Community participation in development: nine plagues and twelve commandments

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ABSTRACT   Many development thinkers and practitioners have been pondering over community participation for the last two to three decades – some even called the 1980s the decade of participation. To a large extent the current decade of social movements, non government organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs), is a manifestation of organized community participation. By analyzing the dynamics of community participation, particularly in the South African urban upgrading context, nine obstacles and impediments ('plagues') are exposed which serve to illustrate participatory development as a complex and difficult, though essential and challenging endeavour. Twelve draft guidelines ('commandments') are also presented in trying to address these obstacles associated with participatory development.

Introduction

Community participation in development is advocated for various noble reasons and is often rhetorical and permeated with lofty sentiments. However, to criticize these advantages of community participation would appear to be ungenerous. As a concept, 'community participation' is one of the most overused, but least understood concepts in developing countries without a serious attempt to critically analyze the different forms that participation could take (Nientied *et al.*, 1990: p. 53; Oakley, 1991, p. 269; Gaigher, 1992, p. 11). But, as development scientists it is our obligation to apply our analytical skills in the examining of any set of beliefs, something which is no less the case for participatory development as a paradigm. This in itself is a difficult endeavour, because it calls for not only a criticism of romantic ideals that have intrinsic appeal, but also of disentangling ethical

issues from theoretical and practical considerations (Midgley *et al.*, 1986, p. 34). This article is therefore an attempt to expose the important impediments or obstacles to community participation with some reference to its application in urban development projects. The paper also argues that there are some emergent guidelines that organizations and individuals involved in development initiatives might consider applying.

1. Nine plagues – impediments or obstacles to community participation

There are a wide range of factors that could hinder and indeed constrain the promotion of participatory development, and these often lead to the emergence of non-participatory approaches. Such obstacles prohibiting participation abound, ranging from institutional to socio-cultural, to technical, to logistical, and are spread over a seemingly endless spectrum. Obstacles are also external, internal and a combination of both. 'External obstacles' refer to those factors outside the end-beneficiary community that inhibit or prevent true community participation taking place. External obstacles suggest the role of development professionals, the broader government orientation towards promoting participation, the tendency among development agencies to apply selective participation, and their techno-financial bias. Internal obstacles refer to conflicting interest groups, gate-keeping by local elites, and alleged lack of public interest in becoming involved. Some of the obstacles such as excessive pressures for immediate results and techno-financial bias *include both internal and external characteristics*.

1.1 The paternalistic role of development professionals

The majority of development projects are initiated by outsiders. They are rarely founded spontaneously by the community itself. The paternalistic roles of many 'development experts' during the past four development decades impeded a lot on participatory development approaches. In this regard Cadribo (1994, p. 22) even referred to Africa as a graveyard of development projects due to their failures resulting from externally induced development and externally managed processes. The following remarks of community members illustrate their discontent with the paternalistic approaches of development professionals:

> 'They (the developers) arrived already knowing everything. They come here and look around, but they see only what is not here' (Indian Villager.)

> 'Developers just came overnight, they just arrived. They did not tell the people. They made us think that they were coming to save us' Informal settler Kwa-Zulu Natal South Africa (CRIASS, 1994, p. 16).

Often, professional experts dominate decision-making and manipulate, instead of facilitate, development processes.[2] The trademark of 'development experts' is often that they always know best and therefore, their prime function is to transfer knowledge to communities whom by definition 'know less'. The reason for this is that professionals are predominantly trained in ways that disempower and who tell other people what they should do and think. This has contributed to professionals (unconsciously or consciously) regarding themselves as the sole owners of development wisdom and having the monopoly of solutions which consistently under-rate and under-value the capacities of local people to make their own decisions as well as to determine their own priorities. It is therefore difficult for development planners to view community needs and opportunities through 'the eyes of end-beneficiaries' (Dudley, 1993, p. 150; Heymans, 1994, p. 34; Rowlands, 1995, p. 105).

