Refocusing on Participation in Policy Formulation and Implementation: The Citizen and Participatory Methods

Wade Zack Ver

Department of Theatre Arts, Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria

Abstract

How do ordinary people, especially poor people, affect policies that in turn affect their well-being? What is the role of citizen participation in policy formulation and implementation in this area of globalization? How do changing contexts and conditions affect the entry points through which actors in civil society, especially the poor or those working with the poor, can exercise voice and influence in critical aspects of social care, be they in the areas of health, politics, education, welfare, security, programmes for the disabled or any other significant policy arenas? This paper explores a view that argues for an approach to social policy that sees citizens not only as users and choosers, but as active participants who engage in making and shaping social and political policies as already preached by Theatre for Development. However, to do so raises important conceptual issues about the nature of participation, citizenship and the policy itself. The paper suggests that changing contexts and conditions- demographic change, an increased emphasis on decentralization, privatization of provisioning, and globalization – challenge traditional approaches to participation. This article discusses these conceptual issues within a broader historical review of the strategies through which methodologies like the Theatre for Development have recommended. The paper argues that participation must be repositioned in light of current realities.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of participation, of course, is not a new one in development. Over the last 40 years it has acquired a spectrum of meanings and given rise to a diversity of practices. For much of this time, 'community participation' usually in projects adopted through Theatre for Development remained distinct from political participation, conventionally through voting, political parties and lobbying. In recent years, there has been a convergence of concern with citizen engagement in policy formulation and implementation and with 'good governance' broadening political participation to include a search for new , more direct, ways through which citizens may influence governments and hold them accountable.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a growing demand in many parts of the world for citizens to be involved in decision-making processes which affected their lives, including in the social policy arena. The form of participation that emerged focused largely on establishing consultative mechanisms, often in the form of user committees. The spread of this new approach was rapid and far-reaching. Citizens became involved in thousands of community health councils and countless other beneficiary committees. Through strengthening participation of the clients, it was hoped that providers would be better able to understand their needs and perspectives.

Institutionalized participation provided opportunities for improved assessment of needs and service responsiveness. It also provided a political space in which beneficiaries could develop their own identities and voice. Yet increasingly, even the advocates of beneficiary participation began to raise questions about its limits. The lack of a common understanding of the definition of the term 'participation' meant that a whole variety of practices could be carried out and legitimated under its label. There were concerns about issues of power- what about those who lacked the power to express their views and preferences? Could participation in itself serve to reinforce exclusion? There was the danger that the beneficiary involvement model would simply become an interest group approach, in which user groups simply became seen as 'one amongst a number of self-interested stakeholders lobbying a pluralistic system' (Barnes 1999: 79-80). Moreover, there were questions of consultative fatigue, and of the ways in which social service managers used consultation fatigue, and of the ways in which social service managers used consultation simply to legitimate their own ends (Croft 1996: 16).

At the same time, the spaces created through user groups also became a ground for learning and for learning and for articulating broader demands as Barnes (1990:75) says:

> If there was a top-down encouragement to listen to what service users were saying, there was also a growing movement amongst those who were dissatisfied not only with the nature of the services they were receiving, but also with their lack of control over them.

Jide Malomo (2004: 20) says most development plans have failed due to what he describes as "vertical planning and implementation" which he faults the planning methodology of the state for *service* to its citizens. He opines that the citizens have the right to decide what is suitable for them. Olatunji Abayomi (2000:106) says:

> The human has the rights to live, to think, to procreate, to express himself, to associate with each other, as well as to break, by all means feasible, the fetters on these rights, so as to continually exalt them.

> Neither apathy nor lethargy nor pacifism nor submissiveness must be allowed in the confrontation against human rights abuse if we are to assure that the liberty of citizens are not withered by the corruption of power.

This goes to an extent to mean that both men and women appertain and inhere in them because they are humans. No person has the right to take these rights away or injure them in any way. They are called fundamental because they sprouted out of sand of life. It is always in the assertion of the acquired that the citizen is bound to have greater interaction with society and government.

With growing frustration over the limitations of the ' user involvement' concept of participation, writers and practitioners began to distinguish between viewing users as the redistribution of power, to enable people gain more control over their lives. Distinctions were also made between participants in initiatives set up by the state, and those set up by user groups themselves, over which they have more control and power and control (Croft and Beresford 1999; 31 Barnes 1999:2).

A more radical version of people's participation increasingly came to be seen as a 'third option'; one that would go beyond the more paternalistic versions of the welfare state and the narrow consumerist approaches to user involvement. This approach began to talk about participation not only in terms of having a say and being involved in the delivery of existing programmes, but also in terms of more active participation in provisioning and in policy formulation.

