

Participation in International Development Discourse and Practice

"State of the Art" and Challenges

Frank Bliss/Stefan Neumann

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Participation in International Development

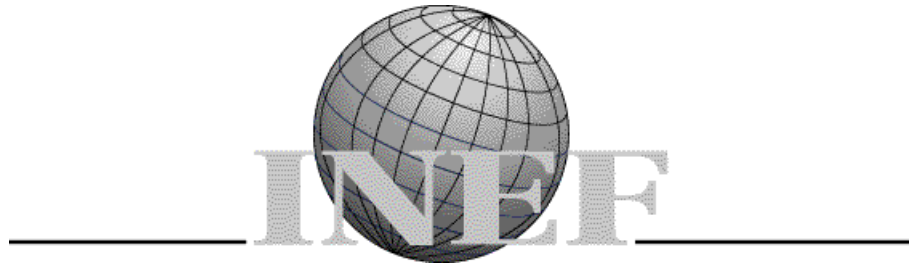
Discourse and Practice

“State of the Art” and Challenges

INEF-Report 94/2008

University of Duisburg-Essen
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Institute for Development and Peace
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ABSTRACT

Frank Bliss/Stefan Neumann: Participation in International Development Discourse and Practice. "State of the Art" and Challenges. Duisburg: Institute for Development and Peace, University of Duisburg-Essen (INEF-Report, 94/2008).

Participation has become one of the most important buzzwords in the international development discourse since at least the middle of the 1990s. In the same way as older key terms such as gender and socio-cultural conditions of development, or new concepts such as good governance and ownership, the increasing claims for participation (of target groups, of beneficiaries, of stake-holders etc.) are usually accompanied by a critical assessment of previous development cooperation which needs to be improved by stronger, more comprehensive or target-oriented participation. However, this positive connotation of participation shared by almost all actors in the field is increasingly challenged through critical remarks forwarded by theoreticians and practitioners alike.

In this article the authors provide a critical overview of the dimensions and meanings of "participation" for different actors and in different contexts, and they summarize and analyze the current controversy surrounding the concept and its implementation. One important finding is that in many development programmes (from the project level to sector-wide approaches) and Poverty Reduction Strategy processes, participation is seen and implemented in a functional and utilitarian way to achieve predefined objectives, and not as a tool for empowerment. The same holds for the actors from bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, including many Nongovernmental Organisations.

From this review current challenges of participation and development are derived and discussed, including key issues such as legitimacy and representation of various groups of stakeholders, participation and decentralisation, participation and civil society, participation and the poor, and participation and conflict.

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Preface

This work summarises the first part of a research project on participation in national development and development cooperation as exemplified by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This project, financially supported by the Volkswagen Foundation, started in 2005 and will be conducted until 2008 in Germany and on-site in Central Asia. The German Orient-Institute, Hamburg, and the Institute of Development Anthropology and Applied Social Sciences (*Institut für Entwicklungsethnologie und angewandte Sozialforschung*), Bonn, provided the institutional framework for this part of the study.

The studies are conducted by Frank Bliss (Professor of Development Anthropology at the University of Hamburg and freelance consultant) and Stefan Neumann (Director of a German NGO for civic education and freelance consultant). Partner institutions are the Academy of Science in Kyrgyzstan and the University of Khatlon in Tajikistan.

The research project aims to examine the role of stake-holder participation during the transformation processes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The analysis is intended to contribute to the international research on participation, focussing firstly on the general development discourse, which is heavily influenced by the West, and secondly on the applicability of the idea of participation in the context of development cooperation as exemplified by the reference countries. This also implies discussing the relativity of the concept of participation.

The studies include the analysis of societal participation in the two countries at regional, sectoral and national levels, and embrace the typical instruments of development cooperation: "project" and "programme". Based on the analysis of decision-making processes, the studies are designed to make a contribution towards developing adequate forms of societal participation and placing them in the context of development policy. In its further progress the research project aims to examine the appropriateness and applicability of the idea of participation in development policy and cooperation at a general conceptual as well as at country and project levels.

This work, which is conceived as a partial summary, presents some of the results of the first phase of the project, and deals with the significance and relevance of the concept of participation in development discourse and practice in general. Except for a few comments regarding the role of civil society, the research results on stake-holder participation in the preparation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are left aside. A complete version of this paper, including comments on the PRS process, is available in German and can be ordered under the title "Zur Partizipationsdiskussion in der internationalen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit: ‚State of the art‘ und Herausforderungen", Bonn 2007 (PAS-Verlag: info@pas-bonn.de).

Remagen / Bonn, January 2008





1. Introduction*

Participation has become one of the most important buzzwords in the international development discourse since the middle of the 1990s. In the same way as older key terms such as gender and socio-cultural conditions of development, or new concepts such as good governance and ownership, the increasing claims for participation (of target groups, of beneficiaries, of stake-holders etc.) are usually accompanied by a critical assessment of previous development cooperation which needs to be improved by stronger, more comprehensive or target-oriented participation. This implies that development cooperation is principally considered to be possible and to have positive effects, provided that qualitative standards are met. Among these are notably the participation of stake-holders, moreover the consideration of gender and socio-cultural aspects, and observance of the ownership principle in projects, programmes and concepts, as well as the realisation of the idea of good governance, or indeed of all of these elements together.

The general effectiveness of development cooperation has always been disputed in the literature. Peter Bauer (1982), for instance, explains its inevitable ineffectiveness with reference to basic economic rules which are broken by measures which are free or highly subsidised. Ulrich Menzel (1992) for his part argues for a global social policy instead of development assistance. These are only two among hundreds of critics who reject Development Cooperation (DC) as well as the possibility to reform it, because the basic idea behind it supposedly leads to an impasse. There is nevertheless a clear majority of participants in the development discourse who in principle regard the idea of DC as reasonable and its aims (e.g., the Millennium Development Goals) as achievable. This position is basically supported by the authors of this paper.

However, the need for a fundamental reform of DC and the conditions of international cooperation is only challenged by a minority of observers. The associated claim for a qualitative improvement of the international DC is compelling given the still unbearable situation in many developing countries, but it is by no means new. Rather, it has accompanied development cooperation since its beginning, at least since the 1970s when it turned out that development assistance, officially launched in 1948 and inspired by modernisation theories, had failed.¹

However, stake-holder participation was not taken into consideration prior to the first paradigm shift, credited among others to Robert McNamara – then President of the World Bank – who in his “Nairobi Speech” in 1973 extended

* The authors are indebted to Sven Härtig and Mike Kelly for their editorial assistance.

¹ According to Ulrich Menzel (1992: 101), one of the few non-marxist exponents seeing the possibility of a development beyond the European (or US) option of bourgeois capitalist development, that is beyond modernisation theories, is Karl A. Wittfogel who sketched out alternative models in his work „Oriental Despotism“ (1977).



the dogma of poverty reduction through economic growth to a direct aid to the poor. Partially, modernisation theorists naively opted for copying the Western development model, surprisingly neglecting the democratic principles that had been a constitutive element of reconstruction and economic development in all Western countries after World War II. Either these principles were missing completely in the development concepts or they were postulated as a more or less automatic and anticipated by-product of development.

Similar to many cultural traditions (particularly religion, norms and values, traditional justice), participation was even considered as a constraint to development. The fundamental contradiction between the explicitly verbalised need to overcome “obstructive cultural singularities” on behalf of modernising these countries on the one hand, and the willingness on the other hand to “transitionally” accept the phenomenon of potentates as a culturally embedded form of leadership adequate for Third World societies hardly attracted any attention. Authoritarian regimes were actually not only tolerated but regarded as downright necessary by at least some commentators (Menzel 1992: 101). The result of this mindset and behaviour were such adventurous characters as the operetta emperor Bokassa in the Central African Republic, the slaughterer Idi Amin in Uganda or – breaking all records in personal enrichment – Mobutu in Zaire, who completely bankrupted their countries. The fact that they received support from single development theorists and especially from Western governments until the very end by no means qualifies their antidemocratic and antiparticipatory attitude.

It was thus not in the focus of modernisation theories that modernisation or catch-up development is possible also or especially when democratic values are placed in the centre of political processes and when structural reforms can be enforced by countervailing powers gradually emerging from within a society – as noted later by Hartmut Elsenhans, among others (Menzel 1992: 115f). Consequently, the chance to integrate participation as a central feature into the planning and implementation of development interventions had already been missed at an early stage.

The partial reorientation of international DC under the basic needs strategy at the end of the 1970s turned the attention to the direct concerns of the population – initially to primary physical needs (food, shelter, clothing, and health), but later also to social needs (education and gender equality). However, with regard to the participation of the population, which approximately at this time came to be defined as the “target group”, no fundamental change occurred.² Furthermore, virtually no importance was attached to investigating the socio-cultural context of intended interventions and to adapting the measures to these prevailing conditions. Eventually, activities in the context of the basic needs strategy were planned in donor countries far away from the target areas in the same way as the previous large-scale projects (which were not suspended) of

² At most, “community development” seemed to be a certain exception (see Uphoff/Cohen/Goldsmith 1979 for the “state of the art” of participation in this area as early as the 1970s).



“catch-up development” – a commonality between basic needs strategy and modernisation ideology. The experts knew best what was good for the people in partner countries, and in just the same way as certain “backward” cultural elements, participation was diagnosed (although not explicitly) as a constraint to development.

The discourse on stake-holder participation, or rather the awareness that target groups (should) play an outstanding role in project work – at least in the assessment of the current development policy portfolio – was stimulated by the increased evaluation activities of international and bilateral donor organisations, among which the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) began playing an important role in the mid-eighties. The first record of nine years of evaluation (1976 to 1984), which was presented under the title “Learning from Mistakes” (“Aus Fehlern lernen”, BMZ 1986), used a relatively clear mode of expression.³ Although the overall result of German public development cooperation was considered to be positive, experts could not overlook the report’s criticism. For instance, particularly the lack of sustainability of the projects was criticised, which was partly ascribed to negligence of the following aspects in the planning and implementation processes: (i) generally insufficient knowledge of the basic conditions in the setting of development processes, particularly (ii) of social power structures, furthermore (iii) insufficient consideration of socio-cultural conditions (BMZ 1986: 41).

However, the inadequate participation of target groups in the planning and implementation processes as well as the deficient information of the population regarding the projects’ aims and advantages, and concerning the importance of the target groups’ own contributions, were also explicitly mentioned as reasons for a lack of sustainability (BMZ 1986: 42). This basically covers the arguments which initially led to the examination of socio-cultural criteria of development and later stimulated the debate on participation.

Regarding the first discourse, the BMZ assumed that DC activities could be designed more sustainably and in line with the concerns of target groups if three basic socio-cultural criteria of a given project were assessed: (i) legitimate political leadership, (ii) stage of development and (iii) ethnic heterogeneity (Simson 1983, 1993; Simson/Schönherr 1992). This “shortcut”, suggested by the BMZ instead of a more comprehensive socio-cultural analysis of target groups, was massively criticised mainly by German social anthropologists (Bliss 1986; Bliss/Gaesing/Neumann 1997; Kievelitz 1988; Schönhuth 1987).

Essentially two arguments were brought forward: firstly, due to the complexity of culture it would hardly be possible to define key factors in advance. Instead, the determination and description of the cultural factors relevant for a

³ In the following years, similar evaluation reports were published with titles such as “Experiences from the Past for Success in the Future” („Erfahrungen aus der Vergangenheit für Erfolg in der Zukunft“, BMZ 1993), “Development Cooperation Put to the Test” („Entwicklungszusammenarbeit auf dem Prüfstand“, BMZ 1996) or “Development Cooperation – Achievements and Problems” („Entwicklungszusammenarbeit – Erfolge und Probleme“, BMZ 1999b). From 1998 onwards, evaluations were combined only in terms of topics or regions, given the complexity of the evaluation of different types of projects and programmes.



planned project could only result from a sociological on-site analysis. Secondly, the handling of cultural features “along the way” by technical experts would be unfeasible. For this purpose socio-cultural competence would be required, which only cultural and social scientists could have (Bliss 1986).

In 1997, this discussion – partly even carried out in the media – brought about a redefinition of the socio-cultural development criteria of the BMZ, which to a large extent paid attention to the aforementioned anthropological criticism (Bliss/Gaelsing/Neumann 1997). Particularly two important aspects were taken into account:

- (i.) Instead of the “legitimate political leaders” supporting a project, the legitimacy of the project itself became the subject of the socio-cultural analysis and thus of project planning. The acceptance of goals by individual subjects was replaced by the demand for a broad approval on the part of the target groups, who were to explicitly express their desires. Hence, the principle of popular participation as a standard for all German DC projects and programmes was at least implicitly codified.
- (ii.) Instead of following the evolutionary tradition by determining the target groups’ stage of development and drafting necessary adaptations of the population from a Eurocentric perspective, attention was paid to the compatibility of a project with the existing social organisation and socio-economic conditions. The result was that it was not people who had to adjust to procedures, but the projects which were to adapt to the possibilities open to the population – at least in theory.

Another at least implicit reference to participation can be found in the third socio-cultural criterion: the socio-cultural heterogeneity of the target groups that are to be analysed. The need to consider the concerns of all population groups, namely women, the poor, religious or ethnic minorities etc., is emphatically underlined. In this way, the spectrum of those parts of the population involved in the participatory process is also conceptually marked out. Instead of prioritising the legitimate political leaders, as recorded in the first draft, now all segments of the target groups are integrated in the idea of participation. However, the demand for a comprehensive participation of target groups is explicitly expressed here for the first time in the participation concept of the BMZ (BMZ 1999a). Participation, besides ensuring the sustainability of a project (functional or instrumental participation), is for the first time also seen as a contribution to the “empowerment” of disadvantaged population groups.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, and parallel to the socio-cultural debate, aspects of the promotion of women are being discussed in public and private German development cooperation – chronologically and thematically comparable to the international dispute. Under the “gender” label, those aspects later became the focus of interest in development cooperation. At first, however, this discourse was dominated by considerations of efficiency,⁴ and the empower-

⁴ E.g., it dealt with the better integration of women into projects to ensure their success – not primarily to promote the (strategic) gender interests of the women themselves.



ment of women was at the most claimed for, without being promoted as a vital objective of projects.

However, since 1993/94 significant conceptual improvements have been discernible compared to the hitherto dominating “gender components” in DC projects, which themselves do not mainly focus on the promotion of women. By means of incorporating strategic gender interests, the participation of women in the planning and implementation of DC projects is also eventually being demanded (BMZ 1997/2001). Socio-cultural criteria of development cooperation, the participation concept and the gender approach thus define the frame in which a comprehensive participation of the population concerned could at least theoretically be realised within the German development policy conception. Furthermore, the BMZ not only reached but partly even exceeded the international state of the art, also and especially with regard to the individual sub-criteria for participation within the concepts mentioned. Nevertheless, as will be shown, the development practice of almost all donors is far from a sufficient implementation of the conceptual standards, for very different reasons.⁵

Since the HIPC II Initiative⁶ of 1999 at the very latest, and with the process of developing and implementing national poverty reduction strategies – laid down in so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) – participatory development cooperation is facing entirely new challenges. While until then the question was mainly how to carry out stake-holder participation at the level of projects and programmes, the problem now broadened or even shifted, but in either case became more complicated: participation is no longer just a problem at the implementation level of somewhat straightforward projects, that is predominantly at local and regional levels, but comprises the national scale where the new poverty reduction strategies are drafted and their implementation is overseen. Instead of trying to solve the problem of how target groups can and should take part in planning and implementing a concrete project, the question now is how representatives of different social groups of a country, including the poor, can incorporate their interests into the national strategies. Thus participation is no longer a challenge of how to include more or less accurately definable target groups, but particularly a problem of legitimacy and representation regarding the agency of relevant subgroups in entire nations.

