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# Decentralization and Participatory Rural Development: A Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

Most of the developing nations are still struggling for efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome physical and administrative constraints of the development, it is necessary to transfer the power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power from improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development. Advocates of decentralization argue that decentralized government is source to improve community participation in rural development. Decentralized government is considered more responsive towards local needs and development of poor peoples. There are many obstacles to expand the citizen participation in rural areas. There are many approaches for participatory development but all have to face the same challenges. Current paper highlights the literature about Decentralization and participatory rural development. Concept and modalities of Decentralization, dimensions of participation, types of rural participation and obstacles to participation are also the part of this paper.

## KEY WORDS:

decentralization, participatory rural development, sustainable development, literature review, rural development policy

**JEL Classification:** R500, R590

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## Introduction

International donor agencies acknowledged decentralization as a platform to improve citizen participation and service delivery. Decentralization is a source for bottom up participatory development, thus improving local governance resulting poverty reduction in rural areas. The whole purpose of development is being redefined so as to bring people to the central stage. Participatory Rural Development (PRD) also called by someone as community driven development or community participatory development (Stohr, 1981) is an approach for more accountable governmental and increase poor people participation. Decentralization

is widely used concept now a days and policy makers applied this concept for the promotion of the development. It has increasingly been promoted as major component of the poverty alleviating strategies.

Most of the developing nations are still struggling for efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome physical and administrative constraints of the development, it is necessary to transfer the power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power from improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development (Manor, 1995; Vaughan et. al. 1980, Mills et. al. 1990). Donor organizations, nations and international development institutions significantly shifted their attention from urban-industrial development and focus on rural participatory development. According to Kliksberg (1994), decentralization

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and agriculture growth are alternate and appropriate tools to achieve such development.

*The states must to look human development as its ultimate goal, that's always leads towards strengthen the democracy and increase social welfare. Working in teams with private enterprise and other non governmental organizations leads towards organizations and development of civil society (Kliksberg, 1994).*

The growing progress in decentralization in state management, an acceptable and generalized process at the international and international level, has many implications in term of participation as well as management efficiency. This shift was considered as background to the evolution from centralized (development from above) to decentralize (Stohr, 1981; Mabogunji, 1980) and now a day's developing societies considered as most appropriate development strategy.

## The concept of decentralization

Developing societies advocate decentralization as source of development and empowerment since their independence. Decentralization has three main phases of popularity. According to Conyers (1983), In late 1950's and early 1960's, the interest in decentralization was interlinked with the transition to independence and then affiliated desire for creating democratic structures when colonial rules was imposed for control. Colonial system was an uneven approach to decentralize services where services were distributed on the basis on caste system. This result was that basic services are not available to marginalized groups. In 1970's, the concept of decentralization was advocated as an easy way to take relieve from unresponsive centralized planning. The countries emphasized to decentralize their hierarchical structure in effort to make service delivery to public more efficient and giving local administrator's more responsibility to extend service delivery (Cheema, 1983) and ultimately a means to increase popular participation in development (Conyers, 1983). Similarly in 1970's, due to economic and fiscal crisis, rising prices of oil, decreasing level of exports forced societies to use their own resources effectively and the only way they found were decentralization, thus many countries in Africa, Asia and South America pursued decentralization.

The concept of decentralization varies from program to program. It depends upon goals and objectives of the program. Developing countries in Pacific and

Asia have so far interpreted and implemented decentralization as being the source to delegate and transfer power for planning, implementation, evaluation and participation in decision making. Similarly transfer of administrative authority from the central government and it connected departments to field organizations, local government or non-governmental organization.

Liberal and democrats in west and developing countries have different opinions for decentralization. According to the liberal democratic tradition in west, decentralization government is perceived as the institutional vehicle for political stability, training in leadership, political education, equality, responsiveness and liberty (Smith, 1985). While developing countries perceives this term in broader context. It has positive connotations as well as 'emotional overtones,' particularly when it is used for achieving important goals and objectives of concern programs such as people participation, local democracy, transfer of decision power to people, need based relevant development, co-ordination, integration and de-bureaucratic setup (Conyers, 1986).

