, and allowing them to exercise more influence over decision-making processes.

Ostrom’s study of open access resource management demonstrated that user groups ‘can organize themselves voluntarily to retain the residuals of their own efforts’ to manage collective water sources, fisheries, and forests, thus producing more efficient and equitable results than either state or market systems [Ostrom, 1990: 25]. This was confirmed in the World Bank
water management study which showed that ‘beneficiary participation’ was
crucial to ‘overall project effectiveness’ and to ‘individual and community
empowerment’ [Narayan, 1994: viii]. Uphoff also showed how
participatory methods transformed the social and technical conditions at Gal
Oya, a major irrigation programme in Sri Lanka [Uphoff, 1992]. Collective
solidarity has also been central to the achievements of the Grameen Bank
[Fugelsang and Chandler, 1986; Shams, 1995], and of the many solidaristic
micro-credit organisations that have attempted, often with considerable
success, to emulate it elsewhere.

We also know that co-operatives have operated successfully in mutual
financial organisations and marketing enterprises in many developed
countries, while solidaristic forms of organisation are critically important in
civil and political society almost everywhere. In Uganda in the 1980s Parent
Teachers’ Associations responded to the collapse of public funding by
taking on an active role in managing schools. They raised income by
imposing fees on parents, and played a positive role in enforcing efficiency
and controlling malfeasance, although they did this at the cost of reducing
access to the poor [Brett, 1996: Ch.6]. Ostrom also shows how a private
dispensary in Nigeria provided much better services than the state
dispensary nearby, because it was directly dependent on community support

Strong evidence can also be advanced to support participatory research
and action programmes designed to involve potential users in decision-
making, monitoring and evaluation processes. According to Chambers, such
activities had ‘evolved or spread to at least 40 countries in the South’ by
1994 [1994: 1253]. These have shown that local people do understand the
social and political conditions under which they live and possess relevant
technical knowledge for the solution of many local problems; that involving
them in project development allows agencies to acquire better
understandings of local needs than traditional surveys; and that these
methodologies can reduce dependence on outside experts and empower
local people.

These methods have been adopted by a wide range of organisations
– universities, training institutes, NGOs, and government departments –
although Chambers does concede that it ‘has been more difficult’ to get
government agencies to comply than the others [1994: 1447/8]. Some of the
more extreme claims made on behalf of community controls and PRA/PLA
methodologies will be questioned in the next section, but this brief review
should be sufficient to demonstrate their potential where they are used to
manage projects that operate on an appropriate scale, bring clear benefits to
the participants, and operate in relatively solidaristic communities capable
of creating the necessary institutions for collective management and
mobilising the appropriate skills. This is a tall order, which suggests that these methods cannot be applied indiscriminately, but only where some exacting conditions can be met.

(c) The Limits of Strong Participation: Problems in Theory and Practice

Judgments about the effectiveness of participation must be set against the objectives of those that make them. One problem confronting the enthusiasts is their tendency to oversell their product – participation is not simply suggested as a method of improving programme management, but as a mechanism of social transformation – a new paradigm involving: ‘the mobilisation, conscientisation and organisation of the people [which] could proceed from being a countervailing factor to ensuring social justice and greater equality for all’ [Wignaraja et al, 1991: 16]. It is necessary to put these claims into perspective by showing that methodologies associated with strong participation can only be used for a limited range of activities, that they are only likely to succeed where a wide range of demanding organisational and social conditions can be met, and that participatory ideologies can also be used to justify non-accountable behaviour, increase inequalities and transfer organisational costs from agencies to their users.

(i) Managing large systems – problems of hierarchy and complexity: The participatory movement is primarily concerned with small-scale development projects for the rural and urban poor. These projects focus on local communities, and on the management of schools and roads, health centres, extension agencies, water, sanitation, and credit. We have seen that some of these services do lend themselves to participatory processes, although even these are very difficult to manage successfully as our next section will show. However, this is not the case with a wide range of critically important large scale projects and programmes on which everyone depends – major roads, tertiary education, national and global research and development programmes, and the whole range of essential goods and services provided by national and global companies. These require complex technology and decisions taken at national and, increasingly, at global levels. Here hierarchy, expertise and professional autonomy in governance and project management are essential, and ‘real’ participation involving direct control by local people is virtually impossible.

This does not only apply to large-scale services, but also to large-scale programmes and projects where the participatory claims made by agencies are often unsustainable in practice. For example an INTRAC study concluded that ‘the introduction of a more participatory approach into existing or future large development projects … constitutes a major, if not impossible, challenge to multilateral development agencies’, and that ‘in the
more conventional, professionally-led technologically based rural development projects, the promotion of active people’s participation has been ignored’ [Oakley, 1995: 25]. Nicholls also shows that the great majority of UNDP’s funds in Uganda were still going to conventional ‘technical cooperation projects’ with no participatory content in 1996, despite its claim to have placed participation at the centre of its programme, although she does not explain why this is so [1998: 225].