The current global situation of stake-holder participation, the state of the art regarding the design of concrete participation rights, and the problems that arise from the international discourse will be outlined below. In the process, the general analysis of the participation discourse will reflect the international debate, while those analyses which are more closely related to practice will concentrate on German development cooperation. However, experiences of other donors such as the World Bank are also considered.

⁵ Besides technical obstacles there are certainly also those reasons that result from the qualifications of the deployed personnel and from the extent to which participation is seen as a contribution to empowerment; other reasons are for example the resistance of direct partners or political units in partner countries.

⁶ Debt relief programme for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).



2. The Discourse on Participation in the Social Sciences: A General Overview

In 1995, Sidney Verba, who significantly contributed to the participation discourse in the 1960s and 70s, presented an often-cited definition of participation, which still characterises the state of the art: “Citizen participation is at the heart of democracy. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate in the governing process. Through their activity citizens in a democracy seek to control who will hold public office and to influence what government does. Political participation provides the mechanism by which citizens can communicate information about their interests, preferences, and needs whilst generating pressure to respond” (1995: 1).

Following this definition, participation is an elementary, even constitutive component of democracy. Accordingly, Oscar Gabriel, a German researcher in the field of participation, also states: “All democracy theorists agree that political participation belongs to the indispensable characteristics of any democracy” (2004: 317, translated by the authors). However, this emphasis on the outstanding relevance of participation in the democratic system is where the consensus within political science comes to an end. What political participation substantively means often remains diffuse or is interpreted in very different ways. On the one hand the term has certainly progressed over the last 40 years, but on the other hand the exact substance of participation remains largely dependent on the debaters’ political standpoints.

Roughly outlined, the international and German participation discourse underwent the following progress since the 1960s: In his book on “Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition”, Robert A. Dahl (1971) uses participation as an important constitutive element of the democratic process itself, which basically amounts to the competition for the allocation of positions and the shaping of politics within a democracy. Other authors in the 1960s also examined participation, mainly under the aspect of formal democracy, that is, elections and voter participation. Up to now the matter of voter participation has been one of the most important topics in the participation discourse (Gabriel/Völkl 2005), complemented by the aspect of citizen’s involvement in political parties. Participation then is not much more than the contribution of citizens to the political system by becoming party members, voting for politicians and – so to speak the highest grade of participation – competing for political mandates themselves. Participation thus would be the mechanism through which the formal democratic political system functions.

Since the mid-1970s at the latest, however, this restricted definition of participation is largely outdated,⁷ even though a small fraction of political

⁷ However, when individual authors such as Jung/Knemeyer in 2001 write a paper on “Direct Democracy” in Germany, largely or even exclusively reducing citizen participation and direct democracy to referendums or plebiscites, it becomes at least implicitly apparent that still sporadically a very restricted comprehension of participation exists in political science.



scientists (still) questions the legitimacy of participation in political decision-making beyond political parties and parliaments.⁸ A majority of participants in the international and German debate, particularly the working group around Ulrich von Alemann (1975), started disconnecting participation from the discussion on parties and elections. By anticipating important elements of subsequent concepts (e.g., the one introduced by Verba), people's participation is extended to include the exertion of societal pressure on those parliamentary processes which before were virtually congruent with participation. Thus participation becomes a process concerning the whole of society, which in the mid-1980s at the latest was regarded as a parallel way of making and influencing political decisions, or at least as a corrective to the party and election processes mentioned. Since then, political participation has accordingly covered much more than just influencing formal democratic and parliamentary procedures. It deals with the independent decision-making of citizens, at least the attempt to create and seize the necessary freedoms for this.

Key words of the newer concept of participation, summarised by von Alemann et al., are on the one hand still the political (citizen) participation in the democratic system, but in the same context also the (political) participation in economic democracy, i.e., the broadening of participation from the governmental to the economic field. This first of all means the codetermination by employees regarding decisions at company level and at levels beyond the company, but consequently also at national and eventually international levels. The latter was not explicitly demanded at that time, but was introduced parallel to the globalisation debate in the late 1990s. In the last few years especially International Nongovernmental Organisations (INGO) have adopted the issue in very different ways.

Additionally, in the 1970s, von Alemann et al. also transferred the demand for participation to the fields of science and education. The right to universal societal participation, partially derived from German Constitutional Law, thus at least retroactively legitimises the student protests in the late 1960s which aimed at the democratisation of university constitutions.

Since the 1980s at the latest, political participation has been commonly understood as citizen participation in two directions, (i) as citizens' influence on the political system and (ii) as participation of people in institutions in which they study (school and university, even kindergarten) or work (private companies and governmental institutions). Apart from the exceptions mentioned, these two forms of participation are by now widely undisputed socio-political principles. However, there are also opposite tendencies, for example when organised employee participation is increasingly challenged in Germany and other democratic countries, albeit on economic instead of political grounds, such as ever-growing competition and higher labour costs. Resistance against these propositions employs similar arguments: participation largely contributes

⁸ The mistrust towards plebiscites, especially on the part of conservative politicians, is the result of this restrictive understanding of participation.



to a better working atmosphere, fosters motivation and thus is a precondition for maintaining productivity and competitiveness.

There are recent tendencies to distinguish conceptually between political participation, signifying the participation in decision-making within the political system, and social participation, denoting the participation of individuals or groups in social institutions (Gabriel/Völkl 2005; Deth 2001, 2004). This distinction is not always comprehensible, as political and social control partly overlap. Parents' initiatives, for example, try to participate within institutions, but at the same time they try to influence political decision-makers, e.g., by demanding the improvement of general conditions, for example a better provision of resources for schools and kindergartens or new curricula.

Originating in the USA, and in the meantime also theoretically applied in Europe,⁹ is the so-called Third Sector discourse that on the one hand deals with social participation in the sense of Gabriel/Völkl, but also unambiguously deals with political intentions, namely the effort to increasingly delegate traditional core state functions to the society and its institutions. On one hand this supposedly extends societal participation, by giving people the opportunity to decide in areas hitherto dominated by governments. Yet on the other hand it is the realisation of a political ideology that aims at privatising health and educational systems, most likely declaimed by its apologists in order for them to discharge themselves from social obligations of solidarity – with all the consequences for the majority which without governmental redistribution is not able to afford educational opportunities or sufficient health services.

This conclusion is crucial to recognise that more socio-political participation does not necessarily constitute more social security and thus socio-economic benefit for the participants. This idea becomes increasingly important in the development discourse, because here participation (of civil society and individuals) is obviously increasingly equated with relieving the state from its obligations (Bliss 2005). Thus the hitherto prevailing character of participation as codetermination is in danger of being replaced by an obligation of civil society to take (financial) responsibility.

The discussion on participation is increasingly directed by some political scientists towards instruments of political participation. While the fields and aims of participation are to a large extent agreed upon, this is in no way the case for its instruments. During the 1960s the twin instruments of participation were primarily party membership and the walk to the ballot box, whereas in the 1970s and 80s a wide spectrum of so-called non-parliamentary instruments also found its way into the discussion (and into practice). This includes, among others, participation via plebiscites – granted in most constitutions of the German *Länder* – which can be regarded as supplements to “normal” parliamentary procedures and which are based on the principle of formal voting. They are thus hard to distinguish from elections and by no means exceptional forms of participation, which at least ensures their unanimous acceptance

⁹ Authors are among others Birkhölzer et al. (2004), Priller/Zimmer (2001), von Strachwitz (1998) or Zimmer (2001).



(albeit not at federal level) (Jung/Knemeyer 2001). Citizens' initiatives are another important non-parliamentary instrument of participation, whether being formally codified in the *Land's* constitution or as spontaneous or organised activities of voluntary associations that try to exert pressure on political decisions as described by Verba and others.

The instruments applied meet with more or less approval in the participation discourse according to the degree of pressure exerted by the protesters and their degree of readiness to commit legal offences. While protests in the form of demonstrations, information desks or leaflets are almost unanimously being seen as legitimate means of participation, the opinions differ towards blockades, for example. These, however, also cover a relatively wide spectrum of different means, starting with rather symbolic acts (e.g., solemn vigils in front of a gateway) to well-organised and effective blockades of streets or railways to prevent, for example, the transport of nuclear waste. Blockade instruments doubtlessly receive the least support in the discussion when they are executed with physical violence against goods or persons.

However, even in this case significant differences in opinions are identifiable. Hence, the success of actions against single nuclear power plants (such as the case of Borken, Germany), reprocessing plants or nuclear waste plants could retroactively also legitimise violent demonstration and delegitimise the police operation, as obviously a majority of the population agrees on the activists' position and considers nuclear plants and wastes – instead of the activists – as a threat to democracy and even life.

All in all, it can be summarised that in today's mainstream political thinking participation is seen as a principle of citizens' involvement affecting the entire political and social (and, if separable, also the economic) sphere and comprising all levels from neighbourhood to commune, to region and nation. The hitherto very limited forms and instruments of participation, elections and party membership are still considered to be important in the participation process, but they are now supplemented by a wide spectrum of means of influence, ranging from the self-organisation of social groups for verbal protest to symbolic as well as physical blockade activities by groups and individuals.

3. Participation in Development: Discourse and Practice

3.1 The International Debate on Participatory Development: Claims and Problems

3.1.1 The Genesis of Participation as a Guiding Principle in International Cooperation

The current discourse on participation begins with an apparent paradox. It commences in a time of depoliticisation in international development policy, where the idea of democratising developing countries has been mostly



abandoned in favour of considerations of stability and growth; with partly devastating results:

“The alternative between growth or democracy, understood as a conflictive relation, empirically resulted in most developing countries in politics of dismantling the institutions of formal and informal, direct and indirect participation and the attempt to undo social mobilisation” (Nohlen 1989: 537, translated by the authors).

This by no means implied the end of participation in general. However, in line with the gradual evolving of self-reliance (see below) and basic needs strategies, there emerged a conceptual and strategic shift from political (if only formal) participation at national and subnational levels to participation in areas that are directly connected to the living and working conditions of the people concerned (Nohlen 1989; Burkey 1993). Participation was hence downsized to the concrete levels of projects and programmes, outside of the state and public sphere.

Notwithstanding participation, those projects and programmes – temporally, regionally, technically and sectorally definable investments – mainly remained what they had been before. On one side were development agencies designing, planning, implementing and evaluating them. On the other side there were target groups or beneficiaries – largely undifferentiated groups of recipients of goods and services, which were considered to be passive. The latter participated at most through their labour, but for the most part solely partook of the projects’ output whose appropriateness was hardly ever questioned and accordingly not systematically related to the real life of the people concerned. For this reason, projects and programmes mainly responded to bureaucratic requirements concerning the implementation and completion of interventions, instead of focussing on the population’s needs. Ultimately such projects tended to incapacitate people, to undermine the belief in their own strength and to consolidate an attitude of being mere depositories or receivers of outside support.

Beyond the development “establishment”, particularly actors from the South took a firm stance from the beginning of the 1970s onwards against their ascribed role as recipients. The Latin-American Action Research School, associated in particular with Paulo Freire, emphasised their active, deliberate, and crucial role in social and political life and thus in any form of development (Freire 1970). The concept of self-reliance formed by Julius Nyerere at approximately the same time underscored the impossibility of an externally induced development and the necessary confidence in one’s own strength:

“People cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible to build a man’s house, an outsider cannot give the man pride and self-confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man has to create himself by his own actions. He develops himself by making his own decisions, by increasing his understanding of what he is doing, and why; by increasing his own knowledge and ability, and by his own full participation – as an equal – in the life of the community he lives in” (Nyerere 1973: 60).

This accentuation of self-determined and self-governed development necessarily goes hand-in-hand with an eminently political comprehension of participation, understood as co-determination by the population in all political decisions at different levels and based on its own situation and world view.

“We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears – programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed



consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of 'banking' or of preaching in the desert" (Freire 1970: 96).

In the early 1980s these ideas received further impetus and entered the development policy mainstream particularly through two influential publications. In "Rural Development: Putting the Last First" Robert Chambers (1983) uncovers the arrogance and ignorance that from his point of view underlie many rural development projects, eventually causing their failure. His arguments display a critical attitude especially towards a technocratic leadership of development projects, and voice the author's anger over the poverty which is still unabated despite all efforts. Chambers attacks the degradation of people to mere objects by "know-it-all" development experts, underscores the knowledge and competencies of the population as central elements in the development process and demands a deprofessionalisation of the experts in order for them to be able to listen to the disadvantaged and to give space to their expertise, their wishes and needs. In practical terms, this implies an inversion in the design of development activities from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, which (at least conceptually) leaves the control over the intervention to the people concerned (e.g., the population) or returns it to them. In consequence, this means a change of roles for the experts from operators to facilitators of development processes, which is expressed by the phrase "handing over the stick" (Chambers 1994a: 1254). Thus the process itself becomes a mutual learning experience.

In his book "Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development", first released in 1985, the first sociologist in the World Bank, Micheal M. Cernea, criticises for his part the disregard of sociological and anthropological perspectives compared to technical and financial aspects in rural development projects (Cernea 1991a), while – similar to Chambers – pointing out the far too great number of failures. Cernea even questions the general adequateness of projects as central instruments to overcome poverty. But for want of alternatives and in order to improve results he demands an inclusion of sociological variables, methods and insights into project work, and the institutionalisation of (development) sociology as an equal discipline in development planning.

Despite their obviously different orientation, both publications alike appealed to the development community and stimulated considerations and discussions on the participation of those that are actually supposed to benefit from development. Subsequently, this discussion was at least loosely tied together by the term participation, even though it did not always have the same meaning. Nevertheless, the term became presentable and lost its subversive connotations, although it may have also lost its progressive content (Schönhuth 2005: 174f).

"How do reformist ideas come into vogue and what happens to them when they are fashionable terms and have become widely accepted?" asked Theo Rauch in 1996 (translated by the authors) in his review of participation in development cooperation. We will first deal with the first part of his question.



Doubtless the ideas of Cerneas and Chambers were not altogether new. As early as the 1970s, and partly even before, participation in terms of involving the population groups concerned in decisions affecting them indeed had a secure position among the principles of development policy. The same applies to terms such as empowerment or ownership that are also part of the mainstream and always accompany participation in one way or another (Uphoff/Cohen/Goldsmith 1979). But like other innovations (Barnett 1953; Harris 1968: 378), the idea of participation did not have its breakthrough until advantageous circumstances were at hand.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, at least four interrelated factors or changes can be found that provided a framework for the participation discourse and at the same time stimulated it (Nelson/Wright 1995: 2ff): Firstly, in the course of the 1980s the disappointment at 30 unsuccessful years of conventional and technocratic development aid also increased in bilateral and multilateral organisations in the North. It was often connected to the failure of reaching the alleged beneficiaries (e.g., by not considering the role of women in food production in Africa) and accordingly led to demands to include these beneficiaries.

Secondly, the faith in governmentally-led development programmes decreased within the post-colonial states in the South. The – from the critics' perspective – paternalistic connotation of development was challenged by an understanding of development as the liberation of people from repression by the rich and powerful, which would only be possible without capitalism and representative democracy (Freyhold 2002: 271). Thirdly, international non-governmental organisations in South and North alike simultaneously started to turn away from welfare approaches and towards subsistence and independence. Participation was translated as subsistence and self-help beyond or even against governmental intervention. Bottom-up development became a pragmatic formula, including the empowerment of people as the guiding principle.