Griffin (1982), a fundamental politician and economist, advocate decentralization but stress that

*It is agreeable that in many countries power to local government is more rigorous, exclusive and applied more mercifully against the poor than at the central government. Thus it cannot be said that more decentralization leads towards greater democracy, nly power to poor cannot solve most of the problems but its all depend on the situation, measures and requirement for which devolution had taken place. Sometimes decentralization is considered just to improve the financial condition of the country and sometime to improve governmental institution structures. (Griffin, 1982)*

Experiences of decentralization from developing countries demonstrate that decentralization bring about minority dominance by a few powerful rich local leaders and the case become worst if such leaders were chosen to lead the respective councils. Sometimes these elite lead on the basis of their heredity or some other favors. Such types of problems in decentralization have long lasting impacts and cannot be dismissed lightly (Lamour, 1985).

## Modalities of Decentralization

According to the Brain Smith, who is considered one of the fullest account of decentralization to date ,

the term “Decentralization”, got different meanings in different eras and fields and academics are not agree on proper use of this term (Smith, 1985). Thus decentralization can be referred as the transfer of authority to the linked lower hierarchy, whether the lowers tier related to local government or to some big organization. In contrast, Morgan (1986), a management scientist emphasis the decentralization as an organizational principle for divisionalised organization, but normative values for decentralization are different. There is functional, deconcentration/devolution dichotomy, political elite power administrative decisions and tetorial decentralization. According to Guzman (1988), decentralization refers to the systemic sharing and dispersal of state government power. It’s about delegation of authority to local level institutions, involving all the stockholders to come together as close as possible to problem area thus allow multi-sector decision making.

#### ***Administrative Decentralization or Deconcentration***

Deconcentration refers to the simple dilution of centrality by distributing various elements of political and administrative activity to non-central offices. With deconcentration (also known as ‘administrative decentralization’), strong centralizing tendencies co-exist with particular forms of bureaucratic decentralization (Hoshino, 1994). It is a means of increasing central control. Many writers, for example Heager, are critical of the deconcentration approach to decentralization. He considers, deconcentration as a method for the central government to increase its power by more effectively curbing liberties” (Heager, 1974).

Manor (1995) is also critical of deconcentration when he says indeed, it is often used as a device used by the government for better control over lower level. But sometimes a greater degree of deconcentration is achieved through field administration by transferring them power to plan, decide and implement with in the boundaries set by central ministries. The power of field administrators, as Smith (1985) stresses, is ‘bureaucratic rather than political.

#### ***Functional Decentralization or Delegation***

Functional decentralization is also deconcentration to parasitical agencies with some financial and

administrative separation from the main bureaucratic hierarchies (Manor, 1995; Hoshino, 1994). Delegation implies the lending of central authority, responsibility, and resources for exercising administrative and substantive functions to subordinate units or organizations in the centre. Although these organizations and agencies have been decentralized, they really serve to reinforce centralization and decision-making at the higher levels. The relative autonomy of these agencies, and their bureaucratic way of assuming certain functions and responsibilities, have given rise to serious problems of coordination and control (Harris, 1983). Delegation of function represents a more extensive decentralization than administrative deconcentration (Rondinelli, 1981).

#### ***Political/ Democratic Decentralization or Devolution***

Transfer of resources, activities and power to decide for local development and division of tasks from the central government to lower authorities is called devolution. In devolution the lower authorities work as an autonomous body, independent from central government. Devolution implies more permanent and inter-governmental transfers, from national to local governments, of political as well as administrative and technical functions, answerable to the local community as a whole (Manor, 1995). The local government may challenge the central government’s mandate, as asserted by Mrs. Thatcher, when she states that: “the hard left power was entrenched in three institutions: the Labor Party, local government and the trade unions (Thatcher: 1993 quoted in Pycroft, 1995).

The transfer of power to geographic units of local government that lie outside the formal command structure of the central government’. Thus devolution represents the concept of separateness, diversity of structures within the political system as a whole (Sherwood, 1969).

#### ***Privatization***

It connotes the transfer of responsibility and resources for certain governmental functions to the private sector. Through privatization, governments divest themselves of responsibilities either by transferring them to voluntary organizations or by allowing them to be performed by private business. It is a recent fash-

ionable policy prescription and political philosophy for national development. It is claimed to have many virtues. It could relieve government of its fiscal burdens, rationalize its role in development and improve the administration of programmes appropriate to the public sector. Its advocates argue that decentralization mean passing power from central government to private firms and democratization by increasing choice for 'customers' who receive services (Rondinelli, 1989, 1990). The definition of decentralization as transferring authorities and power to the lower authorities from central authorities including planning, decision making and administrative control (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983), opens up questions about the market provision (deregulation, privatization) of services since the market can be regarded as a centrally regulated, but with decentralized allocation mechanism (Harvey, 1988).