‘Strong’ participatory processes can never displace the need for hierarchical public and private bureaucracies, market competition, and representative democracy which severely constrains direct control over the way decisions are made and implemented. Those who claim that these participatory methodologies can fundamentally alter the nature of the power structures that sustain complex societies are simply ignoring the well-established insights of modern social science. Weber demonstrated that control over complex systems is ‘possible only to a very limited degree to persons who are not technical specialists’, while the ‘purely technical’ superiority of hierarchical systems over other forms of organisation means that ‘the choice is only that between bureaucracy and dilettantism’ [1968: 223/4, 973ff]. All of the large public and private donors that are actively promoting the participatory ideal do not apply the principle to their own activities, but operate on classic Weberian lines. Theorists of the firm agree that hierarchy is ‘ubiquitous within all organisations of any size’ [Williamson, 1985: 269/70]. All modern democracies have had to shift direct control from citizens to their representatives, since ‘every free individual [cannot be given] a share in debating and deciding political affairs of individual concern’ [Hegel, 1964: 159].

Further, strong participatory theorists often make unrealistic assumptions about the ability of the poor to access joint decision-making processes. Democratic processes can be subverted by narrow groups whose interests do not coincide with those of the society as a whole. ‘The poor and unemployed are almost never organized for collective action’, so ‘some civil society democracy programs … more often retard than advance the economic and democratic development of recipient countries’ [Olson, 1997: 60–61]. In fact rapid development has rarely been associated with participatory structures. The success of the East Asian economies, for example, is widely attributed to ‘embedded autonomy’ – the ability to shelter officials from pressures from social groups with vested interests which might undermine rational economic decision-making [Leftwich, 1994]. Such governments do need to be responsive to pressures from ‘below’, but also need to be able to impose unpopular decisions on powerful social groups, which would be difficult where they exercised direct control through strong participatory processes.
We have already seen that these arguments have been diluted recently by an increased recognition of the need for democratic decision-making within organisations, and stronger accountability to users and customers. However, these changes also operate within severe limits. Modern organisations have also increased executive rewards, marginalised trade unions, eliminated security of job tenure, and fired tens of thousands of workers. Hierarchical firms dominate competitive markets, driving out co-operatives, and generate huge inequalities which are incompatible with strong participation. Despite this, the agencies like the World Bank which promote participation, attribute far more importance to the need for market freedom and competitive capitalism, than to the demand for ‘bottom up’ controls. This demand is also further weakened in LDCs by the fact that the levels of education and automation that have sustained the shift to flatter hierarchies in DCs have yet to occur there, thus increasing the distance between the limited supply of skilled managers and the workers and users that depend on them.

These arguments do not deny the need to consult users and consumers. However, they do force us to moderate some of the more extreme claims being put forward by the new movement, and to recognise that the problem of creating real accountability is far more complex than many participatory theorists currently assume.

(ii) Managing small systems – problems of information, coordination, and conflict: We have seen that participatory programmes can succeed where the conditions are right. However this does not prove that they will always work, or help us to understand the likelihood and costs of failures. Here we confront a methodological problem. The strength of the participatory case depends on the fact that successful projects survive and can be used as models for replication, failures disappear and are quickly forgotten. The successes may be due to entirely exceptional circumstances, the failures may outnumber them many times over and in fact be more likely, but the immediate physical evidence will suggest otherwise. The commitment to empowerment has directed a great deal of attention to the success stories like the Grameen Bank and the Gal Oya irrigation programme, while research evidence which identifies, costs and explains participatory failures has been much less widely read.

However, such evidence is now mounting up. My general evaluation of institutional change in Uganda between 1980 and 1992 suggested that failures were only too common, and this has been confirmed by work carried out by my research students, and by evidence derived from other studies discussed below. This suggests that participatory projects can be undermined by opportunism, information failures and conflicting interests;
that they often produce limited or counter-productive results; and that they only work well when very exacting conditions are met.