Fourthly, subsistence and personal responsibility were also part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed on developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a reaction to the former's excessive indebtedness. Cynically, participation became the transfer of functions and services which were formerly governmental obligations to the people themselves, to communities or families, namely women. "Where experts become helpless and representatives of state power impotent and where there is no prosperity left to share, it seems self-evident to delegate responsibility to the people" (Rauch 1996: 21-22, translated by the authors).

The disproportionate power relations between these actors, as well as their very different access to resources and opportunities, promoted first and foremost the technocratic comprehension of participation, which expected participation to contribute to a higher relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of projects – also because this comprehension suited the neoliberal ideas and the "project" as a central instrument. Participation thus concentrated on project work, based on the idea that "(p)eople's participation in planning development projects is desirable because it makes projects more efficient, effective and sustainable" (McGee 2002: 95).



Doubtlessly, the term participation and its very positive connotation had the additional and most welcome side effect of providing a new legitimacy to the discredited concept of development – at least regarding the critical public in the North.¹⁰ Against this background, and accompanied by practice-oriented research, an institutionalisation of project-oriented participation took place in multi- and bilateral development organisations in the 1990s. Also, many Nongovernmental Organisations, formerly rather sceptical towards (supra-) national development cooperation, did not remain unaffected. Based on the perception that the disadvantaged and powerless can escape neither state nor market, those NGOs followed a reform-oriented course of integration into the capitalistic system in order to offer at least a betterment for the people concerned (Freyhold 2002: 271).

The cross-organisational Participation Learning Group, created upon pressure by the World Bank's NGO working group, played a significant part in this development.¹¹ It commenced with the aim of documenting experiences with participation in projects, inducing and escorting a learning process within the institutions, and eventually developing suggestions for improvement that among others were focussed on the World Bank's work itself. At the outset, particularly the programmes and the procedures of the Bank were examined and possibilities to adjust them were sought in terms of strengthening participation in different phases of the project cycle (Bhatnagar/Williams 1992).

In its final report from 1994 the Group adheres to the focus on projects by defining participation as a process in which the participants "[...] influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank 1994: 10). Furthermore, the report states that participation in terms of information and consultation of stake-holders has significantly increased in World Bank activities since 1990. It is, however, much harder to detect empowerment processes or joint decision-making, let alone beneficiaries' control of the interventions (World Bank 1994). On the other hand, the report for the first time transcends the referential framework of the "project" – at least rhetorically – and underscores firstly the necessity to cooperate with governments in order to strengthen participation in terms of analysing, developing and implementing policy programmes, and secondly the possible role of participation in increasing the responsiveness and accountability of the state (the government) vis-à-vis its citizens. This, however, is said with reference to the missing mandate of the World Bank to act in this field laid down in its articles of agreement which "explicitly prohibit the Bank from becoming involved in a country's political affairs" including issues of democratisation (World Bank 1994: 19).

This again underscored the Bank's almost exclusive concentration on pure economic development, thereby consolidating a mere technocratic meaning and

¹⁰ Some observers, referring to the term's ambiguity, consider this its main function (Mosse 2001: 29, 32).

¹¹ Among others, the Swedish SIDA, the British ODA and the German GTZ were involved (McGee 2002: 114).



use of participation, its primary objective being the improvement of project results and impacts: "Given the Bank's focus on economic development, its interest in participation is primarily one of improving the results of its investment". Despite this restriction in its 1996 "Participation Source Book" (World Bank 1996: 3-11) the World Bank underscores the need for a participatory approach, including policy development and all phases of interventions, explaining the lack of participatory aspects with the relative novelty of the approach. The "external expert stance" is contrasted with a "participatory stance", according to which the duty of donors and planners is to adjust to local circumstances at the respective level of intervention, and to go through a creative and problem-solving learning process together with the respective stakeholders.

This represents a clear rejection of the application of mere technical procedures in order to solve problems that are defined from the outside. The importance of power relations is also brought into discussion by distinguishing between primary and secondary stake-holders regarding the question of who exactly should participate and why. In recognition of differences in interests, capacities and possibilities of articulation among actors, the report refers to the situational social and political embeddedness of development processes and introduces stakeholder-specific methods that, among other things, address the necessary confrontation with differences in power, which is depicted as a necessary precondition to join various stakeholders in one common process.

At least in the official interpretation it is obvious that emancipatory, empowering forms of participation focussing on primary stakeholders are preferred to the former welfare approach, as well as to "more shallow" forms of participation (e.g., information, consultation). This is emphasised by a proactive re-examination of the World Bank's mandate regarding political interventions. Concrete demands are for example the strengthening of local institutions and the decentralisation of decision structures and resources. Consequently, the former beneficiaries become clients with legitimate entitlements to public or private services, for example.¹²

Understandably, the bilateral organisations partaking in the Learning Group applied a comparable twofold orientation concerning participation in their strategy development: increasing the effectiveness and sustainability at the project level on the one hand, and strengthening the participation of all parties at all levels of society and the involvement of people in activities concerning their own interests and affecting their lives on the other. "Mainstreaming Participation" was the explicit aim, which however apart from the statement

¹² The clear rhetorical priority shift in the Bank's statements is accompanied by an equally clear continuity of the instrumentalist interpretation of participation regarding the project and programme levels (Aycrigg 1998: 19). The fact that eight years later a reassessment on the same matter showed very similar results demonstrates how hard it apparently is for an organisation like the World Bank to implement the official rhetoric in concrete activities (Pozzoni/Kumar 2005: v). For a critical assessment of the 'participatory' content of the Participation Source Book see Francis (2001).



clearly focused and still focuses on the operational level (the project level). For example, a World Bank paper published in 2000 states for the early 1990s:

“Four donors (GTZ, DFID, USAID, WB) [...] agree that they need a more flexible approach to *project design*”; and regarding the time of the publication: “New participatory methodologies are needed to secure *project ownership* of primary Stake-holders. The principle of ownership makes little sense unless it extends to the beneficiaries” (Blackburn/Chambers/Gaventa 2000: 11, emphases added).

In contrast, the United Nations decidedly linked participation at an early stage to the context of democratisation at a national level and emphasised the role of civil society in this process. “Participation”, according to the 1993 Human Development Report,

“[...] means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural, and political processes that affect their lives. [...] The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power” (UNDP 1993: 21).

Furthermore, since the early 1990s, issues such as the influence on all governmental decisions, including those at national level, civil society and empowerment, strengthening economic bargaining power, and social and political participation of the poor, ranked high again on the agendas of Non-governmental Organisations that mostly worked in the context of social movements in the South. For them broad political participation in decisions at all levels and thus effective influence on the allocation of resources became an indispensable precondition for the permanent reduction of poverty. Without the state this is not achievable (Freyhold 2002: 278f).

The ideas outlined above, which are now generally considered “participatory orthodoxy”, are by no means a consistent construction. They rather represent a multitude of partially contradicting objectives and focal points that cannot be ascribed exclusively to one or the other institution’s position, and are discussed controversially even within the different institutions or powers involved.¹³ Against this background, the vagueness and ambiguity of the term “participation” is not surprising. The meanings range from the mere realisation of material incentives (e.g., in “food” or “cash for work” programmes) to the promotion of self-mobilisation processes of local groups, and eventually to demands for elements of direct democracy in governmental decision-making processes (Schönhuth 2005: 174f).

3.1.2 From Guiding Principle to Implementation

Corresponding to the varying orientations and objectives of participation, a multitude of methodological approaches and procedures were developed in the 1980s and 1990s in order to put the concept into practice. These methods provide insights into the authors’ underlying interpretations of participation beyond the rhetoric employed. Looking at multi- and bilateral development agencies, particular approaches were used in order to include mainly primary stake-holders in projects which were already agreed upon, or to clarify if an intervention was compatible with the characteristics of a specific target group.

¹³ However, the term “participatory orthodoxy” is also used in different ways.



These approaches include for instance stake-holder and target group analyses or socio-economic or logical framework analyses. The responsibility for and the control over the planning process remained primarily with the agencies that subsequently also implemented and evaluated the project.

The second emerging set of methods inverts – or at least tries to invert – this distribution of responsibility and control. The people concerned are intended to be enabled to systematically analyse their situation and living conditions, in order to map out development plans and strategies of action.¹⁴ This flexible family of methodological approaches, techniques and codes of conduct – flexible because it can be extended, combined and adapted according to the specific situation – was initially subsumed under the label Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and in the meantime has come to be known as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). It is based on a set of applied research approaches mostly developed in the South. These were, among others, the aforementioned Latin-American Action Research School, the agro-ecological System Analysis which evolved in Thailand, Farming Systems Research approaches and applied Social Sciences which were at first affiliated with the joint label of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) (Schönhuth 1996).

RRA, the direct predecessor of PRA, was basically a response to Cerneas' (1991a, b) call for the adoption of sociological methods in development project work and to the short-term assignments of foreign development experts, denounced by Chambers as "rural development tourism" (1983), who were only able to achieve superficial results at most. Schönhuth and Kievelitz define RRA as a:

"socio-scientific approach, according to which a multidisciplinary team locally and quickly gathers, analyses and assesses relevant information and hypotheses on rural life and rural resources, using non-standardised, simple methods and incorporating local people's knowledge" (1993: v, translated by the authors).

Whereas this undertaking indeed centred on the everyday life and the knowledge of the population, the procedure itself remained extractive (Schönhuth 1996: 15). The methods applied – direct observation, semi-structured interviews, transect (walks), ranking techniques etc. – enabled outsiders to quickly gather knowledge and information in support of a better inclusion of the population into their projects. Analysis and use of the data remained with the experts, so that participation regarding the entire project cycle was limited to the involvement of the population in interventions that were arranged from outside. The general orientation of development co-operation was thus left untouched; the framework for the interaction of those involved in the development process remained a pre-defined project.

PRA, on the other hand, aimed at conjointly enabling the primary stakeholders, the poor and disadvantaged, to define their own desired development and to design the development process in an autonomous and self-responsible way. It was furthermore intended to also lend them a voice in a wider context

¹⁴ This consistently repeated formulation already points to the problem that is also inherent in this approach: the asymmetry between target groups and – from their point of view – outsiders.



of social dispute. Ownership in terms of “pulling the strings” of one’s own development and empowerment in terms of both enabling the target population (process) as well as increasing the population’s abilities and capacities (objective) to articulate and enforce their demands towards governmental and other social actors became integral parts of (if not even identical with) the idea of participation. While participation in this sense refers more to the interaction of stake-holders, empowerment rather aims at the intended impact. The methodological approach itself becomes the key to understanding development, i.e., who creates which development in what way.

Exponents of PRA see their approach as much more than a mere accumulation of methodological practices and procedures in an ever growing toolbox, even though this is often assumed due to a downright obsessive discussion of methodological issues. They rather claim to have a fundamentally altered comprehension of development and the role of people in it, resulting in far-reaching methodological implications.

What has changed in detail is often presented as sets of contrasts, which serve firstly to point out differences from conventional and project-oriented participatory approaches and secondly to highlight the method’s own central points: PRA is therefore seen as a turn from an etic to an emic perspective, from measuring to comparing and from statistical means to exceptions, from standards to diversity, from central to local, from the individual to the group, from verbal to visual, from extraction to empowerment, from general standards to situational flexibility, from the reserve of the experts to mutual trust with the people concerned and from experts as planners to supporting advisors and facilitators of processes. More important than particular methods is the attitude with which they are applied. The facilitators, as catalysts of the processes, are called on to show a self-critical awareness, continuously surveying their own prepossessions, and also to trust in their own abilities instead of mechanically applying methodological prescriptions (Chambers 1994a, b; see also Francis 2001).

In the middle of the 1990s, both methodological approaches depicted here were broadly used, occasionally overlapping and supplementing each other (e.g., target group analyses used the PRA tool box). The claims made by PRA with regard to participatory development cooperation were also to a large extent well-positioned, even in the guiding principles of national and international development agencies. Yet it cannot be ignored that the differences illustrated are situated foremost at the conceptual level of the overall aims of development but were hardly sustained in practice. For a long time participation could not leave the project level and advance into those political spheres where decisions about the allocation of resources are (also) taken. In any case, the endeavour of practising participation proved to be more difficult than expected.

3.1.3 Between Claims and Reality: Participation Criticised

“Participation has [...] become an act of faith in development, something we believe in and rarely question” (Cleaver 2001: 3). Regarding the success of the participation concept in development institutions, the thoroughly positive



connotations and the “positive feeling” of the term are often pointed out (Nelson/Wright 1995; Eyben/Ladbury 1995). Due to the hope of having found the key to successful and poverty-reducing development cooperation, early critical voices were not heard which suggested that participation may just be a set of normative arguments which were good intentions though frequently out of touch with reality, furthermore with quite differing objectives. Moreover, Rahnama pointed out that it could be easily overlooked “that you can also participate in bad intentions and jointly follow reprehensible purposes” (1993: 248, translated by the authors).

Initially, the positive expectations associated with participation were supported by some empirical comparative studies. Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin (1989) concluded from the comparison of 52 USAID projects, especially construction projects in several sectors, that participation of target groups or beneficiaries generally increases the effectiveness of projects. Although they qualify this finding by stating that the correlation between participation and project effectiveness is rather weak and participation is not always necessary or helpful, they regard the results of their study as sufficient to recommend participation as a general standard in all development activities. A clearly more positive result concerning the benefits of participation for the effectiveness and the success of projects is offered by a World Bank study, systematically comparing 121 water supply improvement activities: “Beneficiary Participation in decision-making was the single most important contributor to overall quality of implementation” (Narayan 1995: 38).

But parallel to the ongoing euphoria, scepticism emerged, based mainly on feedback from practice but also on a critical academic discussion about participation. Even among supporters opinions diverged (and still differ) concerning the adequacy and expediency of participation, including the question of who participates or should participate in what way, as well as the possible (perhaps hidden) political motivations for participation. PRA is either glorified or condemned, as Guijt and Cornwall stated in the mid-1990s (1995: 3).

Against the background of these questions and for the further operationalisation of participation, different typologies are offered. What is particularly prevalent is the distinction between participation as a means and participation as an end. Means thereby refers to a more efficient, effective or economic achievement of project objectives, whereas participation as an end considers the control over the development process by participants themselves. This difference is substantiated by contrasting instrumental participation – the participation in externally defined projects, for example by making contributions – and transformative participation, meaning that control over the activities is transferred to the primary stake-holders (Nelson/Wright 1995: 1, 5). Different intensities are also distinguished, degrees, levels, or a varying profoundness of participation, understood as a continuum from low to high or weak to strong. Regarding the relation between target groups and projects, this continuum ranges from mere information to consultation and joint decision-making, and eventually to autonomous initiation and self-regulation (Pretty et al. 1995).