In some instances, community participation is not a genuine attempt to empower communities to choose development options freely, but is rather an attempt to sell preconceived proposals. Participation processes often begin only after projects have already been designed. The process is not an attempt to ascertain the outcome and priorities, but rather to gain acceptance for an already assembled package. Consultation with the community may simply be to legitimate existing decisions i.e. to tell people what is going to happen by asking them what they think about it. Community participation is in these cases nothing more than attempts to convince beneficiaries what is best for them.

If a development professional is the pivot around which development initiatives are built, any community can easily become dependent on the presence and ideas of such a development champion who in turn may hinder participatory development by undervaluing the input and experiences of non-professionals.

1.2 The inhibiting and prescriptive role of the state

Although Gilbert (1987, pp. 56–80) generally agrees with the benefits of popular participation, he believes that its achievements in practice have often been vastly exaggerated and its outcomes have often damaged the interests of the weaker groups in society, mainly because its advocates have often played down the political dimension of community participation. In Latin American societies there are many examples where governments have used community participation[3] to maintain existing power relations.

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2. Constantino-David (1982, p. 194) notes that elements of facilitation and manipulation is inevitable in community organization and mobilization for development. She uses the term *facipulation* which includes elements of both facilitation and manipulation.
3. The ostensibly non-political, non-partisan character of participation obscured its use as a weapon in the struggle for power. Morgan (1993, p. 7) describes, almost in a cynical–ironical way, how participation was used as a resource and object of political struggle by politicians and health professionals and officials in the 'noble' field of primary health care in Costa Rica.

Although there are many different types of development professionals operating in and with deprived communities, one perhaps can distinguish between two prototypes of professionals. Let us first ascribed names to these two typical professionals, just for the purpose of the example, and call them 'Tau' and 'Kado'. Tau views community participation as a tool to deliver development products as soon and as effectively as possible, to the beneficiary community. At the end of a multi-million informal settlement upgrading project Tau's approach paid off resulting in 4000 sites that were serviced, with electricity installed in each site (an amenity which had not initially been budgeted for) and savings for the community based organization (of which the community leaders were part) of nearly R1 million in the bank. Basically, Tau employs a utilitarian idea of participation in development which emphasize the delivery of the development product, come hell or high water! He predominantly applies community participation as a tool for carrying out a task or as a means to an end. Several times during the project the community leaders expressed their dissatisfaction at the lack of consultation and communication of important issues to them. They also complained about not being paid for the time that they had put into organizing community meetings and assisting with a range of tasks that contributed to the successful implementation of the project. Tau emphasized that they had been elected as volunteers and therefore had to serve the community. Some of the leaders in the beneficiary community became so frustrated with Tau's approach in this project, that they decided to end their three year long working relationship with Tau on the eve of another R20 million housing project. They objected of having been misused by Tau (rightly or wrongly) for the benefit of Tau and the development agency he represents.

Kado, on the other hand, regards community participation as an end in itself. For him continuous communication and dialogue are the key to create a conducive environment to work as partners with the community and its leaders. He argues that set objectives and tangible products are not less important but the process of achieving them is of equal importance. After ending their relationship with Tau the community leaders opted to work with Kado. Kado facilitated the restructuring of the Community Based Organisation (CBO) in such a way that the community leaders could receive remuneration for what is termed community consultancy work. Kado is also a firm believer and practitioner or interactive decision-making processes.

One wonders what the reasoning of the community leaders is when they have opted to work with Kado, instead of Tau? Perhaps Kado understands the spirit of the community and its leaders better. But before we fall into the trap of judging these two professionals' approaches to participatory development we will try to give history the chance to judge the newly found relationship between Kado and the community leaders. Three years from now, at the completion of the second project, it will be interesting to assess, how the community leaders responded to Kado's way of managing participation in development, and what the overall results are.

Box 1.   Tau and Kado[4] as prototypes of development professionals

4. The example in Box 1 presented itself in one of the informal settlement communities in South Africa in which one author was involved during the past five years. For ethical reasons the fictitious names 'Tau' and 'Kado' were used.

He also points out that the benefits to be derived from participation depend primarily on the political interests involved and concludes that participation can be very dangerous when placed in wrong hands.