In Uganda solidaristic systems have been used in agricultural marketing, education, primary health care, and local government, with very mixed results. Growers’ co-operatives emerged in the 1950s, and were given monopoly power by the state. They were captured by local elites and became mechanisms for personal enrichment and fraud [Brett, 1970, 1993b: Ch.5]. The Christian Churches have managed successful health care units for most of the twentieth century. They benefited from the ethical commitment of their staff, but were run on hierarchical rather than participatory principles. Primary health care has recently been provided through donor funded community associations. Here performance has been variable, and success has depended heavily on supervision and expertise provided by Church organisations [Brett, 1993a: Ch.6]. Democratic local councils have operated at every level from the village to the District since 1986. There has been greater accountability, but performance has been weak because of unrealistic assumptions about people’s desire and ability to participate, and the scale of the resources and the management systems required [Brett, 1993b: Ch.3; Golooba Mutebi, 1999]. Parent Teachers’ Associations have made a positive contribution to schools, but they have done so by imposing costs on parents that have excluded the poorest children [Brett, 1993a: Ch.6].

Nicholls’ review of participatory UNDP and ActionAid projects in Uganda shows that UNDP’s projects did not reach the poorest and used top-down management systems. They were undermined by opportunism in local grass roots organisations and especially by ‘the tensions and mistrust resulting from the beneficiary community’s social heterogeneity and internal inequalities [which] manifested themselves in the form of unaccountable, autocratic, or corrupt leadership by group leaders known to be taking advantage of group members’ [Nicholls, 1998: 241–52]. Similar problems existed in ActionAid’s participatory projects. These were better managed than UNDP’s, but:

Contrary to AAU’s intentions of delegating development planning, implementation, and evaluation responsibilities to programme beneficiaries and regardless of whether one defines participation in a maximalist or minimalist fashion … it was predominantly [the] managers who were calling the shots [ibid.: 335].

This stemmed from ‘the pressure to keep to budgetary deadlines and planning guide-lines’. An internal ActionAid memo conceded that ‘the participatory planning process … has to a large extent been derailed by AA’s own planning and budgeting system’ [ibid.]. Loizos and Clayton
review participatory approaches in British aid in Nepal and also claim that ‘DfID Office Instructions, which are highly prescriptive on PCM [Project Cycle Management] and the use of the log frame, is a major obstacle to develop a more flexible, negotiated approach to development interventions’ [1997: 8].

Martinez’s work [1997] in a poor indigenous community in Mexico shows that most of the solidaristic local projects were undermined by problems created by unequal and inadequate access to information, free riding, and inappropriate incentives. Local elites dominated decision-making processes, and performance was usually poor because of limited local expertise, and ineffective controls over implementation. Michener’s study of a Save the Children Fund education programme in Burkino Faso identified the ‘conflicting uses of “participation” by different stakeholders taking part in the same project’, the way they all attempt to exploit the situation for their own gain, and concluded that neither the agency officials, the teachers or the beneficiaries were ‘fully engaged in genuine transformative participation’ [1998: 2105, 2115]. Mayoux showed that these kinds of problem are especially relevant to the involvement of women in participatory processes, and that ‘women themselves are frequently less than enthusiastic about participating in many participatory development projects’ [1995: 241]. Reinke’s study of a solidaristic micro-credit organisation in South Africa shows that the costs of building the social capital involved virtually exclude the possibility of profitable operation [1998].

The capacity to co-operate depends on levels of ‘social capital’ and this is highly unevenly distributed and the product of long historical processes and entrenched cultural values [Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995; Putzel, 1997; Harriss and de Renzio, 1997]. Only where it exists already are co-operative projects likely to succeed, and this is most likely to be the case with better-educated and privileged groups and social strata, or where communities are under external threat – as in Israel, Eritrea during the war of liberation, or the Philippines where Putzel believed that: ‘ … wartime conditions may, in fact, have made the peasants more open to cooperative endeavour because of external threats and that it would be difficult to maintain their enthusiasm under peaceful conditions’ [Putzel, 1992: 380]. Thus participation can be costly and socially disruptive for those involved. Meetings take an immense amount of time, and decisions are likely to generate conflict, so users may well prefer to ‘hand over their participatory rights to professionals – thereby saving themselves time, energy and, in some instances, conflict’, as Eyben and Ladbury [1995: 197] claim in relation to a British family planning project in Nepal.25

Such conflict is probably inevitable since participatory systems are rarely a response to demands from local people who may well be locked
into hierarchical and deferential structures, but rather promoted in response to western values imported by donors. This obliges local communities to develop different kinds of organisation from those they have used in the past, thus demanding new skills and the ability to overcome local opposition if they are to succeed. Thus in Nepal local officials or beneficiaries in such projects did learn to support these new values and to ‘reject traditional hierarchical norms, and have visions of more equitable sharing of resources’. However they still had to ‘operate in a wider society which does not as yet strongly subscribe to these ideas’ [Loizos and Clayton, 1997: 3].