Although it will probably not always be easy to strictly distinguish, for example, between participation as a means and participation as an end, the differentiations developed can be helpful, given the conceptual vagueness of



the term: if used descriptively the distinctions can help to clarify positions and immanent meanings, i.e., what is to be understood by participation. However, they only allow a cursory insight into the problems and limits of participation that emerged all the more from practice the more widely participatory instruments were used. The main points of the critical discussion on participation in the DC context can be summarised in the following theses:

Thesis 1: Participatory projects are often blind towards social differences and local power constellations

Participatory procedures and practices often underestimate or misinterpret the socio-cultural and socio-political heterogeneity and complexity in which they operate. They are rather based on the assumption of a homogeneous and harmonic target group, a village, a neighbourhood, a district, the rural population or the poor as addressees of efforts towards participation. The “community” becomes an undifferentiated collective with common interests and needs. This myth of community obscures existing power structures, factual differences as well as possible clashes of different interests, for example based on sex, age, marital status, religion, profession, social or ethnic group etc. Nelson and Wright (1995: 15) point out that the community is often an external construct and not congruent with the self-identification of the respective collectives: “Community is a concept often used by state and other organisations, rather than the people themselves, and it carries connotations of consensus and ‘needs’ determined within parameters set by outsiders” (1995: 15).¹⁵

Village meetings aiming at consensus-building thus become unproblematic but often bring the wrong or at least problematic results. Particularly, there is the risk that again the disadvantaged and marginalised remain outsiders in favour of local potentates or the privileged population, who often successfully exploit the offer of participation, the following projects and their benefits for their own interests. If from the outset the official opinion of a collectivity is trusted, there is also reason to consider the possibility that it might be closer to the opinion of leaders than to the opinion of the politically powerless. It is said that group processes generally tend to level differences.

A possible and also practicable approach to avoid this risk is to form more homogeneous subgroups, to integrate them into the decision-making process and to systematically address the disadvantaged (Bliss 1996). The problem then is to transfer the specific results into one common consensus, and to create options for the disadvantaged. But even then it would be naïve to equate *a priori* common characteristics of these subgroups with common interests. Often enough individuals are integrated in cross-cutting networks that can (yet do not have to) be more useful in terms of articulating practical and strategic interests than the fact of being poor or a woman or a man. In this way, manifold and varying groups emerge that are composed according to specific situations and problems, for example if the matter at hand is irrigation or the supply of firewood (Cleaver 2001: 45; Cornwall 1998: 50).

¹⁵ See also in more general terms Fried (1975); Neumann (1994); Heinz (1993); Mohan (2001); Gellner (1983).



Thesis 2: Participatory projects are often blind towards the prevailing social decision-making processes and cultural patterns of communication

Closely related to the first thesis, the generally public character of meetings may result in the virtual exclusion of important (disadvantaged) stake-holders, who can already be overlooked in the invitation process and accordingly also in the results. When they are present, they often are not or barely able to articulate themselves, owing to the predominant communication patterns. Many of them are not familiar with open (in terms of Habermas' deliberative) decision-making processes. They do not dare to speak out, and remain passive. On the other hand, the requirement to equally include everybody in decision-making – under formal democratic conditions – can also become a constraint. The hardly-discussed matter of legitimacy and representativeness becomes relevant here, even apart from democratic considerations. What does “elite” mean in a local context, who takes and who is entitled to take which decisions and who is authorised in what way?

This addresses the possible, however not inevitable tension between the emic interpretation of legitimacy and representativeness and the etic demand for participation and empowerment – which by the way is also emic from the development expert community's perspective. Where does the respect for existing decision-making processes begin and where does it end? How is the relationship characterised between the demand for empowerment and for an adaptation to local circumstances? Where does empowerment begin and where is it perhaps better for it not to (yet)? Where and how are boundaries drafted regarding these matters, where and how is a balance possible? How can conflicts be handled that may be triggered between the powerful and the powerless?¹⁶ What Baumann explicates in the context of good governance also applies to the context of participation: “You can be human in more than one way, and it is not evident which of those ways is preferable” (1998: 7, cited in Minogue 2002: 129).

Doubtlessly, a discussion of these questions could not lead to a golden rule, simply because of the different objectives of empowerment in the context of institutional and individual interests and convictions, and also because of the many emic perspectives on legitimacy that exist. But sure enough, such a discussion would be helpful in a self-critical and reflective approach to participation and empowerment. Rauch concisely summarises the difficulties in the decision-making process in the context of participation:

“Participation is a matter of modifying social decision-making processes, which cannot simply be decreed, especially in the case of foreign societies. The forms of social decision-making are manifold, historically developed, and culturally shaped. They are deeply rooted in the patterns of behaviour. They are often based on a rationality which is not only the rationality of those in power, and which cannot be easily understood by outsiders. Those who want to dare more participation and support progressive forces should know the prevailing forms of decision-making, their rationale and their deficits” (1996: 22, translated by the authors).

¹⁶ Shah/Shah (1995) for example give an account of a fatal conflict resulting from a PRA in an Indian community (see below Chapter 4.4).



Although the renunciation of ethnocentric and the application of local concepts is postulated in the PRA approach, the instruments used in practice (e.g., card queries, transects, diagrams and matrices) are not necessarily based on culturally rooted local patterns of communication, ways of information processing or perceptions. Regarding the conceptual connection between participation and socio-cultural aspects in the development context, it is indeed surprising how little the culture-specific nature or cross-cultural transferability of participatory methods is reflected upon. Schönhuth observes a certain method in this: “[The question] seems to be downright tabooed as it questions the approach’s claim for universality” (1996: 19, translated by the authors). It is however debatable, Schönhuth continues, “whether the small peasant in rural Africa or South America structures and analyses everyday life in this way” (1996: 18, translated by the authors).

Against this background, the question arises whether participation is to be realised in the same way in all cultural contexts by a formal public dialogue. Hailey (2001), for instance, gives examples from South Asia, where personal interactions between members of target groups and development agencies were not only culturally adequate but also advantageous. By being informal talks instead of formal meetings, these interactions would allow intensive personal contacts, offering insights in the perceptions and wishes of the target group. Studies discussing the reciprocal benefit of ethnographic fieldwork on the one hand and PRA on the other come to the same conclusion (among others Hess et al. 1998; Vokral 1994; Ulbert 1995; Henkel/Stirrat 2001). Others point to the necessity or at least desirability of adjusting PRA to socio-cultural conditions. A group of PRA trainers from Vietnam, for example, argue for the “Vietnamisation” of the approach:

“A better approach might be to accept local culture and politics as a constantly present player in PRA, to recognize local forms of leadership and social relations for what they are, and try to work with, rather than around these factors.”

And consequentially the cultural openness of PRA is also questioned:

“Just how Vietnamised can PRA become, before it comes into conflict with international, liberal PRA values? How acceptable, for example, is the group’s assertion that empowerment in Vietnam must be the empowerment of all, including local political leaders?”
(Danish Red Cross 1996 et al.: 2f)¹⁷

Thesis 3: Participatory procedures often result in a simplification and distortion of local knowledge

Local knowledge is an integral part of participation. According to theory, it is the guarantee for ownership. But the critique points to the fact that local knowledge is not simply present and cannot be accessed easily in a public meeting. If societies are not homogenous, then local knowledge is not either, and neither is it distributed equally, justly or democratically. Knowledge does not exist in a cultural, economic or political vacuum. In fact it is integrated in the given power constellations and social role allocations. Women have different knowledge than men, and certain women have different knowledge

¹⁷ Michael Schönhuth kindly provided us with this article.



than other women. There are many forms of knowledge: everyday knowledge, ritualised knowledge, latent knowledge, secret knowledge, incommunicable knowledge. Knowledge is therefore often not accessible via public discourse (Schönhuth 1996: 34).

Knowledge is not an object with clear-cut contours. Knowledge is not static, but is bargained and judged and evaluated in the context of manifold social interactions. Knowledge is social practice and thus guided by interests. Local authorities know how to turn their particular interests into public interests, while for example women's knowledge is often ignored. This also applies for projects and participatory planning processes. What is presented to the facilitator of a planning workshop as local knowledge – needs, plans, priorities, interests – thus “[...] is a construct of the planning context, behind which is concealed a complex micro-politics of knowledge production and use” (Mosse 2001: 19). If the social and structural contextuality of local knowledge is disregarded, participatory processes run the risk of objectifying and reifying inequalities and differences:

“By not recognizing that knowledge is produced out of power relations in society and through practitioners' acceptance of 'local knowledge' as some kind of objective truth, participatory methodologies are in danger of reifying these inequalities and affirming the agenda of elites and other more powerful actors” (Kothari 2001: 145).

The influence that the facilitators themselves (can) have on the definition of objectives and requirements should also not be underestimated. They and their organisations also do not operate in a vacuum. Their relation to the target groups is crucially influenced by their mandate and their statutes, by the beliefs of their donors and the political public in their home country. Finally, the interests (and the knowledge) of native staff members or of national organisations, which normally organise the workshops, should also not be forgotten. There is an obvious risk that they filter and reinterpret the local knowledge recorded for their own benefit.¹⁸ How can it otherwise be explained that so many PRA applications and participatory needs assessments produce exactly those kind of priorities that the respective organisation has to offer – health, water, income-creating activities, reforestation etc.?¹⁹ Thus, the participatory process of recording local knowledge is biased by a complex constellation of interests that could cause the distortion of the idea of participation by allowing the development agencies' need for legitimacy to dominate over the local knowledge of the population (see in particular Mosse 2001: 22-23).

It would on the other hand be equally problematic if development organisations slavishly followed local knowledge and the development plans based thereon. As mentioned before, participation is not *per se* positive, and not all wishes of target groups are straightforwardly and indisputably legitimate. It is, for example, problematic when neighbouring groups are harmed or when

¹⁸ This risk, however, also exists when the facilitators have extensive local information, which normally is an indispensable precondition for reasonable participatory planning (Schönhuth 1996; Bliss 1996).

¹⁹ We leave aside the well-known project shopping, where agencies pass through villages in order to find willing beneficiaries for their programmes (Neubert 1997).



short-term economic interests cause environmental damage (Freyhold 2002: 281).

Through this, another problem that has been neglected so far becomes obvious, namely the “legitimate influence” on the decision-making process by outside facilitators, “development experts” or organisations. It is often insufficient to solely rely on local knowledge, because information beyond this knowledge is necessary to make justified decisions. Here, external actors could beneficially introduce their “local knowledge”. In practice, sure enough, it becomes a balancing act between manipulation and informative contribution, which is however not contrary to participation in principle.

Thesis 4: It is difficult to harmonise participation with administrative bureaucracies and the “project” instrument

The inclusion of participation in guidelines and policy papers as well as the claim for participatory procedures at the operational level is so far only inadequately represented in practice. On the contrary, it can be observed that participation has adjusted to project practice and requirements, instead of the other way around. Aspects such as effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and significance are still in the foreground, and thus also the pressure towards the outflow of funds. “Through integrating participatory concepts into the classical organisational project form, the functionality of an activity is determined by the latter, not by the participatory concept” (Kühl 1998: 52, translated by the authors). Sectoral priority areas and presettings are another serious problem. How can participation and the aligned formulation of goals be successfully realised by target groups if the target areas are already determined from the outside, be it through government negotiations in multi- and bilateral organisations or in the form of NGOs’ statutes (e.g., Bliss 1996: 61)?

Additional problems are posed by time targets (three years, maybe a little more or even less for one project or a project phase). Participatory processes need patience and much work and effort, both on the part of those persons in charge of the project and on the part of target groups. However, decision-making at target group level can take time. Managers, decision-makers and employees fear delays or need to disburse their funds. It may be that their reputation in the eyes of donors and supervisors is in danger. Quick outcomes are thus very important. The result is a loss of quality due to mechanically conducted participatory meetings and workshops. Implementing a PRA is mistaken for participation in the project (Bliss 1996: 55, 58). Furthermore, swiftness is contradictory to the mutual trust between facilitators and population, based on a comprehensive knowledge of local culture, as the concept demands. “Action-oriented practitioners normally have no time for these ‘socio-cultural trifles’” (Schönhuth 1996: 33, translated by the authors).

Hence, the question – resulting from the key principle of a new understanding of the “expert’s” role – of how to adopt the emic perspective of the participating population in such a short time is also problematic. Several hints to sources of error during rapid surveys can be found in the literature: lack of regional knowledge, of language and social structure, misinterpretation and disregard of prevailing codes of behaviour and rules of communication, resulting insecurities of facilitators towards participants, focus on outcomes



instead of processes etc. (among others Hess et al. 1998: 20; Bliss 1996). Regarding these problems, Richards harshly condemns PRA as “quick and dirty anthropology” and as “[...] an ‘answer’ to the problem of where to fit the social studies perspectives into the busy schedules of development consultancy teams” (1995: 15, 14).

On the other hand, bureaucratic decisions also take time, which in the case of successful PRA often leads to “implementation gaps” and disappointment on the part of the population. The PRA results are available but the implementation has to wait (Korf 2002: 300). Finally, participation can become an incapacitating compulsion, for example when the target group has already clearly defined its needs but still has to run through mandatory participatory meetings, for they are scheduled in the project, before services or goods are allocated. In this way, the chance can be lost to “jump on the bandwagon”, which would indeed be the best thing that can happen in a participatory approach.²⁰

Projects, with their internal planning procedures, processing requirements and the pressure they bear to justify themselves on the one hand, and the resulting communication demands from the target group on the other, have difficulties not least with the given social structures and forms of organisation. Due to the lack of – from the projects’ point of view – acceptable partners, new and parallel forms of organisation are often created (committees, cooperatives, voluntary associations, etc.) among others to ensure participation. The possible effects of this interference with the social structure may not be sufficiently taken into consideration. These effects are, for instance, social isolation of favoured groups or individuals, formation of new or consolidation of old hierarchies or the outbreak of conflicts (among others Cleaver 2001; Ovesen/Trankell/Öjendal 1996: 69).²¹ Here as well, not necessarily abstinence but a more careful and conscious use of these interventions is necessary.

Incidentally, taking part in participatory events does not necessarily reflect the identification with a project and produce ownership. Although this possibility has been barely examined yet, target groups can see participation as a contribution to a project of others and at the same time as another resource for their own survival. A study on participatory projects in the Central African Republic thus concludes:

“The population reinterprets the assistance flowing in one direction in forms of advice, education, support of self-organisation, credits and subsidies as an exchange relationship. The target groups understand their participation in consultation, education and support of self-organisation as a service provided by them for the projects which has to be repaid in forms of credits and subsidies” (Kühl 1998: 52, translated by the authors).

²⁰ Rauch (1996: 20), for example, cites the question of a female peasant in the evaluation process of a decidedly participatory water project in South Asia: “How long do we still have to participate until the Germans understand our problem and support our project?” The problem had been discussed by the villagers for years.

²¹ An employee of the “German Agro Action” in Tajikistan pointed to the aspect of accountability and asked who would be accountable after all if a project (participatory or not) failed and left behind a disaster?



This may also be a sign of the possible overestimation of the importance of development projects for the target groups, whose lives for the most part doubtlessly take place outside of projects.

Thesis 5: Participatory practices underestimate the high demands on the personnel

Besides the indispensable professional qualifications, the principle of a new understanding of roles – now interpreting former experts as catalysts and learning tutors of the process – also requires extensive personal preconditions from the personnel. Firstly, it is probably not easy to leave behind the role of the superior “know-it-all” and to start on the same footing with the “uninformed” local population. But even if experts are able to do so, the change of role is secondly confronted by the given structural asymmetry between projects and target groups. How can experts, maybe arriving in an expensive landrover vehicle, credibly present themselves as being on equal footing, when they are obviously richer, better educated and more powerful? This antagonism equally applies for both foreign and local employees, because the latter are part of local hierarchies and can occupy or achieve a certain position based on their status as employee in the project. Being local does not necessarily mean having a positive relation to the target groups.