For the state, it appears that the main aim of community participation programmes is less about improving conditions for the poor or to modifying forms of decision-making, than maintaining existing power relations in society and ensuring the silence of the poor. Community participation is often used by governments as a means of legitimizing the political system and as a form of social control. The level of commitment by many governments to community participation has often been dubious or extremely limited. Formal channels of community participation have not always generated major benefits for local communities (Constantino-David, 1982, p. 190; Gilbert and Ward, 1984, pp. 770–780; Morgan, 1993, p. 6; Rahman, 1993, p. 226).

Participation is often constrained at the state level by partisanship, funding limitations, rigidity, the resistance of local and national bureaucrats, and the state's inability to respond effectively to the felt needs of the populace (Morgan, 1993, p. 6). Government bureaucrats as the instruments of nation states are very much in a hierarchical mode of thinking which inhibits participatory development and undermines the people's own governing abilities (Rahman, 1993, p. 226).

1.3 The over-reporting of development successes

Another problem is that successes related to development initiatives are quantified, documented and communicated to a greater extent than failures. There is therefore a lack of understanding of lessons learned, and their communication. In theoretical discussions, development experts will readily agree that failures are an important part of the learning process. Yet, when considering their own projects, development experts at all levels in the process have an interest in presenting a picture of success. Success is rewarded, whereas failure, however potentially informative, is not. The result of that is that the knowledge of the nature of the failure, the very information which could allow intervention policy to be improve, is lost (Dudley, 1993, pp. 11–12; Friedman, 1993, p. 35; Rahman, 1993, p. 153). We need more studies of what went wrong in development initiatives, the reasons why they went wrong and some suggestions as to how the same mistakes can be avoided.

1.4 Selective participation

Very often it is the most visible and vocal, wealthier, more articulated and educated groups that are allowed to be partners in development without serious and ongoing attempts to identify less obvious partners. Friedman (1993, pp. 11–17) and Young (1993, p. 148) has warned against the practice

of many development agencies to engage exclusively with particular groups as community representatives, while Gaigher *et al.* (1995, p. 239) also mentioned that poor community penetration by NGOs and CBOs is one of the main impediments to community participation. Since many community organizations are not democratically elected, the involvement of local leaders often represents the voice of a group of self-appointed people, and may not accurately reflect the views and perspectives of the broader community. This easily runs the risk of the project being co-opted by certain groups or interests, leaving development workers with a feeling that the beneficiaries consulted were the wrong ones.

This may create problems because the needs and issues at stake are determined by people who do not experience poverty in society. Salole (1991, p. 10) even refers to these groups as marginal participants. It is a well-known social anthropological principle that often the most outgoing or most easily approachable members of the community tend to be those that are marginal to their own society. It remains one of the biggest challenges to ensure that the people who neither have the capacity, nor the desire to participate, are involved in the development process.

One of the worst manifestations of selective participation occurs when the development agency 'buys' the goodwill and support of key interest groups in the community, which is also referred to as 'community-renting'.[5] This is often the result where community involvement exercises are susceptible to manipulation and misappropriation. The point has been made in Latin American contexts that communities may deliberately buy into co-option to gain access to resources. Other practices that can easily lead to exclusionary or selective development can occur when the developer or donor agency identifies the community partners, instead of the community themselves. This selective identification usually happens when development workers ask the 'best known' members of the community to serve on a committee (Morgan, 1993, pp. 144–147). Since participation for the developer is largely a matter of convenience; the objective is to find a partner in order to allow the project to continue and the screening of the representativeness of the partner is, at most, secondary.