This can produce serious contradictions, as an internal evaluation of an ACORD rural animation programme showed:

The notion of the community being provided with opportunities … to participate in planning and implementing it’s own development … is symptomatic of top-down thinking and assumes that the people in the community are not already engaged actively as subjects in their own development … The community is assigned a role which has been defined for them by someone else [ACORD, 1991].

This means that the participatory agenda of the donor agencies and of many progressive local NGOs and people’s organisations is not primarily a way of using local knowledge, but of using aid to transfer external values and systems to people who would not have adopted them of their own accord. This is not a problem for those (like me) who believe that progress is usually dependent on learning from more advanced systems elsewhere, but it cannot be treated as a process in which facilitators merely ‘enable’ local people to do what they would have wanted to do anyway. This raises serious questions about the nature and role of PRA/PLA techniques which will be addressed in the next section.

Thus problems with strong participatory systems are so pervasive that they suggest that successes will only be likely where the many problems anticipated by orthodox organisation theorists can be systematically overcome. These theorists claim that most people will only be willing and able to take part in the collective processes required to make strong participation a reality when they have the necessary skills, can expect an adequate payoff and are part of systems that can contain ever-present tendencies to ‘free riding’ that commonly undermine systems based on voluntary co-operation [Olson, 1971]. Esman and Uphoff review the performance of 150 cases and show that success depends on the existence of complex systems of representation, management and internal and external linkages [1971: Chs.3–4]. They also clearly identify the many problems they confront. Such organisations:
… exhibit vulnerabilities or pathologies which limit their overall performance. Frequently, they encounter resistance from local elites, government or even the rural poor themselves, all of whom for some reason may fear their activities. LOs are also in chronic danger of subordination to the interests of dominant elites, government or even their own leaders. Those that escape these perils may fall prey to internal cleavages among members, whether these be based on social, political, or economic differences. Other problems include ineffectiveness, which often results from lack of appropriate business skills, and malpractices, which unfortunately are all too common [1982: 57–8].

Thus successful participatory systems are likely to be more rather than less difficult to develop than traditional ones. This does not mean that they should not be attempted, only that their costs and complexity should be fully recognised.

(d) The Limits of Weak Participation – Problems of Organisational Opportunism and Inefficiency

Although the participatory literature stresses the need to transfer control, we have already noted that organisational imperatives force large agencies to use methods that offer users little more than consultation. Properly managed, this should empower local people and allow agencies to operate efficient bureaucratic systems. However, these systems have serious limits, since they do not transfer real power, and can be used to hide poor performance or transfer costs and responsibilities to their users. Thus in the worst cases participation can be manipulated by agencies ‘to contain and redirect change, with a view to adapting it to their own interests, wherever possible with the victims’ participation’ [Rahnema, 1992: 128], or used to disguise a ‘co-opting process’ to incorporate local people in external programmes [Chambers, 1995: 30], or serve as the ‘human face of structural adjustment’ [Mayo and Craig, 1995: 4]. Radical critics see the new approach as pseudo-participation – a way to manipulate ‘beneficiaries by development professionals to meet the needs of elites’ (Deshler and Sock [1995] cited in Michener [1998: 2106]). This need not always be so, but it is undoubtedly a real possibility.

This suggests that participatory processes need to be combined with effective accountability by agencies to users if inefficiency and malfeasance is to be avoided [Hirschman, 1970; Paul, 1992; Brett, 1993a]. Successful strong participatory systems do this, since they give users a powerful ‘voice’ in all decision-making processes. However it is highly problematic with weak systems, since the right to be consulted does not imply a right to
determine outcomes, which continue to depend on the good will and competence of the agency. Hence consultation will only be as effective as the agencies allow it to be, thus leaving control firmly in their hands and potentially subverting one of the fundamental principles of organisational accountability.

This problem also applies to the PRA/PLA approach despite its claim to transfer real power to users. PRA meetings are called by external agencies, the information they elicit is determined by their objectives, and the decision to respond to local demands remains in their hands. Here ‘outsiders’ operate with much greater care and sensitivity, than in orthodox approaches, but still call the shots. Where PLA goes beyond research and is used to manage social change it depends on external animators whose role becomes ‘a necessary, but not necessarily a sufficient condition to enable the poor to undertake and manage collective action to change their reality’ [Tilakaratna, 1991: 235]. They may wish to facilitate local learning rather than impose their own agendas, but this must imply prior choices by the agency about what should be learnt, who should learn it, and why they should do so. This will often produce better results than orthodox approaches, but it still puts agents into the dominant position and says nothing about what the users could do if their assistance turns out to be counter productive or they fail to do their job properly, which is undoubtedly a real possibility.