Often the opposite is the case. Where patron-client relations prevail – which occurs very often – they also reproduce themselves in the context of projects, often without the possibility to clearly define who is patron and who is client. In situations such as these it is hard enough to accomplish participation on one’s own behalf, let alone in the interaction with target groups. Even after years of experiences with participatory project design, participation can still be more of a lip service rather than inner conviction, as for example repeatedly observed with many different actors in Cambodia by one of the authors. This, however, is by no means due to the narrow-mindedness of employees at the different levels, but first and foremost is the result of the structural asymmetry mentioned, as well as the local power structure and the associated values, which are generally shared by the target groups. Beyond any will and personal belief, this often brings about the situation that patron remains patron and client remains client. If the implementation of technical solutions is already difficult, this is all the more true for social or institutional innovations (Rauch 1996: 22).

Thesis 6: Despite all contrary statements, participation depoliticises development processes

The critique states that the romantic idealisation and homogenisation of the local community eventually conceals underlying structures of repression (based on sex, class, caste, ethnic belonging etc.). At the same time this, as well as the exclusive focus on local projects, obstructs the view on wider power structures, situated outside of the local framework and influenced among others by the development community, which constitute perforce the framework for local development processes. Instead of empowering people, participation thus significantly contributes towards depoliticising development. Participation integrates disadvantaged people into processes they can neither question nor influence (Kothari 2001); it produces local knowledge regardless of the



partiality of those initiating it (Mosse 2001); and it hinders the formation of alternative versions of development (Henkel/Stirrat 2001).²² Participation thus perfectly blends in with the “anti politic machine” as characterised by Ferguson (1994) based on an analysis of the development community in Lesotho.

From this perspective, applied participation is ultimately reduced to the direct exertion of power in the form of participatory processes and encounters in order to discipline the stake-holders via remote-controlled processes. Through the participatory discourse this exertion of power is at the same time legitimised. Altogether, according to this view participation would then be an instrument for repression and management of the neoliberal project, at best able to offer the poor a marginal place in the system.

Radical critiques such as these are rightly countered by the argument that even powerful institutions and groups, such as the World Bank and local elites in the South, are not homogeneous actors that act in concert and could determine the character of participation single-handedly. This alone provides evidence that the implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption of a conspiracy, plotted and furthered by some powerful interest groups, is untenable (e.g., Williams 2004: 93).

With reference to the creative and constructive way in which the poor and disadvantaged handle such claims to hegemony, the radical critics themselves are charged with a reductionist understanding of power. In this context, the Foucaultian comprehension of power is frequently adopted by the opponents, which sees in any discourse power and in any exertion of power also the potential to overcome it (e.g., Cornwall 2004). It is therefore pointed out almost with relief that disadvantaged people by no means always adopt a slavish role in participatory projects (or generally in development), but that they show manifold reactions (e.g., open or passive resistance, withdrawal or also manipulation and instrumentalisation of projects for their own purposes etc.).²³ This, however, admits the fact that participation indeed has or can have tendencies to incapacitate the people concerned. The arguments brought forward are summarised by Williams in the following way:

“Participatory Development Projects may well re-script people’s subjectivities in terms of others’ choosing and incorporate them within a development process far less benign than its promoters might suggest. But while participation may appear all-pervasive, this account of its operation is in danger of ignoring the fact that any configuration of power/knowledge opens up its own particular spaces and moments for resistance. [...] To take the ‘incorporation’ of participatory events at face value is to ignore people’s ability for feigned compliance and tactical (and self-interested) engagement. [...] Limited engagement or even exit thus provide means of passive resistance to the ‘tyranny of participation’” (Williams 2004: 94).²⁴

²² Some authors even caricature participation or the adoption of its discourse and practice across institutions as a form of sedation (e.g., Beckmann 1997; Hailey 2001).

²³ A classic and often-cited study in this context is offered by Scott (1985).

²⁴ Similar passages can also be found from Cornwall (2004: 82). But such statements may also be understood cynically. Phrased pointedly: We can do what we want, and the poor will know how to help themselves.



Many of the aforementioned problematic aspects are similar to those that were brought forward against conventional approaches by PRA exponents. They are the background of the claim for another and decidedly critical discussion of participation as a concept and method. For example, in a special edition of PLA Notes on the critical reflection of participatory practice, the editors warn:

“We have come full circle. PRA started as a critical response to the inadequacy of existing research and planning processes. Yet many of the concerns discussed here focus precisely on the inadequacy of local participation in the process. [...] By describing what we do, and not claiming to do what we do not or cannot do, much of the confusion can be avoided. By reflecting critically on what we do, we can learn from our mistakes and move forward” (Guijt/Cornwall 1995: 7).

While the critiques briefly summarised here regarding participation in development cooperation are largely unquestioned in the discourse, they result in very different appraisals and conclusions. Some authors, such as the ones cited above, conclude that a reform and reactivation of the self-critical and self-reflective conception of PRA is necessary. Others consider, at least implicitly, banning participation from development cooperation, as it is an instrument of “tyranny” and the concealment of power structures (e.g., Cooke 2004; Cooke/Kothari 2001). In contrast to this pessimism there is currently a clear trend towards the concept’s repoliticisation and the exploration of transformative possibilities, aiming at filling the gap between different levels of participation and at actively shaping the structural framework in favour of effective participation. Key concepts in this context are decentralisation and good governance, “citizenship participation” and also participation as a right (e.g., Gaventa/Valderrama 1999; Gaventa 2004; Hickey/Mohan 2004; BMZ 2004).

These aspects will be picked up on briefly in the context of participation, national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the importance of civil society. However, before this, the importance of participation as well as its preconditions in development cooperation practice will be addressed.

3.2 Participation at Project and Programme Levels

3.2.1 Broad Participation at an Early Stage

The concept of stake-holder participation – where those explicitly named as stake-holders are generally target groups, partners, and people who are negatively affected, as well as others who can further or hinder a project – should by now be applied in all bilateral and multilateral DC activities, at least according to the concept. Participation, particularly of the target group or the benefiting population, should furthermore begin as soon as possible, in the optimum case when projects are identified and conceptualised, which would include the setting of targets and thus the definition of the results aimed at and indicators to measure success.

In this regard, the concepts of international development organisations and the German BMZ barely differ (BMZ 1999a, 2003b; ODA 1995a, b, c; World Bank 1996). Yet much of the project-based literature on stake-holder participation does not discuss where and when the different actors should be involved, but what participation could technically look like in a certain project or programme. Accordingly, the following remarks are only partly the result of

the literature review. For the most part, they rather represent experiences gained by the authors in planning and consulting DC activities.

3.2.2 Participation in All Project Types

In the practice of German development cooperation there is still a distinction made between stake-holder participation in projects close to and in those supposedly disconnected from target groups. Until very recently, most programmes in the important development of infrastructure, for example concerning electricity networks, were considered as being rather far away from the target groups, resulting in the belief that direct effects on identifiable population groups could neither be detected nor demanded, and representatives of the populations would not have to be included in the project work.

A comparable view can still be found in a recent BMZ evaluation for the priority area of good governance.²⁵ The evaluation at least implicitly assumes²⁶ that, for example, activities to promote accountability by establishing and consulting national audit courts do not have a specific target group, therefore no direct poverty-reducing effects could be expected, and consequently no public debate (participation) would be needed.²⁷ Accordingly, neither early target group, nor stake-holder or impact analyses were conducted in this and in similar activities, and even institutional analyses were limited to internal procedures. The interaction of the institutions with (civil) society and all aspects regarding legitimacy and other socio-cultural criteria were ignored. Doubtlessly there are projects that do not have a specific target group belonging – according to the German focus on poverty reduction – to the poor segments of society. Such projects include, for instance, the support of the construction of airports, of loading ports for ships, or of telecommunication facilities. However, these examples are clearly exceptions.

Even a cursory stake-holder and impact analysis indicates that the notion of “projects disconnected from target groups” also has to be qualified substantially in the two priority areas of Energy and Governance. A power supply line not only supplies big international transmission systems, but also regions with clear numbers of inhabitants. Even the decision to supply region A instead of region B with development cooperation funds can and in fact should always be based on a poverty analysis and an estimation of attainable effects. This consideration will also influence the target levels aimed at, because a project would be designed in a way which does not result in the support of the entire anonymous

²⁵ Despite the term “good governance”, the poor development orientation of a political system (“bad governance”) caused by corruption, “rent-seeking”, clientelism, patrimonialism etc. is at the centre of the reform efforts.

²⁶ Implicitly because the matter of participation of the population is not mentioned at all. Consequently it can be deduced that it was not considered necessary by the consultants (BMZ 2003c).

²⁷ In contrast, the “Working Group for Evaluation of Development Policy” of the German Society for Evaluation believes that the promotion of democracy and good governance indeed also has effects on target groups, e.g., the increased participation of citizens in political processes (DeGEVal 2005: 16).





population of a country. Instead, the poor population, which is mainly situated in region A, should benefit preferentially or at least have the same benefit as other population groups. This so-called “geographic targeting” can be supplemented by a targeting based on the tariff structure, so that while all people in a region are supplied with electricity – everything else would in any case be difficult to realise in technical terms – a certain segment of the population benefits in particular, namely the poor or women, as often-disadvantaged groups.

If target groups can be identified and defined in this way, there is no reason to refrain from target-group participation. In contrast to smaller projects, participation will then not include the whole population, but only the legitimate representatives of the population of entire regions. Hence, the inclusion of target groups poses the most organisational problems, but it cannot be questioned fundamentally if the principle of participation really is aimed for.

3.2.3 Participation as Early as the Formulation of Goals

The second fundamental problem of people’s participation is the question when participation should start. The principle of earliness, postulated by most donors, would imply that representatives of the population would have to be listened to even regarding the questions of “if” and “what”, hence they would already have to at least co-decide whether the offered aid is really needed and what it should primarily be used for. In smaller projects and programmes with limited funds this could happen directly, i.e., in an open dialogue board between donors, partners and representatives of the population.²⁸

In bigger programmes and activities aiming at regional and national impacts, not only the organisational level of the participation process is problematic, but also the basic manageability of complex mechanisms of participation in a multitude of individual projects. If the two central questions “if” and “what” were to be considered in every activity of donors in a country (often numbering several dozen), it would of course significantly impede the overall development planning.

3.2.4 National Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) as a Basis for Participation

In cases like these, the PRS approach offers a constructive alternative, at least theoretically. By integrating the interests of individual regions into the PRS process resulting from previous participatory decision-taking processes at a decentralised level, the priorities of the population are at least captured, and subsequent planning processes could be based on the respective input of the

²⁸ In her article on “Participation in Development Cooperation” (“Partizipation in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit”, 1997: 76ff.) Gabriele Beckmann discusses forms of project planning such as Objective-Oriented Project Planning (*Zielorientierte Projektplanung*, ZOPP) and shows how little even this standard approach of German Technical Cooperation has been utilised.



PRSPs. DC projects that integrate such inputs from PRSPs, developed in a participatory manner, would thus at least indirectly be legitimised by the representatives of the target groups. This concept of participation at the national level is supported, for instance, by the World Bank and other donors. Then, Poverty and Social Impact Analyses (PSIAs)²⁹ designed in a participatory way and other planning and monitoring or evaluation instruments would also make sense, provided that the basic assumption is correct that the PRSPs adopted entail the participation of the population at large.

However, the key problem is that more often than not the contents of many PRSPs are not in accord with the interests of the poor population in the regions selected, due to the fact that they were not developed in the designated participatory way. So far there are only few positive examples where people's interests or at least the wishes of regional authorities and communes were discernibly included in the process of PRSP formulation (Bliss 2006; Eberlei 2001). Consequently, participation of the population or the poor has not really taken place beyond the programme level. Thus the instrument of PRSPs, supported by the World Bank, also cannot yet substitute participation in individual activities or projects.

3.2.5 German Priority Strategy Papers as an Outcome of Participation

A possible alternative to PRSPs, at least as long as they fail to fully entail the envisaged participation of the population, could be the Priority Strategy Papers (PSPs), which have been being prepared by the BMZ for some years now. These PSPs are to be developed for each country and priority area of cooperation, and are intended to constitute a binding standard for the overall engagement of German public development cooperation in a given country. However, until now participatory elements are also missing in the preparation of PSPs. Although a PSP is intended to be coordinated with the partner, the lack of development orientation of many partners again becomes relevant here, a problem discussed below. These partners often do not represent the people's interests, least of all those of the poor.

Nevertheless PSPs offer a great opportunity for real participation of the people, as well as conceptually for the programme work of the donor. Strategy papers based on a country's regions, developed for their specific problems, conceptually assembled at the national level and compiled and adopted together with legitimate representatives of civil society, could contribute to the initiation of activities in a relatively short time without the necessity for extensive investigations of individual cases and without inducing new participatory processes.

²⁹ PSIA is an approach particularly used by the World Bank for *ex ante* and *ex post* assessments of the impact of policy reform projects. Like target group analysis and PRA/PLA, PSIA is a framework within which different sets of methods are adapted and applied on a case-by-case basis which makes it possible to deal with similar or the same specific questions along the entire programme cycle (or the cycle of a political reform project) (World Bank 2003c).



In this case there would also be no need for comprehensive target group analyses that take gender, poverty and conflict risk assessments into consideration, because the activities would already be based on a fundamental problem analysis and would have been discussed with the participants.³⁰ This, however, requires that priority intervention areas are not simply declared as such because German development cooperation has already been significantly active in them, but that a priority setting has to result from a comprehensive consultation of and coordination with all relevant social forces in a country. From this it also becomes clear that the sectoral approaches still dominating most DC portfolios cannot be easily harmonised with participation.

3.2.6 Governments, Ownership and Development Orientation

Bi- and multilateral donors consistently point out that their activities are not imposed on people, but are developed in a dialogue with the partners. According to this it would appear that the application principle is always adhered to, which states that the partner government has to take the initiative. Without a doubt ownership of partners is important regarding the programmes of donors. In Vietnam, for example, ownership is given on a large scale, the partner government indeed being aware of its responsibility for economic growth and the allocation of profits among the population. Here ownership at the same time entails responsibility for development and to a certain degree also accountability.

Vietnam, Botswana, and, on a smaller scale, also Tanzania or Mozambique are countries with a certain level of development orientation. The problem, however, is that in many other countries the causes behind the poverty of major parts of the population are at least partly due to the government's lack of development orientation and, above all, (extremely) bad governance that impedes any improvement. In countries such as the DR Congo, Chad, Niger, Zimbabwe, Mauritania and many others, potentates – formally legitimised or not – largely do not care what happens to the population. Accordingly, basic taxes or tolls have barely been collected for decades now. The result is that investments in even basic education and health services are no longer financed by the state, and furthermore the responsibility for the minimal functioning of existing institutions is either shifted to donors or, more and more often, to the population itself. And what is even worse, it is not only in isolated cases that corrupt officials have had to be paid by an international development agency for the permission to implement activities in favour of the population.³¹

In systems like these it is in fact impossible that public agencies and thus partners could credibly represent the opinions of target groups or other important participants. Thus, even though the sectors and goals are indeed

³⁰ However, an overly schematic adoption of project models should be avoided, for even planning on a regional level has to take the local characteristics into account.

³¹ This can be done by direct transfers (bribes or "speed money" in order to get permissions, to be able to import project materials etc.) or through additional project outputs, such as offering vehicles and *per diems* – daily allowances.



often coordinated with the partners in the respective country, the activities defined and agreed upon in the concepts are hardly – and certainly not only in extreme cases – compatible with the population's priorities; or the compatibility remains completely unclear, with all the associated consequences for the legitimacy of an activity and its further acceptance and thus sustainability.