The public choice approach and the emergence of the 'New Development Administration' school stresses deregulation, privatization, minimal government and popular participation (Werlin, 1992). It is this approach that opened up a debate between Slater (1989; 1990) and Rondinelli (1989, 1990) in the journal of 'Development and Change'. Rondinelli (1989) produced a political economy model, which combined public choice and public policy approaches and added privatization as the form of decentralization, which marked a shift from his earlier work of ranking deconcentration and devolution as the prime decentralization methods. This directly contradicts another of his statements: 'especially the poor must be allowed to participate and decide about their own needs and demands' and 'have rights to work for local as well as national development' (Rondinelli et al., 1989). Therefore, privatization can be found in this context, implicit in the concept of de-bureaucratization.

## Participatory Rural Development

Form past few decades developing countries making great efforts to improve the lives of the deprived communities. Awareness towards education and maternal health improve significantly. Now there is low infant death rate and life expectancy improved by more than fifty percent. Almost in more than half population, children started their schooling. Similarly, there is significant improvement in provision of clean drinking water

to rural areas. Average per capita income of the developing countries rose to almost double (Sandstrom, 1994).

According to UNDP report in 2000, despite of the improvement and development, poverty still remains a biggest challenge for world. Still in this development era, seven million people die every year due to preventable diseases. In developing countries, still death rate is high, fertility ratio is low and child death ratio is high. On the other side, there is significant improvement in ratio of rich peoples in world in developed countries in last thirty years but seven million peoples in developing countries still struggling to earn less than a dollar and striving to live with limited resources (UNDP, 2000).

Over the past few decades new approaches to development have been adopted. The human element has lately acquired a new significance. Getting over their earlier obsession with economic growth, planners now readily appreciate that it is the involvement of people in the development process that ensures sustainable development. While programs differ substantially in design, objectives and target communities, a common organizing principal is clearly discernible. It is the belief and principle of participatory development, according to Keith R. Emrich (1984) that development must begin in the very lowest tier or level. There must be real opportunities for participative decision making for the target groups and those decisions must relate to their future development (Sadiullah, 2006).

According to the advocates of Participatory Rural Development (PRD) (Mansoori and Rao, 2004), Aim of the Participatory development is to accomplishing following three functions including:

1. Communities should identify and implement projects for themselves for need based development.
2. Improve the capacity of the local peoples to organize themselves as community.
3. Enable community organization to work together for common purpose.

## Peoples' Participation

Ultimate and practical way of democracy is to consolidate with the local people and encourage them to participate in development activities. Motivating them to participate, organize them in groups and communities and involve them in decision making is only way which reflects basic desire of people (OECD, 1994). In

developing world, participation of communities in development process is considered as a basic element for good governance resulting accountability of government and benefit to poor peoples (World Bank, 1994).

### *Nature and Definition of Participation*

#### **a) Defining Participation**

Participation has been defined in narrow and broad terms. In its narrow connotations, participation is defined as the active engagement of citizens with public institutions, an activity which falls into three well-defined modes: voting, election campaigning and contacting or pressuring either individually or through group activity, including non-violent protests (Verba et al., 1980; Parry et al., 1992). Excluded in this definition are attitudes towards participation and participation in rural development efforts. In its broad terms, participation is a "collective sustained activity for the purpose of achieving some common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development" (UNESCO, 1979).

Political participation has been an issue in development management from the beginning, but its significance has increased principally because it has become part of official rhetoric. Individual full participation in making societal choices and decisions is a natural outcome of the endowment of individual dignity because it contributes to individual self-development. Responsibility for the governing of one's own conduct develops one's dignity. In particular full individual participation within the local institutions contributes to the creation of community solidarity because everyone feels involved in what is going on relative to their welfare (Uphoff, 1986).

Although there are different ways to define participation, the dominant perspective is to treat it pragmatically and to view it as a strategy to improve the development process.