Thus PRA/PLA methodologies are certainly helpful, but we have to question some of the more extreme claims made on their behalf. They are introduced by external agencies concerned to improve local services and institutional arrangements in response to political choices determined by forces outside the control of local people. Indeed, as Chambers implies, the method is far more likely to be used by international NGOs and local agencies dependent on foreign donors who have a much stronger commitment to empowerment than do local governments, indigenous institutions, and the elites that control social and political power at the local level.

This does not imply that these initiatives are inappropriate. These methodologies can and should be used to help poor people to mobilise themselves to break out of the limits often created by authoritarian local power structures and oppressive cultural values that can encourage patriarchy, racism, sectarianism, and class or caste based domination. However they should be recognised for what they are. They are not ways of reversing roles and putting the poor in charge by giving their knowledge priority over that of outsiders. They are ways of increasing demands for the introduction of new and progressive modes of organisation which have been developed all over the world, and which the poor would not be able to
access without the support of progressive external agencies. Hence, the problem with these methodologies is not that they go too far, but that they do not go far enough. They encourage agencies to develop progressive and co-operative relationships with their users, but they do not create real accountability. If the movement is to overcome many of the difficulties identified in this section it is imperative that it finds ways of doing this.

IV. PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS

I have identified some of the problems associated with both strong and weak participatory approaches. Strong participation is only possible for a limited range of services, and, without strong management and a favourable social context, it is likely to generate high costs, conflict, indecision, and inequality. Relying on the goodwill of agencies to consult users without giving the latter real leverage over what they do can produce inertia, rigidities, inappropriate outputs or procedures, or, in the worst cases, monopoly rents and predation. These problems can only be avoided by finding effective ways of balancing the need for bottom up control with top down authority. Here institutional theory focused on the problem of organisational accountability and incentives comes into its own.

This analysis suggests that participatory methodologies cannot be treated as a general alternative to state and market systems. These are the only proven way to provide services where scale and complexity exclude direct control, and likely to be more suitable for small local projects where communities lack the necessary skills and social cohesion. This view challenges some of the more extreme claims of participatory theory, and its proponents’ assumption that their methods are the only or even the best methods of achieving empowerment and emancipation. Modern capitalist firms and welfare systems have eliminated extreme deprivation in most developed countries, yet are managed by autonomous and well paid staff using top down hierarchies. To assume that poor people should provide and supervise their own services and be constantly consulted by agencies ignores the benefits of the division of labour and of national and global co-operation. However, state and market based agencies also fail unless they are subjected to effective social control.

Hence the key factor affecting performance is not dominance by external elites and knowledge, but the nature of the institutional constraints that determine how much leverage users can exercise over agencies, whether these operate in the state, market or voluntary sector. Leverage need not imply direct control, but does require far more than a willingness to consult. Consultation is beneficial, but user interests will only be fully respected
where agencies are answerable to them for what they do. Posing the problem like this allows us to acknowledge the validity of the claims made by strong theorists, while avoiding the weaknesses of populist arguments that deny the need for hierarchy, expertise and organisational autonomy. Accountability can be enforced in many different ways, so this approach allows us to create different kinds of agency to respond to different demands and social conditions, while simultaneously obliging their managers to perform.

This means that participatory theory must be located within a wider approach which sees strong accountability as the critical variable in social empowerment and emancipation. This raises two issues – the general problem of user-agency relationships, and the diverse ways in which these can be organised to respond to the social and technical demands of different kinds of services and situations.

(a) The Agency Problem: Giving Users Leverage

State, market or participatory organisations will not succeed unless their managers and workers are offered adequate incentives, and subjected to realistic sanctions if they fail. The interests of agencies and users diverge, because the costs of any service must be met by the latter and provide the income of the former.28 Thus agencies will always be tempted to increase costs or reduce effort and efficiency. This tension creates the ‘principal-agent problem’ – principals (or users) will need to find ways to monitor and control the agent’s actions and levels of effort, thus bringing ‘problems of inducement and enforcement … to the fore’ [Pratt and Zeckhauser, 1985: 3]. Hence agencies will only perform well when users can exercise real leverage over what they do.29

Accountability can be seen as vertical mechanisms that enable superiors to impose performance standards and financial probity on subordinates, and not those which control managers themselves. However, the idea of downward accountability to users places the latter problem at the centre of the analysis. This goes far beyond the normative demands of weak participatory theory by demanding institutions that give users real, though not necessarily direct control over the agencies that provide their services.30

Agencies usually have multiple users or ‘stakeholders’ (for example donors, beneficiaries, and governments in the case of NGOs), with different obligations to each, while users have different amounts of information about and leverage over agencies. This complicates the problem of accountability and the kinds of leverage it can involve.31 Agencies have to manage three kinds of interaction where leverage is involved – internal relationships between workers and managers; vertical relationships with political masters, donors or shareholders; and external relationships with users. Each
involves complex problems, but my concern here is with the third – the extent to which agencies are ‘liable to be called to account [or are] answerable’ to their beneficiaries or consumers [Webster’s Dictionary, 1949: 6].