1.5 Hard-issue bias

In many development projects the so-called 'hard' issues (technological, financial, physical and material) are perceived as being more important for the successful implementation of these projects than the 'soft' issues (such as community involvement, decision making procedures, the establishment of

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5. 'Community renting' refers to examples where the goodwill and support of communities are 'bought' in exchange for some promised spin-offs. Since the establishment of Provincial Housing Boards in South Africa in 1994, various reports have been received of developers (i.e. town and regional planners, consulting engineers and building contractors) engaging in community renting practices for the primary reason to obtain contracts.

efficient social compacts, organizational development capacity building and empowerment). (Moser, 1989; Sowman and Gawith, 1994, pp. 567–568). This may be the result of the assumption that social and cultural features (the so called 'soft issues') are ephemeral, intangible and unnecessary time-consuming in comparison to the more easily managed 'hard issues'. This inevitably results in a technical bias, which neglects the fact that inappropriate social processes can destroy the most noble development endeavour. Cernea describes the soft–hard issue dichotomy as follows:

> 'While many technologies are available for the "hardware" components of development projects, this is not the case for the institutional components and socio-cultural parts of these projects ("software"), which in no way are less important for the projects' ultimate success. Thus, creating and strengthening adequate social organisation – the social capital that sustains, uses and maintains the technology, and involving the users of the technology, is no less important than the technology itself' (Cernea, 1983, p. 13; 1994, p. 8).

The majority of professional organizations for development (i.e. engineering firms, town and regional planners, quantity surveyors, contractors) involved in urban development are also more oriented towards 'product-related hard issues' rather than 'process-related soft issues'.[6] Participation is not a value or a norm for these professions, but it is a matter of convenience. Most of them also lack the attitudes and skills required to elicit community participation, because the 'community' is only a means to achieve their own development goals.

In this regard, Asthana (1994, p. 57) refers to the tensions that exist between hard and soft issues in slum improvement projects in India. In many instances the social dimensions of a project remain largely undefined. It seems to be assumed that either the soft issues of a project are less important, or that everyone knows how to do it.[7]

1.6 Conflicting interest groups within end-beneficiary communities

In the majority of cases, development introduces marginalized communities to limited scarce resources and opportunities, which very often increases the likelihood of development as a divisive force. Development is always the result of decisions which require choices about whose needs are to enjoy priority; often, some interests can be accommodated only at the expense of

6. People with a financial, technical, and/or professional background tend to overemphasize the development product, while for people with a social community based background, development is more a matter of the right approach or process. *Cf.* Box 1, Tau has a technical science background where Kado has a social science background.
7. Due to limited time, two housing proposals in South Africa [one in Tswaragano-Kimberley (Northern Cape Province), the other in Freedom Square-Bloemfontein (Free State Province) – 1995] only clarified the hard-technical issues and did not devote enough time at creating a suitable social compact as engine for effective community participation. Both projects were delayed for several months due to this techno-economical bias and underplay of community-related issues.

others. A logical consequence of this is the likelihood that conflict can develop among different interest groups or segments of the community.

Conflict also arises in situations where some groups may feel neglected in decisions affecting their lives. This in turn may enhance the possibility of different interest groups within a single community opposing each other.

Competition among community based organizations and other popular movements for access to scarce development resources and power is a major constraint preventing proper participation. Most civic and political movements are well aware that development, for which they can claim responsibility, will boost their support base; therefore, they have an incentive to discourage processes, for which they cannot claim sole credit. In the South African urban development scene there are various examples of development initiatives being sabotaged, undermined or hi-jacked, because a specific interest group believes it was allocated an insufficient role (*cf.* Box 2).

Another reason why different stakeholders in a development initiative may find themselves at loggerheads, is because, for various reasons, they can be in the same development drive: In this regard Stiefel and Wolfe (1994, p. 17) refer to as a 'difference in rationalities'. Because interest groups engage in encounters and development projects for different reasons, they very often do not share a common vision and objectives regarding the future development of their community, which is almost a guaranteed recipe for conflict. In reflecting about the pros and cons of participatory development what is perceived as negative by one interest group can very often have a positive meanings for another.