3.2.7 Country Ownership and Direct Cooperation with Civil Society

The persons in charge in public donor organisations are aware of the real ownership situation,³² although there is probably not sufficient knowledge on the real extent of “bad governance” in the administrations.³³ Nevertheless, the necessity to cooperate with public agencies and the impossibility of implementing activities without state involvement is pointed out. On the one hand this argument is right, as will be shown in more detail below (see 4.2), but on the other hand no visible consequences are drawn for the long-term cooperation with the countries concerned, although these consequences practically impose themselves as a threefold reaction to “bad governance”:

- (i.) in the case of any development cooperation that is not aiming at the improvement of governance, a stronger cooperation with legitimate civil society institutions should be aspired (from “government ownership” to “country ownership”),
- (ii.) participation of important stake-holders would have to be extended not only to planning but also to steering and monitoring of the implementation and thus to the control of the use of funds, and
- (iii.) in the case of German public DC the procedures for the formulation of PSPs would have to be completely reconceptualised. Instead of being conducted solely by agents of development cooperation and adopted more or less consensually with the partners, an open analysis and work process should be chosen which would have to incorporate all important stake-holders at an early stage and not only grant them participation rights but also promote their realisation.

³² The consequences, however, are not convincing. Notes on corruption existing in the partner country can be regularly found in the protocols of government negotiations over several years. This indicates that *de facto* nothing has changed in practice. But these circumstances are discussed neither as obstacles for cooperation in general nor for cooperation in certain sectors only.

³³ Moreover, “bad governance” has until now always been seen as a problem on the side of the partner, which should also be addressed by special projects. The fact that also the projects themselves can be involved in corrupt structures and that corruption can be present even in the projects is not discussed.



3.2.8 Participation as Involvement and Joint Responsibility in the Implementation Process

The mostly unpublished project-oriented documentation focuses in large parts on the implementation of development activities, and particularly on the role of the benefiting population in the management of infrastructural facilities supported by public development policy. This is no coincidence, as this topic is also in the centre of the participation discourse of donor institutions. Correspondingly standardised socio-economic studies are carried out in many projects by the World Bank, UNDP, the British Department for International Development (DFID), the German Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and others. In concrete terms, the studies examine how the target group/s use/s a social or, in rarer cases, an economic infrastructural facility, what wishes they have regarding the design of the facility in case of its reform, and to what extent they are economically able and willing to cover the running costs of the facility, which are usually imposed on them but not on the state (= "Ability And Willingness To Pay Analysis", WTP).

Certainly, own inputs of target groups to both the construction and the operation of a facility are not necessarily opposed to the participation of the population. Self-responsibility as the highest level of participation even calls for an engagement "in cash and in kind". But on the other hand, the financial contribution can also result in a situation in which poor population groups simply cannot afford the achievements of a DC activity, e.g., a rural health post, and would not be able or willing to participate in its construction or operation. In practice a high degree of input from target groups often enables a remarkable economic and technical sustainability with an acceptable participation of a part of the population. The actual development effects of such activities, however, can be very low, as particularly the poor cannot afford the services offered (Bliss 2005). And for the same reasons, the poor are certainly not involved in the decision-making process.

3.2.9 Partizipation – Participation – Participation: True Involvement or just an Obligation to Pay for the Target Group?

This financial contribution of the population to the costs of investment and operation (partly also in the form of work or materials for construction) is mostly meant by "participation de la population" in French parlance. Accordingly, francophone partners, e.g., in French West Africa, are willing to agree on "participation" in the project concept, knowing that this does not mean joint decision-making but a "contribution financière". Consequently, in francophone areas an earnest participation of the population can only be codified with explicit remarks concerning their extent and quality.

In English "participation" means two things: firstly, as in French, the acceptance of "responsibility", which refers to nothing more than a "financial contribution"; but secondly, also the involvement in "decision-making". Our own experiences show that due to the term's wide scope, it is not only in



francophone countries (but, e.g., also in India or Pakistan) that detailed negotiations with partners are necessary when “participation” is on the agenda.

In German, “Partizipation” is mostly understood as involvement (*Mitwirkung*) or codetermination (*Mitentscheidung*). The term tends not to be used for financial responsibility for the operation of, let’s say, an infrastructural facility. If so, a term like “own contribution” would be used, but not “Partizipation”.

It should be obvious that in all these cases mutual consent on the general participation of target groups and other stake-holders by no means connotes clarity regarding its extent. Also, many German actors assume that the consultation of individual participants is already a considerable concession in terms of participation.

3.2.10 Decisions on Banalities

Nowadays, special importance is attached to participation in terms of the involvement of the local population in the implementation of projects and/or programmes; very often, for example, when the decision for a location of the project’s output is to be made, be it a school or a public water point; less often concerning the design of the intended innovations that are introduced; and very scarcely regarding the decision about the technology itself or its standard. Hence, the more fundamental the decision, the less participation there is, or put inversely: codetermination takes place in unimportant decisions, whereas the fundamental questions are answered without representatives of the local or regional population.

At the same time, our own analyses have shown for example in the DR Congo or in India that the population or its representatives are indeed able to decide which technological standard is reasonable and affordable for them in view of the current socio-economic conditions. At a round table in a Congolese city, for example, it quickly became obvious that water connections for each house – which were initially favoured – could not be financed by a majority of users. Consequently, the representatives of the population recommended public water points. However, in the sector in question, even such a limited participation, unfolding only after the fundamental decisions were already taken, is not the rule. Also, the technological standards are almost always settled in advance between donors and national agencies. Thus the participation of future beneficiaries, e.g., of drinking water facilities, may *de facto* be reduced to the decision on the exact location of a public water point.

According to public law in Kyrgyzstan and other countries, a water user association is legitimised as a non-profit association and can take charge of the water supply for 1,500 to 5,000 or even more people. Surely this is a large responsibility, but is it truly participation? In those cases familiar to us, the decision whether rural or provincial supply systems should be run by water user associations founded by the population, or whether they should instead be managed by other agencies, was never left to the users, but was always made by donor and partner during the project design process. The fact that such user associations are nearly always initiated by donors or national partners also does not speak for their participatory role.



Even the minimal participation of the population in secondary decisions, as shown in the examples above, is thwarted by the procedures of bi- and multi-lateral DC – and not only in exceptional cases. Usually the time frames for the implementation of projects and programmes are very short, and are only rarely in accordance with the given socio-cultural circumstances. Two- or three-year periods are the usual time frames within which the achievement of certain aims is obligatory. Particularly for new activities, the incorporation of the population would be a personnel- and time-consuming process, which moreover is not always controllable in a predetermined schedule, but which also depends heavily on internal social processes within or between the target group(s).

Particularly the consulting companies which often accompany the implementation of a project often show little interest in responding to the population's or its representatives' wishes. However, contracting bodies also exert pressure which negatively effects participation. Feedback between all participants, which can indeed be very pronounced regarding technical questions, is unfortunately very rare in the context of socio-cultural and participatory aspects.

During the implementation of a DC activity donors and the implementing organisations observe the progress of the work. In investment activities, which so far are in the centre of this discussion, this mainly concerns the progress and quality of the construction activities. Representatives of the population are rarely involved in this monitoring. In some exceptional cases representatives of the target group are part of so-called Steering Committees that cannot make decisions but advise a programme. Mostly however, these Committees are only composed of representatives of the state, various experts, and sometimes also spokespersons of Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs). A German bilateral project on resource management in Jordan, where local chiefs are adequately represented in the responsible Steering Committee, shows that this can be handled differently. In India as well, in a financial cooperation project, the implementation of watershed management activities is to a large extent steered and monitored by representatives of the population and local NGOs founded by them.

As in construction projects in industrial countries, in a DC context the finished construction works are also checked and approved. This is normally done jointly by donors and partner institutions. At the same time the members of the target groups are nearly always irrelevant. When women and girls are not even asked before the implementation what kind of water pump they want, they certainly won't be asked for their opinion after it has been built.³⁴ This wouldn't help anyway, for at this time the project is already completed and the money is spent.

³⁴ Some donors, such as the public development cooperation in France, almost exclusively provide their own products, with the result that, in Islamic Africa, masses of foot pumps are installed which cannot be used by women and older girls because the movements they make pumping resemble the Cancan dance, which is certainly not compatible with prevalent moral values.



3.2.11 Participation Instead of Responsibility of the State

Participatory elements often do not become effective until construction works are finished, the partner state is not visible due to a lack of means or interest, and the rest is left to the population. Entire sectors are affected by this transfer of responsibility into the hands of the population. In some provinces of Chad, Niger or Mauritania, the state hardly pays more than the basic salary for some of its teachers. The operation costs for schools, their maintenance and even the biggest share of the teachers' wages have to be covered by the population, which almost autonomously administers the schools within the framework of teacher-parent committees. The same applies, for example, for health centres. But those who cannot pay for school and health services mostly do not gain access to them. This also holds true for the drinking water supply. Whoever does not or cannot pay the fees is not allowed to take water from the fountain or even the hand pump. Only scarcely do we find those "intact social structures" that supposedly characterise Third World societies.

Is this what the advocates of a comprehensive participation in the donor countries mean by real participation: a kind of forced "self-determination" of the population regarding the operation of the project "accomplishments"? Three reasons speak against this: (i.) sustainably administered institutions of the kind mentioned above are certainly needed by the people, but they often are not the result of the priorities they have; (ii.) the administration of schools and health centres, in many places also the maintenance of streets, bridges, fords etc. is not assigned to the local population in order to ensure its co-determination, but because the state wishes to escape responsibility; and (iii.) the population or the elected management committees does not really decide when maintaining a water supply system, but they execute what has been decided in the project conceptualisation. Even the level of the fees for one unit of water or for visiting a nurse is not part of participatory decision-making processes, as the costs of operation and maintenance and thus the fees are predetermined by the donors' and partners' choice of a certain technology.

What has been said here applies primarily for investment activities at local and regional levels with precise target groups. Projects of financial cooperation indirectly serving poverty alleviation, such as for example the development of remote regions by road construction, often do not consider participatory mechanisms at all. Yet even consultation processes with representatives of the population would serve all parties involved. And – surely not only in exceptional cases – concrete approaches for codetermination could be identified by a prior target group and organisation analysis.

3.2.12 Methodological Aspects of Participatory Project Work

Methodological questions are currently attracting the biggest attention within the development discourse on participation. Most of the participatory methods and approaches were and still are used in project planning in the first place. They have only recently and gradually also been appreciated as being useful for evaluations or for monitoring, being implemented during the entire life-span of a project (Bliss 2007).



However, strictly speaking, the methods of data collection in development cooperation are neither participatory nor non-participatory. Participation results from their implementation: the so-called “participatory” (as well as so-called “non-participatory”) methods of data collection are participatory if they were chosen and decided, as well as implemented and – with respect to the results obtained – also evaluated with a significant involvement of beneficiaries and other stake-holders (despite all difficulties involved) (IFAD n.d.: 6-11). This requires an overall participatory project design. It means that if a project is designed in a participatory way, the participatory planning process will be followed automatically by a participatory monitoring and evaluation system (M+E). The use of methods labelled as “non-participatory” is then by no means ruled out. Consequently, the usual dichotomisation in “participatory” and “non-participatory” or “classical” methods, techniques or procedures can be omitted.

What has been said for planning procedures and evaluations basically also applies for the monitoring in development policy. However, except for a few internal records there is hardly any literature on participatory monitoring approaches, so that even positive examples – which undoubtedly do exist – are unknown. But it can be assumed that the problems are largely the same:

- (i.) the question of whether monitoring can be designed in participatory ways even for sectoral projects and national programmes, and if so, then how,
- (ii.) the involvement of important stake-holders at an early stage, namely in the decision on the parameters and indicators to be monitored,
- (iii.) the problem of how results of a participatory monitoring can in practice lead to modifications of the implementation etc.

3.3 Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes

In this part of the paper, we will summarize a few important issues related to the participation of civil society in PRS processes, which after six years of experience still have to be regarded as disappointing. Nevertheless, it should be appreciated that by now a number of PRSPs have been developed and implemented with the participation of civil society institutions. But as far as the principles behind participation were traceable in these instances, almost always the rule “whoever comes first is the one considered” applied, meaning that those institutions which attracted the government’s attention or contributed in some way were preferentially treated and barely scrutinised regarding their legitimacy. In Mauritania, for example, this resulted in the exclusion of the most important civil society organisations (Bliss 2004, BMZ 2003a).

The legitimacy of civil society actors – we here refer mainly to Non-governmental Organisations – has at least two important dimensions: the inner legitimacy or democratic structure of an organisation and its recognition as representing certain interests. The accusation of an inadequate or poor inner legitimacy is often brought forward when NGOs such as Greenpeace affect strong economic and/or political interests with their publicity campaigns. Fault is mainly found with the “poor”, “irreproducible” or even “undemocratic”



inner decision-making structure. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker thus points to the defamation strategy that is partly implicit in these criticisms. But he also supports the opinion that the massive competition of NGOs for approval and donations should obey the laws of liberal democracy (2001: 24f). The author's remark on the defamatory character of many objections to NGO activities is doubtlessly justified, especially if the basis of the legitimacy of those critics themselves were to be scrutinised – i.e., companies that are by no means legitimised, and also questionable governments. Yet the general consideration regarding deficits of the inner democracy of many NGOs surely cannot be dismissed completely. Claus Leggewie even calls it a “democratisation paradox” meaning that NGOs can play a democratising role without being democratic themselves (Beisheim 2005: 257).

What is more relevant for civil society participation in development planning than the inner legitimacy is the question of legitimacy in terms of the representation of “general”, “broad” or similarly characterised interests. Particularly in PRS processes, some NGOs extensively claim to speak for these interests. However, it can be observed that in many cases the NGOs involved did not explicitly claim such a representative function, but instead this matter was not addressed at all when they were invited to participate in PRSP discussion forums by state or donor institutions.

In the literature, NGOs' or civil society institutions' legitimacy for the representation of such interests is generally not defined by the number of members or by votes of those that are supposedly being represented. Rather, legitimacy is principally attributed to NGOs as a whole which makes them favoured partners of states, especially when they constructively take part in the usual “circus of politics”, contributing with expertise and solutions (Gebauer 2001: 98). In this way, NGOs even increase the input legitimacy of national and international politics, and certainly the work of all international organisations, by broadening the foundations of political decisions (Beisheim 2005: 251).

In contrast, the legitimacy of individual NGOs could result from the principle of unselfishness even without being invested with a formal mandate. In the Western World, many environmental, social service, and church NGOs acquire substantial consent and thus funds via this principle. Both, donations and consent, could thus be at least important indicators for the legitimacy of those organisations, which nevertheless should not lead to the reverse conclusion, namely to measure the relative legitimacy of an NGO by the amount of its donations. What is also forgotten is that many big NGOs long ago dismissed their former altruistic character and became social service companies delivering their services under market conditions and prices (e.g., nursing services), and often exploiting their employees in the same unsocial and undemocratic manner as most commercial enterprises. Elsewhere, particularly in the more impoverished developing countries, the existence of altruistic institutions, at least regarding NGOs acting in public, is denied completely (as was done in conversations with the authors in Tajikistan, Mali and Chad) so that altruism here has to be omitted as a source of legitimacy for NGOs.