[This] depends on the institutional system that operates in a country to motivate service providers (agents) to deliver the desired type and level of performance … [and] on whether the influence of the concerned stakeholders is reflected in the monitoring and incentive system of service providers [Paul, 1992: 2].

This obliges us to question the nature of the power relationships which govern the interactions between users and agencies of all kinds. It also implies that they will differ, depending on the scale and complexity of the service, the nature of the intermediate institutions linking agencies to users, and their capacity to monitor and sanction the behaviour of agencies. Thus accountability does imply some sort of participation, but not necessarily one involving direct control or even consultation. It may be created in many different ways – diverse solutions have to be found for diverse problems. This insight forces us to reconsider the relationship between participatory theory and orthodox theories of public administration and markets. We cannot explore all the implications of the need for institutional diversity here, only the way it relates to the accountability problem, and thus to the more general problem of empowerment and social emancipation.32

(b) Dealing with Difference: Alternative Solutions to the Accountability Problem

In modern societies large scale collective services are managed predominantly by the state, individual access to excludable goods and services by the market, and personal and ethical needs met by solidaristic agencies in civil society. The sense of ‘empowerment’ which legitimates the activities of these agencies depends on the existence of mechanisms which give the people who depend on them real leverage over what all of them do. Understanding and strengthening these mechanisms has in fact been the central concern of social scientists and progressive social and political movements since the start of the modern period. Indeed, development itself can be identified with the creation of these mechanisms and with the ability to enforce them at greater levels of scale and complexity. This has brought unparalleled advantages to those who can access them by breaking down the serious limitation imposed on human potential by purely local ties and local knowledge.

Most of these agencies cannot be directly controlled from ‘below’ or consult their users, so indirect mechanisms have had to be designed to stop
them from abusing their immense power and resources. These are all ways of increasing the leverage of users over agencies by shifting from non-accountable to accountable systems – from despotism to democracy; command planning to competitive markets; and from patron-client systems and patriarchy to reciprocal social exchange. The anti-colonial struggle in LDCs represented a demand for autonomous democratic institutions. The, the command economies collapsed in response to a popular demand for competitive markets. Women’s groups throughout the third world, like their counterparts in the first, are demanding an end to patriarchal control and within households and all of the social organisations that govern relationships within the private sphere.

The success of these struggles does not depend on an attempt to privilege local over western knowledge, replace large with small systems, or to ‘put the first last’. It depends on the capacity to adapt western knowledge to local needs and conditions, develop local expertise by using the accumulated knowledge of humanity, and create complex systems that will often (but not always) depend on centralisation and hierarchy. However, these systems, as the liberal and socialist traditions in western social theory have always recognised, will only be made to serve the needs of society rather than oppressive elites when they fully incorporate the principles of democracy, legal redress, market competition and open access, which were only established in the west after long and painful struggles. Efforts to emancipate the poor cannot be confined to local solutions, but must start with the urgent need to reform the institutions through which they exercise their leverage over national and global agencies.

Much of the current participatory theory simply ignores the long-standing debates in political science, economics and sociology about the relationship between individual freedom, collective obligation, inequality and the need for powerful mechanisms to enforce social, political and economic control and authority. We cannot take up these issues here, but can point to the usefulness of Hirschman’s formulation of the accountability problem which in effect equates empowerment with mechanisms that allow users to ‘exit’ from poor services where an alternative supplier exists, or to use ‘voice’ to challenge poor performance where, as with state or many civic agencies, exit is undesirable [Hirschman, 1970; also Paul, 1992]. I would add the need for ‘reciprocity’ in families, community organisations or civic associations, where members provide each other with services. Here leverage depends on the ability to withdraw loyalty or support when they do not receive an equitable return [Gouldner, 1960; Putnam, 1993: 171ff; Brett, 1993a: 282–5; 1996, 9–10].

Exit, voice or reciprocity, all require open systems and enforceable rules, but each requires different institutional arrangements, and their effective use
depends on levels of education, freedom of expression, and the quality of independent social investigation and dissemination in the society. An excessive concern with direct controls and consultation can seriously distort our understanding of the causes of developmental failures, and our search for possible solutions. The development of comprehensive welfare systems, strong environmental controls, and effective regulation of corporate giants is impossible without representative democracy and a strong state. Real leverage over the performance of private firms is much better provided through market competition than through direct controls by or consultation with users. All attempts to extend the range and scale of solidaristic activities require the development of strong and hierarchical organisations which exclude direct control as we can see with the major world religions, associations and NGOs.