From the above it is clear that each community consists of a variety of social groups with differing interests and different perceptions of their actual and desired role in society. A critical factor influencing the motivation to participate is often the composition of a community. In informal settlements, for instance, besides political and cultural differentiation, there

In Tswaragano, which literally means 'Let us get together and do something', a small informal settlement of 270 households in Kimberley (Northern-Cape Province, South Africa), rivalry between two community organizations and their leadership was so severe that a housing proposal was delayed for approximately 18 months. Only after four mediation attempts, 10 meetings and many harsh words did the two organizations agree to support a housing proposal jointly. In another community called Boikhutsong 'Place of peace' of 780 households, (also in Kimberley) tension between two community groups was so severe that the community centre (in which a community based organization also occupied an office) was believed to be deliberately set on fire and two community members killed. Four attempts to arrange an annual general meeting failed due to disruptions by members of the opposing community group.

Box 2.   Conflict in places of peace

are also: the new arrivals versus the old timers, the tenants versus the owners, the old versus the young, male versus female, unemployed versus employed, formally employed versus informally employed, etc. The stratified and heterogenous nature of communities is a thorny obstacle to promoting participatory development. In heterogeneous communities people are often less likely to participate due to divisions of language, tenure, income, gender, age or politics, than in less diverse communities.

1.7 Gate-keeping by local elites

It is well known that in cases where the community leadership favours a project the chances of success are far greater than where leaders are opposed. However, often a particular organization, perhaps the dominant one in a target area, may interpose itself between the development agency and the beneficiaries, resisting all attempts to engage with the latter. Thus, local elites may be able to effectively thwart attempts to engage directly with beneficiaries, because this threatens their control.[8]

There is always the danger that decision-making at community-level may fall into the hands of a small and self-perpetuating clique, which may act in its own interests with disregard for the wider community. In this regard, Friedman (1993, p. 29) has used the term 'positioning for patronage'.[9] In developing countries, South Africa included, the peculiar dynamics of informal settlements often lend themselves to an autocratic style of leadership based on patronage, which reinforce the prevailing inequality of the existing social structure (Nientied et al., 1990, p. 45).

Many residents in informal settings are engaged in a struggle for survival in a context of absolute or relative poverty which result in a competition for scarce resources. This is obviously not favourable for community organization. Leaders in informal settlements appear to adapt well in these circumstances, and they frequently monopolize the information channels

8. For example, Cernea (1983, p. 95) indicates how village elites tend to control the contacts between the poorest village groups and planners from the Integrated Programme for Rural Development (PIDER) in Mexico. Kaseje (1992, pp. 1–9) also shares his experiences of how the roles of local elites lead to mismanagement and almost destruction of a rural health programme in Kenya. Davies (1993, p. 8) reports the serious problems in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, that arise in cases where one strong interestgroup like the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) attempt to act as development agency (a role in which they seldom have any capacity or competence); and in the process interfere with the activities of established community based development organizations (CBDOs). This problem is compounded when Civics attempt to extend their 'watchdog of the people' role to one which assumes a gate-keeping function with respect to funding for development projects formulated by the people in consultation with competent CBDOs. At the local level, this has led to conflict and interference with project implementation, often to the extent that initiatives are abandoned or turn out to be only partial successful.

9. Asthana (1994, p. 64) discussed the role of political patronage in his analysis of slum improvement in Visakhapatnam, India. She indicates how slum leaders actively sought vertical links with local politicians, who promise their dwellers' votes in return for resource provision. According to a 1988 survey of slum leaders in Visakhapatnam, 27% believed that political affiliation was a prerequisite to receiving a housing scheme. De Vries (1995) indicated how bureaucrats in Mexico often tried to transform gatekeepers into ideal beneficiaries resulting in an unholy alliance between local power elites and informal settlers.

between the slum residents and the agencies. In this way, and in spite of their sometimes useful role as mediators for the urban poor, they limit the direct and active participation of low income people in general. This behaviour by more dominant groups has often deprived the weaker and more vulnerable social segments of participation in community affairs. This may also lead to self-centredness and selfish development decisions. Experience has shown that it is often very difficult to reach the poorest and that initiatives and leadership will often come from people with higher social status. In the South African context, Roodt (1996, p. 312) expresses his concern for the way in which certain groups and individuals monopolize power and development resources at the local level, and in the process exclude, or prevent, or limit other groups and individuals from participation.