#### **b) Changes in the Meaning of Participation**

Participation was considered and defined in terms of politics during late 1960's. It was only considered as people participation in vote casting, become a member of party and volunteer in some association. But with modernization in world, involvement of public is considered important for development. In the mean time, autonomous public organizations provided the

channels for active community participation. Political parties are forced to consider public as asset and their demand should be given privilege (Parry, 1992).

"During implementation, individuals and groups have different motives and interests that might be conflicting and they compete to secure limited available resources. Limited resources and scarce funds leads towards poor development and suffer government-people interaction" (Grindle, 1980). Similarly according to Lele "self confidence and self-reliance gained by rural community during planning and implementation of the projects is very important to keep development process effectively" (Lele, 1979). An influential statement by learning group of World Bank regarding participation is as under

"Participation is an activity in which development process is shared, influenced and controlled by stakeholders and two factors which affect them are decision and resources" (World Bank, 1994).

### *Dimensions of Participation*

Participation is a very broad concept, and when the term is used in the context of development activities the question is how to operationalise that participation? The clear answer to this question demands familiarity with i) what (activities), ii) who (elites /ordinary people), and iii. How (the way /method of peoples' involvement) dimensions of participation. The 'what' dimension of participation consists of the various activities where people may participate? The report of the United Nations (1975) and other development studies revealed that people should participate in development projects from needs identification to needs satisfaction stage, only then can they be benefited from the development project. It implies the involvement of people in goal setting, planning, formulating, implementing and evaluating of development projects. According to Cohen and Uphoff (1980), people's participation includes a participation in decision-making and participation in Program implementation and evaluation.

The second dimension is a focus on who participates in a truly participatory approach those entire affected have to play a role at all stages of the development process (Lane, 1995). Cohen and Uphoff identified two groups of participants, residents and leaders, as particularly important in participation in development. The World Bank approach to the 'who' dimension of partici-

pation calls for the participation of ‘stakeholders’. The Bank defines stakeholders as the parties who either affect or are affected by development actions, which either have no power or lack information thus excluded from developmental process (World Bank, 1994).

The third dimension of participation is its organizational imperatives. The commentators and practitioners in development pleaded for participation through local organizations. The democratic, accountable and responsive organizations and associations including village councils, progressive unions, farmer’s societies, traders associations and multi- purpose co-operatives, may be effective in participatory development (Verhagan, 1980).

The focus of ‘how’ dimension of participation is also on the degree or level of participation - the degree of empowerment. In his World Bank Discussion Paper, Samuel Paul identifies four methods of participation i.e. share information with whole community, consult for better understanding, participation in decision making and initiating actions for better proactive development (Paul, 1987). Latter indicates participation of the highest intensity. Each level of participation is characterized by a different relationship between the implementing agency and the beneficiaries. Information sharing participation refers to a process where the agency informs intended beneficiaries about the project, and so flows of information and control are both in

downward direction. In a process involving consultation information flows are more equal, with the agency often making use of local knowledge; however control is still from the top down. In decision-making participation beneficiaries have some control over the process. Finally where participation has advanced to the stage of the beneficiaries initiating action both information and control flows are primarily upward, from the beneficiary group to the agency, but the donor agency retains some degree of control. According to World Bank, following are the measures which should be taken to improve the participation. These measures involve six mechanisms whose influence on stakeholders is from bottom to up. These includes following

1. Methods for information sharing among community and government
2. For better understanding consultation mechanism should be preferred
3. Appraisal Mechanism
4. Participatory decision making methods
5. Collective action for better development
6. Community empowering methods (World Bank, 1994).

Arnstein (1969) long ago considered peoples’ participation as a categorical term for people power. According to her, it denotes nothing less than a redistribution of power that enables have-nots to share in the benefits of society.

**Figure 1.** Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen’s Participation

8		Citizen Control		degrees
7		Delegated power		of
6		Partnership		citizen
5		Placation		power
4		Consultation		degrees
3		Informing		of
2		Therapy		non-
1		Manipulation		participation

Source: Arnstein, 1969: p. 217



She proposes an analytical ladder of people's as shown in Figure-1. The classificatory principle in Arnstein's ladder is the amount of people power exercised. She presented her ladder of participation in graphic with the least desirable element first and the most desirable element last

### *Participatory Approaches to Rural Development*

There are many obstacles to expand the citizen participation in rural areas. There are many approaches for participatory development but all have to face the same challenges. The concept of participation in the process of community development is far from new. Indeed, it was part of the rhetoric of the New Deal in the 1930s. It has become the dominating ideology in contemporary thinking in both non-governmental organization (NGO) and governmental / inter-governmental agencies (Poulton et al., 1988; Oakley, 1991 and Sadiullah, 2006).