The participatory processes reviewed here can play a key role in strengthening accountability in certain kinds of projects and programmes. However, they will only be effective where state agencies, capitalist firms and strong third sector organisations are well managed by experts, given appropriate incentives, allowed to exercise professional autonomy, and have adequate authority to perform their roles. They will not provide users with cost effective services unless the latter can exercise effective leverage over them through strong democratic institutions, market competition and civil society organisations. Here users must obey rules and accept a high degree of inequality and dependence, but will also have robust ways of defending themselves against incompetence and exploitation. Strong accountability offers much more than consultation, and much less than direct control.

CONCLUSIONS

There are several important implications of this shift in emphasis from participation to accountability. First, it questions the appropriateness of strong participation without legitimating arbitrary ‘top down’ control. The failure of many donor driven institutional reform programmes does not imply that orthodox solutions are impossible, or that direct ‘bottom up’ controls will provide viable solutions to most currently unsolved problems. Increasing the accountability of states, private firms, or NGOs is not just a matter of new constitutions or economic liberalisation, but building active civic organisations – political parties, pressure groups, independent media and autonomous research agencies – which can subject elites to continuous surveillance, and take appropriate action when they fail. External agencies must play a crucial role in this process in helping social groups to acquire the information, resources, and organisational experience required to do this effectively. They should not withdraw and ‘put local people in charge’ but
develop active partnerships with them, more especially with the most marginalised and excluded groups, so these groups are in a better position to demand better performance from the agencies that manage their societies.

Second, strengthening accountability implies a pluralistic approach to development management, since all the institutions which mediate the relationships between users and agencies must be strengthened simultaneously. This in turn depends upon an interdisciplinary approach to the problem, since this article has demonstrated that the regulation and operation of markets is as important to participatory theory as the activities of states, political parties and community groups. Many radicals deny the contribution which competitive markets can make to freedom and autonomy, while neo classical theorists ignore the way markets can concentrate economic power, be dominated by powerful social groups, and subvert effective democratic controls by the poor.35 In focusing so exclusively on collective action at the local and project level, participatory theory ignores the critical contribution which strong democratic states and competitive and well regulated markets can make to empowerment and social emancipation. Only an analysis that operates at the level of the system as a totality can produce successful results.

Finally, this approach also suggests the need to question the developmental claims of all agencies that manage the policy, programmes and projects that determine the future of poor people in poor countries. Donor agencies accept the need to make national governments accountable, but are less clear about how this applies to themselves. Their projects commonly fail and are distorted by many perverse incentives,36 but there is little evidence that they suffer in any way when this occurs. These agencies are making the strongest claims about the necessity for participation, but they have yet to create effective mechanisms to enable users to impose real sanctions on them when they fail.

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NOTES

1. The World Bank in the 1970s mainly saw it as a way of enhancing efficiency and cost sharing [Paul, 1987], but now claims that ‘as participation increases, vital information not in the public domain becomes available and the voices of interested parties can help make governments more accountable; both in turn enhance performance’ [World Bank, 1994: 3]; the OECD claims ‘that sustainable development, poverty reduction and conflict prevention, all depend upon widening participation in economic, social and political life and establishing well-functioning, accountable governance systems’ [1997: 17].

2. The classic rationale for monocratic bureaucracy is found in Weber [1968: Ch.11]. For a review of the literature dealing with the new approach in the public sphere see Ransom and Stewart [1994: Ch.2]. In the private sector key contributions to the participatory development movement have been made by the ‘human relations’ school of organisation theory, which has justified a participatory approach to private sector management see Pugh,
Kanter [1985] has made a seminal contribution to the recent literature on the need for democratic processes in large private corporations.

3. The participatory movement can be understood as a way of extending the ‘penetration and transformation of secular life by the principle of freedom’ which Hegel identified as ‘the long process of which history itself [is made up]’. He claimed that only the modern era believes that ‘man is by nature free’, and that development involves a transition from societies in which ‘only one is free’, to those in which ‘some are free’ to those where ‘all men as such are free, and that man is by nature free’ [Hegel, 1975: 54–5].

4. ‘The State [has] … always been … the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of ruling minorities, [and] cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies’ [Kropotkin, 1910 [1971]: 231].

5. For a review of its intellectual antecedents see Fals Borda [1998: 161ff].

6. The quotation is from UNDP [1993: 8]. The notion of participation is central to the ‘human development school’ whose approach has been most successfully internationalised in the annual Human Development Reports of the UNDP. For other key texts see Burkie [1993]; Craig and Mayo [1995]; Fals-Borda [1998]; Nelson and Wright [1995]; Midgley [1986]; Uphoff [1992]; Wignaraja [1991].