1.8 Excessive pressures for immediate results: the accentuation of product at the expense of process

There is always a tension between the imperatives of delivery (product) and community participation (process), between the cost of time and the value of debate and agreement. Excessive pressures for immediate results, accruing from the products and services delivered, often undermine attention to institution-building and make it difficult not to address poverty and poverty reduction from a relief and welfare approach. Any pressure on development workers to show results, may force them to take matters out of the hands of community people and complete them themselves. For example, the distribution of food is much more quickly achieved than teaching people how to grow it themselves (Galjart, 1981, p. 148; Gaigher, 1992, p. 49). Anticipated results in often too short a term, have also been the cause of many of the world's most inappropriate development initiatives. In many instances an overemphasis on the development product is often unacceptable by community people as illustrated in the words of a community leader in an informal settlement in Huhudi/Vryburg – North-West Province, South Africa

> 'What we resent is the high-handed way the planners go about ramming proposals down our throats. This is our community and we want to be part of decisions affecting us'.

Friedman (1993, p. 11) has indicated that development progress is often measured, not only by developers themselves but also by public opinion-formers and politicians, by the speed with which tangible results are delivered. However, pressure to deliver is not simply a result of impatience from hasty technocrats, potential beneficiaries are often also impatient at endless discussions without any sign of delivery. Lengthy periods spent on process issues are regarded with impatience because action is required rather than social niceties. For many, participatory development is too time-consuming and not cost-effective, because participation in practice is always a slow and uncertain process and is likely to involve more paper work and

soul searching (Paul, 1987, pp. 10–11; Kaya, 1989, p. 42; Alihonou *et al.*, 1993, p. 13).

However, the assumption that participatory planning is necessarily a costly, time-consuming or drawn-out process, is not always valid. In the first place, evidence suggests that some kinds of projects can be formulated with participatory inputs within a reasonably short time period. When the complaint is made that participation does not work, most often participation has not been seriously tried, or else has been wrongly facilitated. Most failures are unfairly blamed on the beneficiaries, when in fact officials are more responsible for shortcomings in design and implementation. Secondly, although true participation involves greater costs for the identification, design and planning phases, it may actually be saving more time and money during the implementation and evaluation phases, because it ensures that people take ownership of a project (Kottak, 1985, pp. 325–256; Bamberger, 1986, p. 10; Bhatnagar, 1992, p. 14; Uphoff, 1992, p. 144; Kok and Gelderblom, 1994, pp. 54–55).

Two main ways of thought are mapped out in Figure 1 with regard to the process/product debate. Some people and organizations tend to emphasize process and fail to deliver product, whilst other are so product-driven that they neglect community processes. Both are dangerous: process without product leaves communities feeling that nothing is really happening other than a lot of talking, and that time, money and social energy is lost. Product without process runs the risk of doing something communities do not want or need, or cannot sustain.

1.9 The lack of public interest in becoming involved

One of the major impediments of community participation is the allegation that members of the public are not really interested in becoming involved. According to Kok and Gelderblom (1994, pp. 50–51) there is evidence supporting the universality of the problem when they state that:

> 'The question whether people really know what they want and what is likely to be in their best interest is another area of concern that is frequently cited. It is often said that people need to be protected against themselves. This notion implies that people are ignorant and need to be steered in the right direction by those who "know better", presumably the professional ex-perts.'

A lack of willingness to participate may also result from past experiences of involvement where expectations were not fulfilled. Paul (1987) says that the World Bank has learned the difficulties for beneficiaries to be active in community participation when the country does not have a social tradition supportive of participation; inadequate technology inhibits proper service delivery; the government is perceived by beneficiaries as a satisfactory medium; and when governments are reluctant to build participation into their project designs.