This is why the legitimacy of NGOs or other civil society institutions should also be somehow verified in terms of their mandate. This is fundamentally based on documented approval, which requires members or more or less



formal processes of affirmation. Thus, an organisation with a broad membership base and democratic decision-making structures doubtlessly has to be attributed a higher legitimacy in representing certain positions or interests than an organisation with only the legal minimal membership. However, membership should be understood broadly. A village or district meeting surely legitimises their elected representing committee in similar ways as an association's general meeting legitimises its directorate – maybe even to a higher extent when specific matters are adopted in the course of the election. These committees would probably not be able to play a direct role in a national PRS context, but spokespersons elected by them could represent a significant subgroup of society and thus have a substantial degree of legitimacy – at least regarding those initiatives that they were mandated for.

A PRS process that is mainly or at least significantly based on the participation of development NGOs in any case includes only a small segment of civil society, and is therefore far away from a principle of broad civil society participation. Development NGOs often not only monopolise the PRS process on the part of civil society as a whole, but also benefit substantially from their participation. Country studies by Eberlei et al. (2005) show that for example in Ethiopia or Ghana, NGOs even act as implementing agencies for specific elements of the PRSP. This means that those NGOs that just took part in the decisions on subjects (if they were allowed to do so), now receive assignments and money from the national governments. Thus *de facto* they act like private companies, including the fact that they are at least partly dependent on their clients.³⁵

Civil society institutions with many members certainly represent more or less broad interests of the population, in contrast to many development NGOs. But still, they only have an explicit mandate to represent their own members.³⁶ On the other hand, many weak states' capacities are very limited, and they are hardly able to provide the services for their population by themselves as designated in the PRSP. Here, NGOs can play an important role regarding the identification of needs, as well as the coordination and the monitoring of activities. But undertaking the implementation themselves would make them heavily dependent on the state, and an entire segment of society would thus change its role and would have to exit the PRS participation process. This again would deprive civil society of the know-how at NGOs' disposal.

The NGO discussion also has an international dimension which increasingly leads to confusion when it comes to actors and their legitimacy. Alongside local

³⁵ It has to be said that many NGOs in most African Countries, but also in Asia and Latin America do not have independent financial resources at their disposal (e.g., through membership fees or donations) and thus fully depend on donors or their own state.

³⁶ Legitimacy is thereby based on the number of members, although not solely. As development NGOs do not have a broader membership base, the fact that they are very often involved in PRS processes should be scrutinised, no matter how much expertise their agents may have. The case is different, for instance, with labour unions. Although they may not always represent all workers, they are, even in some poor countries, at least organisations with many members, and thus important representatives of civil society.



NGOs there are also International NGOs (INGOs) that likewise consider themselves to be civil society actors in the PRS process. But if even national NGOs have no comprehensive mandate to represent civil society in their home country, this applies even more so for INGOs who *de jure* cannot legitimately speak for individual social groups, let alone a country's population, unless they have been expressly authorised to do so by the constituency whose interests they claim to represent.

Certainly, INGOs are very important in terms of financing development activities and contributing expert knowledge. But instead of influencing the content of a PRSP, they should support the establishment of structures that enable national civil society actors to participate as equal partners in the PRS process. This, by the way, is also the role that the international DC should generally play: supporting the institutionalisation of participatory structures for civil society and other important stake-holders (even by exerting pressure on the state, if necessary).

Generally, legitimacy should not be understood in absolute, dichotomous terms. Instead of speaking of legitimacy (or a lack of it), a difference should be made between *more* or *less* legitimacy and according to the circumstances requiring the actors' legitimacy. Why should a small NGO with its expert knowledge not provide advice in open consultation processes? When general development goals are defined, an important feature for the selection of participating actors could be their relative degree of legitimacy in terms of the criteria mentioned above.

The poor, despite literally being the target group of PRSPs, are only occasionally regarded as independent stake-holders (BMZ 1999a: 10). But "the poor" actually do not exist. Instead one should refer to different kinds of poor people and very poor groups in a region or country. However, poverty implies a certain set of common characteristics. Very often women or households led by women are poor; similarly, indigenous groups are often poorer than the average population; also, handicapped persons are frequently poor, furthermore young people, elderly people, most minorities (religious, ethnic, social) and groups that live in remote territories.

Nobody would question the fact that an effective PRS process especially has to integrate the viewpoint of the poor into the planning and implementation. But practically, this is only considered very little, and if the perspective of "the poor" is included at all, the same problems occur as outlined above with regard to the participation of civil society in general: who of the poor should participate and whom should they represent (Brown 2004: 239)? A central problem of the integration of poor groups is their low level of self-organisation, resulting in difficulties in representing them (Eberlei 2001: 14).

The inclusion of representatives of poor population groups in PRS processes may even be one of the biggest challenges. A World Bank initiative to raise the "Voices of the Poor" has gathered the opinions of 60,000 people in 47 countries (World Bank / DFID et al. 1999; Narayan et al. 1999-2002), gaining many deep insights into problems and visions of poor people. But the investigation did not offer any strategy of how these "Voices of the Poor" could be better respected in the future – ideally in an institutionalised way. The low overall representation



of the poor in all PRS related matters applies even more so for poor women and marginalised households led by women (Bell 2003).

What does civil society participation in PRS processes look like exactly at the moment? Here as well, only the most important issues will be summarised. Regarding the participation of civil society actors/institutions, many authors refer to general “techniques” such as participatory budgeting, but also to more complex methods, such as among others the World Bank’s “incidence analysis” or “budget tracking” / “input tracking”. Individual countries are highlighted in this regard, among others Uganda. The best example of a participatory approach is Brazil, although it is not a HIPC country (Schneider/Goldfrank 2002). But a closer look at these “best practices” reveals that civil society participation is very limited, at least at the national level. Bigger programmes are certainly also implemented at regional and especially at communal level. Here, so-called “budget tracking” by representatives of civil society is much easier, and practical experiences show that particularly the representatives of educational and research institutions can offer good and critical contributions.³⁷

When even more or less organised civil society actors can only achieve a limited participation in the budget cycle, the same holds all the more true for the poor themselves. Although positive examples, e.g., from Brazil, exist, it is a fact that in the vicinity of skilled high school and university teachers, uneducated poor people rarely get a chance to participate, or simply cannot realise the chance. Those who participate today come from urban centres, belong at least to the upper middle class and usually (although there certainly are exceptions!) have little knowledge of the concerns of the poor and what they need. Without direct representation of the main target group of a PRS, namely the poor themselves, it will hardly be possible to realise a “pro-poor” orientation of the budgets. However, nowadays the poor lack almost everything which could enable them to participate, especially in the budget cycle. Solving this dilemma is probably the biggest challenge for the future organisation of the process.

With respect to macroeconomic decision-making processes the country studies recently presented by Eberlei et al. (2005) identify only a few positive examples of the participation by representatives of civil society. In cases where at least rudimentary participation could be observed, the question arises whether the small group, mostly consisting of academic economists, that may have been consulted adequately represented national civil society (in terms of legitimacy and representativeness). In Western countries, labour unions and agents of the private sector would struggle to gain influence on macroeconomic decisions, but especially in HIPC countries their structures are extremely weak.

Today, substantial participation of civil society forces in the implementation of sector reforms and the allocation of services is demanded repeatedly. It is said that in this way the specific needs of the people could be defined and

³⁷ Brazil also offers a positive example of this. An approach applied in the state Rio Grande do Sul allowed the involvement of thousands of contributors, and thus the collection of a corresponding number of statements (Schneider/Goldfrank 2002).



satisfied more appropriately (e.g., “to get the services right”); and that on the other hand citizens and societal groups should be empowered to secure “accountability” (i.e., “ensure that the services are ultimately delivered and public officials are answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds”) (World Bank 2003b: 30).

However, the approval for civil society participation is mainly still a postulate and partially achieved at best. Presumably no Sahel country, except Burkina Faso and Mali, has so far established communication systems that report from the bottom to the top whether the “right services” have indeed been delivered. Latin America is a different case, where for example political participation in Bolivia was so extensive that eventually the government’s legitimacy was openly challenged. In some countries, NGOs, particularly development NGOs, play a significant role in the implementation of services (e.g., the construction of schools and health care facilities). Sometimes they are even explicit implementing partners of the government.

In the context of institutional and sectoral reforms, the participation of unions and private industry seems downright self-evident, at least against the background of European practice. But surprisingly, in many HIPC countries labour unions are by no means perceived as stake-holders for PRS implementation, provided that they exist as independent institutions. At best they are consulted. But these consultations are not systematically designed and – except for the case of socialist Vietnam – invisible in terms of their outcomes. Indeed, labour unions were invited to the first discussions, but they were never involved in the process of formulation, the implementation of sector reforms, their monitoring and evaluation (World Bank 2004). Regarding the effects of this practice, the ILO notes: “[...]in the absence of genuine discussion with the representative workers’ organisations the desired policy outcomes are unlikely to be achieved” (ILO 2004: VI). The same certainly applies for employers’ organisations.

Elsewhere, the authors pointed out that the poor and vulnerable population groups can often hardly afford even those services that are established in the PRSP, especially those for poverty reduction (Bliss 2005). This even extends to basic services such as the provision of drinking water, sewage disposal, basic health services or primary education. By now, in some countries this problem is a subject of negotiations between governments and representatives of civil society (e.g., in Armenia, Eberlei et al. 2005: 14). As tariffs rise even in the implementation of poverty reduction strategies, both of donor-financed projects and national development projects resulting from sector reforms, a stronger participation of civil society and particularly of representatives of the poor in consultation and decision-making processes is much-needed. The socio-economic (especially financial) opportunities of the poor to actually benefit from PRS-initiated projects are probably the most important meta-indicator to measure the impact of a PRSP and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals.

At communal level the participation of civil society representatives can be very extensive, in some cases also concerning the poor, other social groups including women, and even ethnic or other minorities. In Mali even the lowest social classes were sporadically able to remove elected representatives from the



councils. In Kyrgyzstan, all the formerly state-owned land has either been privatised (but without becoming private property) or transferred to the communities. Almost all governmental obligations were assigned to local councils (Ayl Okmotu). The responsibility for the local drinking water supply was shifted directly to the population, which established water committees that took over management duties. This was also at least partly justified with reference to the strengthening of participation. However, the drawback of this form of stake-holder participation is again that it was not based on considerations of democratisation, but was and is pursued by the government and by important donors in order to cast off obligations and costs of the operation and maintenance of the systems.

In some countries, such as Mali, the participation of non-governmental stake-holders in public resource management is by now so far-reaching that it has to be considered whether civil society institutions should in fact have the same or even more rights than mayors or local councils that are legitimised by democratic elections. Doubtlessly in these cases, it should be considered that participation rights have to be structured differently for the management of schools and health facilities than for the management of land property. This problem clearly calls for greater attention, and should be investigated more thoroughly.

However, the example of extensive civil society participation that we observed in Mali must not belie the fact that in most HIPC countries effective participation is by no means the standard, including local and regional levels, and thus needs further support and publicity. Particularly in the case of pro-poor investment, a wide spectrum of participation should generally be aspired to. Broad participation, based on all population groups, helps for data on poverty and on poverty trends to be generated and gathered at the bottom and transferred up to the governmental level. Apart from this, those subgroups of society that were considered to be barely reachable could then also be integrated (Brown 2004: 240).

Regarding the monitoring of PRS processes, the "Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project" offers a participatory PRS monitoring – at least at the level of consultations – that examines the conditions and effects of poverty at the district level and sends the results back to the governmental PRS implementation structures. In Uganda it is also possible to incorporate the interests of the population at the communal level, namely by comprehensive consultation processes called "Community Action Plans". Kenya should also be highlighted, because it has developed its own instrument, the "Kenya Participatory Impact Monitoring (KePIM)", which, based on local-level surveys, examines the "customer satisfaction" with public services. These participatory surveys have been conducted every year since 2002, and have been complemented by further participatory and non-participatory (classical) monitoring procedures.

However, participatory M+E systems make no sense if they don't allow interventions in case that undesirable developments are detected. When a government allows civic participation in the impact monitoring of its policy, it should also be open to alterations of this policy. Participation in PRS moni-

toring without participation in political decision-making processes is actually counterproductive.

An as yet unsolved and hardly-discussed topic is participation at a meso-level, that is between projects and national decision-making processes. As far as the authors know, participation barely exists at a regional scale, not even in the framework of newer World Bank instruments that are partly designed with the help of instruments of analysis which at least theoretically could be used in participatory ways, for example "Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA)", "Participatory Sector Planning" or "Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA)". In practice however, (i.) the questions that are primarily analysed are those of concern to donors and (ii.) if the methods are indeed applied in participatory ways, they are subordinated to a goal that has nothing to do with the empowerment of the population.

Possibly most far-reaching in terms of participation were regional studies conducted in Vietnam from 1999 to 2005, where among others the instrument of Participatory Poverty Assessment was employed. The results of these studies, in which thousands of mostly rural households participated, influenced the national PRSP as well as regional and sectoral planning (among others Vietnam Poverty Task Force 2003-2005).

But all these procedures have the common problem that while they may be based on extensive theoretical guidelines, in practice they nevertheless have to be assessed in terms of aspects such as the representativeness of the units of analysis and the legitimacy of the really participating actors. After all, the World Bank occasionally explicitly strives towards the incorporation of "the poor and vulnerable" (World Bank 2003c).

4. Current Challenges Regarding Stake-Holder Participation

4.1 Legitimacy and Civil Society Participation

Particularly the analysis of PRS processes, but also that of stake-holder participation at regional and local levels, shows that international multi- and bilateral development cooperation continues to have major practical and conceptual problems regarding the incorporation of civil society institutions into decision-making and design processes of development policy, especially in terms of the legitimacy of the actors. With this statement we do not wish to criticise the work of NGOs (and INGOs) in general, neither do we mean to keep NGOs *per se* out of decision-making processes in development policy or to claim that their participation is illegitimate in principle. NGOs are important actors in development cooperation, as well as governmental and other social institutions. However, the monopolisation of many participation procedures by development NGOs and especially INGOs has to be substituted by a broader participation. The central challenge, therefore, is to induce the participation of all relevant civil society institutions in the various decision-making processes. At the same time, the scope of their participation has to depend also, albeit not





only, on their representativeness and their social legitimacy, which admittedly is difficult to measure.