7. Mill anticipated Hodgson’s analysis when he claimed that ‘the theory of dependence and protection’ has become ‘more and more intolerable’ to the working classes, who, as they have become better educated and secure, have come to ‘require that their conduct and condition shall be essentially self-governed’ [Mill, 1900: 458].

8. I see development as a transition from systems based on inequality to those based on ‘independence, freedom and participation’ [Brett, 1973: 17].

9. This approach characterised the many studies carried out under the Popular Participation Project of UNRISD during the 1980s, which ‘studied the organisational activities of the “excluded” – peasants, workers, ethnic groups, slum dwellers – to increase their control over resources, decision-making processes and regulative institutions in the larger society’ [Turton, 1987: 133–4]. For a celebratory collection of recent contributions to the participatory movement see Fals-Borda [1998].

10. These views are perhaps most influential in the communitarian movement, most powerfully expressed by Etzioni [1993].


12. Loizos and Clayton [1997: 2]. This is close to the World Bank’s 1992 continuum which ranged from ‘information sharing’ with beneficiaries, through ‘consultation’ and ‘decision-making’, to ‘initiating action’, where ‘the intensity of popular participation may be said to have reached a peak’ [1992]. The Bank’s 1994 report saw it as ‘a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them’ [1994: i].


15. On ‘capabilities’ see Sen [1990]. This relates directly to the nature of the organisations on which people depend for services, because autocratic structures negate people’s dignity and rights. Thus measurements of performance cannot be confined to a single value but must recognise ‘the diverse attributes of a good or service, or … the multitude of separate activities that constitute [the] performance [of an agent]’ [North, 1990: 28–9].


17. See also Chambers [1983: 82]; Richards [1985]; Leach and Fairbairn [1996]; Ostrom [1997].

18. Chambers [1983: 131]; see also Wignaraja et al. [1991].

19. For example, the World Bank requires Social Assessments to operationalise a ‘participation strategy’ involving stakeholders to improve targeting and appropriateness, but these only involve weak participation. They want ‘to enable project planners in consultation with other stakeholders to prioritise critical issues … ’, where decisions about who to ‘involve’ and how to do so are firmly controlled by the ‘planners’. They wish to ‘empower stakeholders to take
corrective action’, but do not discuss possible sanctions that could be used should the agency fail, only saying that agencies ‘need to be responsive to the recommendations’ emerging from participatory monitoring activities’, thus leaving it to the managers to decide whether and how to respond. World Bank [1997: Module I: 1–4; Module VI: 3–4].


22. Note the relevance here of Wade’s study of collective water management systems in India which demonstrates that these only emerged in villages with scarce grazing land and unreliable water supplies, and not in others [1988: 9]. Esman and Uphoff provide an excellent review of the conditions required for successful participatory project management [1982].

23. Buchanan and Tullock sum up these arguments when they claim that hierarchy will outperform joint control, provided that ‘some means can be taken to ensure that the dictator will … remain benevolent’ [Buchanan and Tullock, 1962: 100].

24. See Brett [1996]. According to North there are ‘fundamental transaction cost problems impeding the survival of such non-authoritarian forms of organisation … Clearly there are both production-cost (from economies of scale) and transaction cost advantages to hierarchical organisation [1981].

25. The tendency to delegate participatory rights to elected representatives and a few activists is not confined to LDCs. On average 12 people attend meetings of my ward Labour Party out of an electorate of 7,000.

26. Social capital does not always support tolerance and co-operation, but can also have a ‘dark side’ as Putzel [1997] argues.

27. I am highly educated, and can access immense amounts of information, but I rely on professionals to service almost all of my needs. Why should poor people with fewer skills and less information be expected to organise their own services?

28. The link may not be direct (as with tax or donor funded services) but in the last analysis ‘there is no such thing as a free meal’.

29. The significance of this shift for our understanding of private market systems is demonstrated in Williamson [1985]; and for public bureaucracies in Tullock [1965].

30. This definition of accountability is identical with Rawls’ ‘principle of participation’, which he defines as the mechanism which ‘compels those in authority to be responsive to the felt needs’ of their principals [Rawls, 1973: 227].

31. For a review of the problems associated with multiple stakeholders in project management see ODA [1995].


33. I have attempted to summarise them in Brett [1999].

34. See Dasgupta [1998] for a critical review of the performance of most structural adjustment programmes.

35. For an examination of the political role of markets see White [1993].

36. Here, for example, see Ferguson’s, account of the World Bank’s programme in Lesotho [1994]; and Putzel’s review of the role and cost of consultants in the European Union programme [1997].

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