Process versus product	Decision-making dynamics	Underlying assumptions	Emphasis
Process *less* important than product	Developer-centered approach: characterized by top-down decisions taken by development elite	Rely on formal know-how and expertise to resolve development problems in the shortest possible time	Time and product
Process *more* important than product	People-centered approach: characterized by bottom-up decisions taken by community members or their legitimate leaders	The immediate resolution of a development problem is less important than the way in which the process of problem-solving is taking place – even if it requires a longer time. Build on the saying 'it is the approach rather than the outcome of the message that spells success'	Participation, consultation and process

Fig. 1.   Process versus product in community participation

2. Twelve commandments – emergent guidelines for promoting community participation

Factors such as culture, history, government policy and social, political and economic structures influence community participation. Individual and group motivations appear to be context-specific and locality-bound rather than universally definable. As community participation grows out of a specific situation, its applicability and replication to another region is problematic, as it encounters various and complex problems. In this regard Galjart (1981, p. 156) refers to the disillusionment of the realization that replication of successful participatory projects as an unsolved problem.

The post-modern age we are living in is a very complex and problematic time in history. Nothing is certain and simple anymore. Perhaps the only certainty is that nothing is certain. The last decade saw a turning point in world history when many of the structural givens of social development themselves turned out to be problematic. In dealing with a topic on participatory development in the upgrading of informal settlements, a mere

attempt to formulate some guidelines could easily ignore the complex nature of our social reality. Guidelines for promoting participatory development should therefore neither be seen as blueprints, nor as recipes, but rather as a framework of values, principles and approaches to promote the ideals of participatory development.

According to Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), a scientific paradigm should, besides a theory, also include examplars, instruments and techniques. Deliberations on problems, obstacles, constraints, issues and myths related to community participation would therefore be incomplete without an attempt at drafting some tentative or emergent guidelines ('instruments and techniques') in promoting or facilitating participatory development. We use the term guidelines in preference to techniques to avoid the view of guidelines as mere recipes or blueprints for guaranteeing the promotion of true community participation. Experience has shown that there are no 'quick fix' approaches in pursuing development in a participatory manner (Toms, 1992, p. 14; Slim, 1995, p. 144). Due to the complexity of community dynamics as a human process there are no blueprints, nor ready-made recipes of participatory processes that can be applied to promote participatory development.

Whoever wants to get involve in participatory development should:

- *Demonstrate an awareness of their status as outsiders* to the beneficiary community and the *potential impact of their involvement.*
- *Respect the community's indigenous contribution* as manifested in their knowledge, skills and potential.
- *Become* good facilitators and *catalysts of development that assist and stimulate community based initiatives* and challenge practices which hinders people releasing their own initiatives and realize their own ideals.
- *Promote co-decision-making in defining needs, goal-setting, and formulating policies and plans* in the implementation of these decisions. Selective participatory practices can be avoided when development workers seek out various sets of interest, rather than listening only to a few community leaders and prominent figures.
- *Communicate both programme/project successes and failures* – sometimes failures are more informative.
- *Believe in* the spirit of 'Ubuntu' – a South African concept encompassing key values *such as solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity.*
- *Listen to community members, especially the more vulnerable, less vocal and marginalized groups.*
- *Guard against the domination of some interest groups* or a small unrepresentative leadership clique. This article pleads for a co-operative spirit and for a watch for oligarchic tendencies among community leadership.
- *Involve a cross-section of interest groups to collaborate as partners* in

jointly defining development needs and goals, and designing appropriate processes to reach these goals.

- *Acknowledge that process-related soft issues are as important as product-related hard issues.* Any investment in shelter for the poor should involve an appropriate mix of technological and social factors, where both hardware and software are developed together. In this regard many scholars recognize the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to project planning and development. The inclusion of a social scientist, and someone with the appropriate skills from within the community, to work together with planners, architects and engineers is very important. A multi-disciplinary approach will only succeed if technical professionals recognize and include the contributions of their social scientist partners in the planning process.
- *Aim at releasing the energy within a community without exploiting or exhausting them.*
- *Empower communities to share equitably in the fruits of development* through active processes whereby beneficiaries influence the direction of development initiatives rather then merely receive a share of benefits in a passive manner.