Based on our examination of pertinent source material, notably also on evaluations of PRS participation processes in some priority countries of German DC such as Vietnam, Tanzania, Zambia, and Mauritania, we offer the following conclusions and recommendations for possible approaches to strengthen the legitimacy and representativeness of both the project work in development cooperation and the PRS process:

- (i.) In a rather “technical” respect, it should be scrutinised more carefully what kind of NGOs are involved when subcontractors are employed for a project’s implementation in a country or region where development-related parallel structures are absolutely necessary due to the absence of governmental structures. If local NGOs or grassroots organisations that are able to substantially influence the project idea do not exist or do not want to contribute to the implementation, it may very well be reasonable, for both the state and the promotion of private industry, to engage a private company to implement the project – for an NGO from the capital may not bring with it any other interest than the biggest turnover or profit possible. For the state it would furthermore offer the advantage of accruing taxes and the establishment of sustainable private sector structures.
- (ii.) Where active NGOs, professional groups such as lawyers’ associations or advocacy groups are at hand – for instance human rights organisations that defend women’s rights, universal and/or culture-specific civil rights or the rights of religious, social or ethnic minorities; furthermore organisations that campaign for democratisation or that desire to promote the rule of law – international DC should systematically support these initiatives.³⁸ It should also be deliberated how advocacy NGOs can be more intensively involved in PRS processes, namely as expert advisory organisations instead of representatives of certain population groups.
When decision-making processes of the population at large are involved, for instance in the design, update and implementation of PRSPs, or when civil society institutions are to be strengthened in order to facilitate social participation, NGOs have to meet the same criteria of legitimacy in such cases as any other civil society institution.
- (iii.) Cooperation with civil society institutions and their promotion by international DC will gain in importance at the same pace as national PRSPs will become more vital for the future cooperation of development actors. The current tendency points in this direction. At least more and more new projects are legitimised through their compatibility with the prevailing PRSP. Regarding these issues, a much better coordination between donors is necessary, which, however, should be preceded by

³⁸ However, these organisations and groups also have to pass a close examination in order not to fall into the trap of their self-representation (Elwert 1989: 24; Neumann 1994).



an open discussion in order to find shared positions. As currently not every donor organisation is interested in questions of legitimacy, and many still view NGOs as merely implementing agencies, German DC should always take part in the analyses of civil society in partner countries. The aim of this exercise should be to identify those organisations that are on the one hand strong enough to successfully introduce positions of civil society into the national poverty reduction process, and that on the other hand have sufficient legitimacy to represent the population.

- (iv.) Without doubt, professional organisations are suitable partners for cooperation in PRS processes as well as for bi- and multilateral development cooperation. This is because they represent a significant share of the economically active population, despite or also owing to their organisational weakness so far. All in all, they constitute a considerable potential for future political participation that should be further developed and mobilised. In countries such as Mauritania or Mali, independent labour unions also represent suitable partners. But why should not also women's or other important mass organisations be promoted in African countries or in Vietnam? Those organisations still have to be partially dependent on the state. However, they could be supported in order to become fully independent in the medium term, and to develop democratic internal structures. Even cooperation with religious institutions should not be taboo.
- (v.) Probably the most important future question in the context of civil society participation in national decision-making processes will be whether the poor – those ten to sometimes much more than fifty per cent of the population for whom (in the case of HIPC countries) the PRSPs were explicitly introduced – get a voice and can speak on behalf of themselves as far as possible.

Our provisional appraisal has to be understood as a profound critique of the hitherto practice of civil society participation in development issues. At the same time it becomes clear that there is considerable need for further investigations in order to find viable (or practicable) alternatives. Some of the most pressing questions are:

- (i.) Which institutions belong to the category of civil society, that is, who would be a civil society stake-holder in decision-making processes in a concrete case?
- (ii.) Which criteria can be utilised to describe the legitimacy of civil society institutions regarding decision-making processes of society at large? Which alternative criteria – if necessary – should be applied when the processes do not concern society at large (PRSPs) but only sectors or regions?
- (iii.) In the same sense, criteria for representativeness have to be developed (e.g., absolute number of members, members as a percentage of the total of e.g., peasants, stockbreeders, market-women, women).



- (iv.) How can civil society institutions be classified applying these criteria? What role should they play regarding processes of participation (e.g., advisory functions for sectors/sub-sectors, participation at regional/national level, decision-making role in regional/national fora that decide preliminarily or finally on concepts and implementation)?
- (v.) How can civil society institutions be externally supported without them becoming dependent on donors?

4.2 Parliamentary System, Decentralisation and Participation

The problem regarding the relationship between democratic structures at regional and particularly communal level (legitimised through elections) on the one hand and direct civic participation on the other has only recently found its way into the development debate.³⁹ A problem analysis has already been realised for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, based on the previous engagement of the authors in DC projects as well as on surveys conducted for this project.

What has been ascertained among other things is that so far almost no donor-financed projects are implemented by or at least in close cooperation with communal administrations because of their objective weaknesses, particularly their low decision-making authority and their very weak institutional capacities (above all the lack of experience in local development planning and supervision). This even applies for the big communal investment programmes of the World Bank which use their own implementation structures. Thus user groups, population committees, self-help groups, or variously-named associations are founded, with whom a project is implemented, and who later use, operate and maintain it in one way or another. In DC terminology this process can be called “bypassing”, namely the bypassing of existing structures.

Some of these institutions certainly have a right to exist, and it is beyond doubt adequate if they work without any connection to communes. For example, this holds true for so-called “water user associations”, which manage drinking water facilities or irrigation systems that were built or repaired with donor capital. What is problematic, however, is current donor practice. In Tajikistan, for instance, almost all activities at the communal level are implemented through such user associations, village communities, and village development organisations which then also operate the newly-built or rehabilitated facilities. Several reasons can be found for this:

- Very often development projects in one village or in a community consisting of several villages are implemented by different donors. This leads to the establishment of several organisations, sometimes even to

³⁹ Gómez explicitly addresses this problem in a new paper for the GTZ: “[...] Participatory decision-making processes on the one hand often lead to the circumvention of the democratically legitimised authority of the parliament and to the transfer of political decisions into parallel structures with questionable democratic legitimacy and representativeness. On the other hand there is also a danger that participation becomes a substitute for the rule of law” (2006: 16, translated by the authors).

an accumulation of different committees that are supposed to take care of any one domain of the (social) infrastructure or plan and coordinate the overall development.

- While governmental authorities are excluded from any assistance, these groups and their steering committees receive all kinds of support from donors, ranging from material funding, education and training, up to the promotion of their capacities to represent interests vis-à-vis the state. Thus the authorities also do not receive any institutional support, for instance in order to fulfil their tasks more professionally and in a more motivated manner in the future.
- The newly founded committees at first heavily depend on donor finance. But what happens when donors withdraw completely and the operation and maintenance of the facilities have to be fully financed by the population?

It also has to be considered that the legitimacy of donor-induced user groups should be scrutinised. Who is represented by a local development committee that was established based on an NGO-led agricultural credit project and which represents 30 out of 800 households in a community? Does this committee have a mandate to speak for the entire village or at least its peasants? Or can it, strictly speaking, legitimately only represent the interests of exactly 30 families?

To avoid misunderstandings, it should be emphasised that the principle of participation, stating that the population decides about village development on its own and thus follows its own priorities, is in no way being questioned by our critical analysis. Our point is rather how these decisions or decision-making processes can be integrated into a communal overall design and a meaningful operational concept which combines participation and the (continued) performance of key tasks by the state.⁴⁰

From the point of view of the present, several questions that should be dealt with in specific country contexts appear to be:

- (i.) Which criteria can be found for the participation (namely consultation and codetermination) of citizens in (a.) countries with democratically legitimised communal authorities and (b.) countries that (as yet) have no democratically legitimised structures?
- (ii.) What role should citizens of country type (a.) play in the implementation of development projects? Should they have a general right to participate or just to organise activities in their own district or even only in their own neighbourhood? Should they be allowed to participate in all fields of development, or should there be topics that can only be decided on by the elected councils?

⁴⁰ Vega/Zimmermann point to an obviously successful example of cooperation among the administration, the council, and civil society in Ecuador (2006: 17ff.). Its core element is an annually compiled participatory budget.





- (iii.) Conversely, in country type (b.), how far-reaching should be the right to codetermine the planning and implementation of development projects held by those local governments that may not be legitimised but that occasionally function? Beyond performing a coordinating role, should they also be allowed to (co-)decide on the matters themselves?
- (iv.) Are there superior levels that can, or that have to assume certain functions (e.g., regarding resource protection, which does not apply to communal, but ecological units, probably comprising several communities)? How, in this case, is the relation between democratic legitimacy and decision-making authority?

Once these questions are adequately resolved, the task of a comprehensive investigation would be to show how stake-holder participation can be achieved depending on the structure and legitimacy of local government. In such an investigation, the respective country context, the socio-cultural background and the way in which civil society has already played a part in decision-making processes at different levels so far will play significant roles. A universal concept, however, cannot be expected.

4.3 The Representation of Poor Population Groups

In HIPC countries particularly the poor are supposed to be actively integrated into national and decentralised PRS processes. But the core problem for the representation of these groups is not their participation in exceptional cases, like in Vietnam, in *ex ante* impact analyses of projected policy reforms and/or sector adjustments which are sometimes conducted by multilateral organisations. Rather the challenge lies in the complete lack hitherto of an institutionalised representation of poor and disadvantaged groups whose main problem is precisely their invisibility in public affairs. The poor are often poor because they have no possibility for self-organisation and thus for the exertion of influence (e.g., for want of time; or because many women are among the poor who have no chance to articulate themselves due to the socio-cultural circumstances in many countries; or because poor men, owing to social pressure, also do not dare to speak up etc.).

A rapid organising of “the poor” in the context of DC or national accompanying measures towards PRS formulation and implementation is thwarted by the fact that “the poor” simply do not exist. Poor and vulnerable groups pursue widely varying interests and have extremely weak and heterogeneous structures, if they have them at all, like in certain Latin American slums. Often poor residential areas comprise migrants from different regions and ethnic groups, who have little in common besides their marginal socio-economic situation. This frequently leads to conflicts over resources, which often are transformed into ethnic conflicts by interested circles. Poor people are also heterogeneous because there are substantial differences in economic interests even within homogeneous ethnic or religious groups. Even in slums you can find those who are better off and the absolute poor, who do not know what they will eat in the next few days. Finally, significant gender differences also exist within poor population groups. The economic, social and political



mechanisms of oppression are sustained in behaviour towards women and girls, who often have to suffer from violence and exploitation by men and boys.

But even where poor people are badly or not at all organised and have few prospects of overcoming this situation in the near future, development co-operation should not give up regarding the representation of their interests in development planning and implementation, but should search for unconventional solutions. The representation of poor people could, for example, transitionally be carried out by legitimate third persons. For instance, so-called “Community Based Organisations” (CBO) work in many countries, but are normally not composed of poor segments of society. However, being associations at grassroots level, they often are better qualified to speak for the poor than urban NGOs. Applied development research should in any case be utilised more in order to find ways to bring about the representation of poor population groups.

4.4 Participation and the Triggering of (Latent) Conflicts

Despite the widespread approval of extensive stake-holder participation in development decisions, one very critical aspect should not be left aside, namely the fact that participation can trigger latent conflicts or even generate new ones. After all, many projects deal with the reallocation of resources or the promotion of specific groups, *expressis verbis* including poor segments of society. Against this background, participation in a DC context can bear the risk of provoking violence against exactly those groups that are intended to be aided, for instance when, resulting from a project, they become less economically dependent, and thus more powerful actors lose access to their cheap work force, or when critical resources are about to be redistributed.

Sure enough, projects in sensitive contexts can take measures to prevent conflicts, for example by widely discussing and, if necessary, negotiating activities with all groups involved (including the negatively affected groups) and the local authorities (including the police). This approach has been demanded repeatedly. In this context as well, the role of the prevailing social and political structures and their systemic interrelation should again be pointed out. Understanding these structures is of vital importance for the successful arrangement of participatory processes. Existing cleavages, clashes of interests, and social disparities, as well as the general complexity of social relations, are often enough neglected, given the desire to bring about consensus and a sense of community, or even to assume them *a priori*. This may particularly apply when accompanying a participatory process is not intended in the long run. Thus, a considerable need for further research and implementation also exists in this regard.

4.5 Conclusions and Appraisals

The following paragraphs summarize important results of the study and attempt an appraisal, especially in view of the need for action in the strategy debate in development policy. At the same time, they point to the procedural character of the study, delineating starting points for further discussions:



► What becomes obvious is an inadequate interconnection (or even the complete lack thereof) between the German and international discourse on participation in political theory on the one hand, and the debate on participation in development policy and development cooperation on the other. The increasing criticism of the conceptual and practical deficits and inconsistencies of the concept of participation is not perceived as a constructive discussion with practical implications, particularly not by the most influential actors in development cooperation.

► The literature review and our own experiences reveal a substantial discrepancy between the claims for and the reality of participation in development cooperation. The general acceptance of participation as a conceptual demand is confronted by an at best low factual participation of important stakeholders. This holds particularly true for representatives of so-called civil society and for the target groups of development projects. It furthermore applies generally for both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, and includes all decision-makers and implementing organisations in development cooperation that were considered.

Especially at project and programme levels, real participation still remains impossible, because in almost all cases the most important decisions have already been made when the participation of the population is taken into consideration, such as the decisions on priority areas of the interventions (namely the aims and activities of a project/programme), as well as on the goals aimed at and even regarding technical implementation.

► Participation on a larger scale is however “granted” where the state is not present as an operating institution for, e.g., social infrastructure. Under these circumstances, the local population has to take over this obligation. Here, participation is understood as the users’ self-responsibility for the sustainable operation of (social) infrastructure created by development cooperation. This form of participation *de facto* does not involve participating in decision-making, but solely covering the costs. Thus, the state is factually discharged from the responsibility towards its population. In this sense, participation does not lead to a higher benefit for the population or even its empowerment, but accompanies a process of further impoverishment, as the poor can barely afford billable basic education and health care.

► If statements, particularly those by the World Bank, regarding participation at national level (key phrase: civil society participation) were taken seriously, it would amount to the participation of all societal groups in national decision-making processes concerning development policy. But in those cases where civil society participates in PRS processes, serious doubts arise regarding the legitimacy and representativeness of the participating actors in by now more than 60 PRSPs and Interim-PRSPs (I-PRSPs). Small development or business NGOs, and also INGOs dominate the public debate, whereas member associations and advocacy groups are only rarely consulted.

Furthermore, participation is limited to information and consultation in most national processes that aim at the development of national poverty reduction strategies. While the most important social actors are able to participate in PRS processes in a number of cases, the participation of poor and disadvantaged

population groups is rather unusual, although they are explicitly mentioned as important groups to be involved in at least some donor documents. Furthermore, an institutionalisation of participation of different stake-holders at a meso-level between project/programme and national policy development (apart from PRS processes) has not been realised despite the existence of pertinent concepts (e.g., for regional investment approaches).

► The state-of-the-art analysis of the international debate on participation has thus revealed deficits in both the concepts and the implementation of stakeholder participation. Additionally, at least four problematic fields have become obvious that have a strong influence on and even hinder the implementation of participation processes in a considerable number of cases.

Problem area 1 – “legitimacy and participation”: even if DC projects allowed comprehensive stakeholder participation, the question arises which persons should be involved.

Problem area 2 – “avoidance of ‘bypassing’”: the relation between the participation of different stake-holders and a democratic parliamentary system, particularly against the background of decentralisation and communal investment, has not yet been clarified.

Problem area 3 – “representation of the poor as an (institutional) participation problem”: connected to the discussion about the legitimacy and representativeness of civil society actors in participatory processes is the problem that poor and disadvantaged groups are under-represented in almost all the fields and different levels where decisions are made.

Problem area 4 – “participation and the triggering of latent conflicts”: besides other basic ethical questions regarding participation, the conflict potential originating from the participation particularly of disadvantaged subgroups of society has hardly been discussed so far.





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Abbreviations:

BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (<i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i>)
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
DC	Development Cooperation
DFID	Department for International Development (GB)
DSE	Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung
FC	Financial Cooperation
GTZ	German Society for Technical Cooperation (<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i>)
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEF	Institute for Development and Peace (<i>Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden</i>)
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organisations
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
KfW	German Bank for Reconstruction (<i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i>)
M+E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory Rapid (Rural) Appraisal
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSIA	Poverty and Social Impact Analysis
PSP	Priority Strategy Papers (<i>Schwerpunktstrategiepapiere</i>)
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TC	Technical Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WTP	Willingness to Pay

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