"There are two main traditional approaches to rural participation: (1) community development programmes which were aimed at preparing the rural population to collaborate with government development plans; and (2) the establishment of formal organizations (cooperatives, farmers associations etc) which were to provide the structure through which the rural people could have some contact with, and voice in, development programmes" (Oakley and Marsden, 1984).

### **Community Development Approach to Rural Participation**

The approach was based on development of capacity and self-reliance among community to participate for better development (Korten, 1990). There are good reasons for the close association of participation with a community development approach. First the aim to meet basic needs obviously requires the participation of all in benefits. Second, participation in implementation improves efficiency through the mobilization of local resources. "Third, the development of a community's capacity to plan and implement change will require greater intensity and scope of participation as the project proceeds (Sadiullah, 2006) But Oakley and Marsden (1984) concede that the strategies developed had no meaningful impact on poor people and local community participation in development and the local

elites continued to make and implement decisions in their own interests under the cover of a participatory organizational structure.

### **Partnership Approach to Rural Participation**

A second general approach to participation can be distinguished from fostering people's organizations or promoting community-based activities. This approach attempts to create participatory partnerships rural development authority and governmental authorities for local development (Bergdall, 1993). Oakley and Marsdon (1984) have labeled this a 'collaboration' approach to rural participation where governmental or non-governmental organizations remain the primary driving force. Because decentralization programmes are an attempt to transfer specifically defined aspects of authority and control to District Councils or other local representative bodies. But many constraints, particularly ones of financial accountability and aid administration, make this a difficult task. In any case, as observers have noted, representative bodies remain just that:

"Participation becomes the prerogative of a privileged few who now find themselves included in a widening but nevertheless still quite small circle of decision-makers" (LaCompte, 1986).

### *Obstacles to Participation*

All the developmental agencies in the world now discuss about the participative rural development approaches, including non-governmental organizations, governmental and inter-governmental agencies (Poulton and Harris, 1988; Oakley, 1991; Adnan et al., 1992). The apathetic situation occurs mainly due to the poor economic, political and social position of people. But some times the latter they do not always want to participate. A recent Overseas Development Administration funded study observes that people feel that development functions were primarily the government's responsibility. Rather they prefer to participate passively and / or through their community leaders (quoted in Eyben and Ladbury, 1995).

Organization at village or even at district level is either short or membership of poor people in such organizations is nonexistent. Hence local organizations easily become centers of formal power controlled by the few elites (Korten, 1981). "The professional bureaucrats both at national and local level pose important barriers



ers to effective local participation. Lack of community participation in projects can be the result of bureaucrats assuming the role of knowledgeable specialists who do not take user's views into account because users do not 'know enough' (according to them) to make decisions. However, some time the local people give their rights of decision to developmental professional thereby save conflicts, time and energy. Moreover the desire of participation is likely depend on the 'product' offered as much as on the development of channels and structures to make participation a practical possibility (Eyben and Ladbury, 1995).

## Conclusions

Decentralization as a policy of rural development is consistently focused in many developing countries since the 1970s. The motivation for and application of decentralization policies varied considerably. In past deconcentration type of decentralization was favored in many countries. In a decentralized system, that stresses people's participation and devolution of authority, local units must be autonomous and clearly distinguished as a separate jurisdiction over which the centre exercises little or no direct control. In many of the cases the central governments initiated introduced and heavily publicized decentralization policies only to see them falter during implementation. Haque (1986) emphasizing the great extent of central control over local units as an "illusion of decentralization". The impact of decentralization varies from country to country; however, the results of decentralization policies so far implemented in developing countries are not impressive.

Development is a complex and continuous process, defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. Economists identify it with economic productivity and higher standard of living; sociologists with social change and social differentiation; political scientists with democratization and participation; and administration experts with bureaucratic performance. Underlying all these divergent viewpoints is common concern to improve the quality of life for man. Regardless of the efforts made by world from past generation, people still suffering for basic services. Almost one billion populations in the world still live the poverty line and have no access to education, health and clean drinking water.

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