The list above reflects 12 emergent guidelines for participatory development. These draft guidelines should not be considered as fixed rules, or formulae or prescriptions but rather reflect the lessons that have been learned by hard-earned experiences. The majority of these suggested guidelines 'emerged', were 'tried and tested', or 'ignored' during the involvement of the author in five informal settlement upgrading projects in South Africa. Although successful participation is very elusive, these guidelines serve as a developmental ethical code of conduct to bringing disparate groups together for the real intention and praxis of participatory development. If one looks closely at these guidelines they appeal to different levels of human co-existence. Perhaps these guidelines could be viewed as the 'twelve commandments' for community participation in development – almost the ethical norms of facilitating development in a participatory manner.

A reorientation of the thinking of development professionals is therefore necessary in which they should rather adopt the motto of planning with and not for the people. In this re-orientation they should change from implementing agents to facilitators who foster the principle of minimum intervention and respect the indigenous knowledge of ordinary community members (Rahman, 1993, p. 68; O'Gorman, 1995, p. 212; Rowlands, 1995, p. 105).

Where developers adopted a facilitating role they need to understand that they are outsiders who cannot develop the poor by themselves. Being a facilitator that promotes participatory development implies first understanding a community's questions, assisting them to articulate it better and

then helping the community to search for solutions. Facilitators should never come with ready-made solutions or tell the people what to do, they must rather encourage and assist people to think about their problems in their own way. Besides advice and guidance, this can be done by stimulating self-investigation and reflection among the poor; by stimulating them to take their own decisions and action, and to review and evaluate themselves. The consultant should be involved with a community only for as long as it takes to identify real needs and transfer necessary skills and ideas to ensure that the community people can run programmes themselves. In communities where people are not yet aware of their own potential, or have not been allowed to express and develop it, a dependent relationship could often emerge which could impede the release of a community's own initiatives and collective capabilities.

Conclusions

Community participation in development projects often assumes the notion of 'common purpose and common good'. This perspective romanticizes the people or the community, a position that is analyzed and refuted in this article. The obstacles to participatory development highlight the social and power relations between the stakeholders in a development planning process: professional planners and technicians, the beneficiary population, and the concerned agencies and institutions. A re-negotiation of the relationship between those who control resources and the recipients of those resources is needed. Involving people can be expensive in various ways and, in some instances, can paralyze decision-making, holding development investments hostage to unproductive activism and reinforce local power structures and power struggles. Community participation can use enormous amounts of time, endlessly delay and circularize decision-making, have to deal with a constantly changing *cadre* of decision-makers and every now and then evoke the new charge of lack of mandate. The challenge for those involved in participation is to recognize these obstacles related to development, and how these obstacles might impede on community participation.

This article has highlighted some of the obstacles and impediments facing attempts to initiate participatory development. Some of the obstacles have an external influence on the end-beneficiary community (from outside), while others are endemic or internal to the community. How these internal and external obstacles inter-relate to or interact with one another, is of vital importance in getting a clear picture on all the different factors and processes impacting upon promoting and facilitating community participation.

Community dynamics in the developing world occur in heterogeneous, divided and complex societies. All attempts to initiate grassroots development should deal with far more than visible conflicts between competing values and interests. Sometimes even authentic community participation is

not a guarantee that a development intervention will be without serious conflict or will be successful. In some instances all the relevant stakeholders may agree upon the contents, form, process and product of development, and yet conflict may arise during the implementation phase of a development project.

Perhaps Gilbert (1987, p. 75) summarizes the essence of problems and controversies in community participation best by stating that:

> 'The only valid conclusion that can be drawn is one of tempered enthusiasm for the idea of community participation, and then always subject to local circumstances. Community participation is worthwhile and can help improve the living conditions of low-income communities. But, since it can also be used to their disadvantage the poor are often well-advised to limit their involvement.'

However, in spite of the numerous and well documented cases illustrating the problematic nature of participatory development in the developing world and particularly in Africa, there is still general optimism and support for community participation in development. This optimism is also very much apparent in South Africa today. Development in the full sense of the word is not possible without appropriate community participation.

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