Increasingly, then, the concept of participation began to move from one of users and choosers of services provided by others, to one in which people became actors and agents in broader processes of governance. As Barnes (1999:82) puts it:

> Once user groups engage in dialogue with producers of public services they enter the territory of public service decision-making. It is at that point that the issues of identity and governance come together in the tension around the disputed identities of 'consumer' or 'citizen'.

Repositioning participation to encompass a notion of citizenship that is both responsive to the possibilities of democratic pluralism and retains the principle of equivalence offers a way out of this impasse. Lister (2001:228) argues that the…

> right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life should be included in the nexus of basic human rights… Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; *citizenship* as rights enables people to act as agents.

Through an emphasis on enabling people to act as agents, Lister's definition offers the scope for addressing and redressing the involvement of citizens in decisions that affect their lives. Linking this works of engagement of user groups in the disability rights field. Barnes (1999:84) argues that direct involvement of users in the processes of decision-making over public service provision…demonstrates their capability to be active agents, *making and creating* the services they receive, rather than simply *consuming* them.

Repositioning participation and citizenship as rights that are bound up with enhancing the ability of people to act as social agents raises important challenges for citizens in making and shaping the policies that affect their lives. Attempts to broaden inclusion in political party policy-making have characteristically involved the use of consultative mechanisms to seek greater citizens' involvement in generating information to feed into policy formulation.

Citizens of a country would definitely be more able to assert their citizenship through seeking accountability from their leaders when they are made to see themselves as actors rather than passive beneficiaries of programmes. One form of this greater accountability is through increased dialogue and consultation.

Citizenship and its consciousness have in many countries, like the United States of America, been extended from one of social rights to one of participation through action to hold others accountable. Although the danger inherent here is that the language of citizenship can become the language of nationalism and this may lead to exclusion of non-nationals. Most writers of democracy, (Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa 2000: 54) , position that reconceptualising citizenship as a responsibility attained through collective action and democratic governance, with rights accruing from this engagement, changes the terrain. Taylor (1996:45) says placing this debate in global context in which global or internationalists forms of citizen action are articulated as a response to increasing globalization pressures on the state, also might limit the more nationalistic and potentially reactionary appeals to citizens.

Theatre and Citizens' Participation in Development plan.
Negotiating the failures of conventional development is the cardinal burden of Theatre for Development as the mediatory instrument of social development. In Nigeria, the theatre is seen in the forefront. In the pre-independent period, Hubert Ogunde challenged the cultural ideology of colonialism through his plays.

Borrowing from western operatic forms, Ogunde infused his drama and theatre with the diversity of Nigeria's traditional culture through proverbs, songs, dances and other folkloric idioms.

Honestly, beyond providing entertainment, Ogunde's theatre provided the much desired cultural framework for the decolonization process, as Nnamdi Azikiwe acknowledged in the *West African Pilot* 'If we are to be independent and eventually we shall, it is essential that we should preserve our national identity. The Nigerian theatre is one way of developing that personality.

How to make history and development of the people available to them as drama, according to Egwugwu J.S Illah (2000:13), became the essential paradox of the new drama. He says the paradox of how to change the world beyond literacy devices like:

> *Glossary, "Engligbo", "Yorubanglish",* developed into an alternative aesthetic. This alternative aesthetic, informed by Bertolt Brecht's challenge to the philosophical foundations of Western theatre; advanced by the ideas of the Brazilian development activist, Augusto Boal, makes the people the central force with which to combat the enveloping "culture of silence", now called Theatre for Development.

Going by the position of Egwugwu Illah, Theatre for Development in pragmatics goes beyond the philosophy by Kabwe Kasoma which calls for *taking theatre to the people* in that TfD seeks the transfer of the means of theatrical production to the people; they become the subject of their own experience through drama.

Theatre for Development has over the years tried to broaden inclusion in policy-making by trying to involve the use of participatory drama to seek greater citizen involvement in generating information to feed into policy formulation. Emerging politics in the country has, however, challenged some of the assumptions on which these attempts to influence participation have been based.

First, it has become evident that the linear model of policy making is deeply flawed. The making and shaping of policies involve more than acting on information that is provided to policy-makers. That is to say even if the entire community members, through drama, *tell* policy-makers what they want, the policy-makers may still not implement what the community members want. Goetz (1994:3-4) had said what policy makers want to know tends to determine how information is used. According to him, this in turn, is shaped not only by their political interests but by the frames of reference within which a particular policy issue is interpreted.

Secondly, even if the community members are allowed to participate in policy formulation, much still depends on those who are charged with its implementation. As a matter of fact, the involvement of the common citizens in policy-formulation in itself is no guarantee that policies will be effectively implemented.

Very significant to the above problems, this paper stresses other dimensions of participatory knowledge generation processes, beyond the production of information. The paper prefers a more direct engagement with and by the agents who formulate and implement policies, community members as agents can enter and make use of policy spaces provided by participatory processes. The involvement of the community members in monitoring in order to enhance accountability becomes in itself a means through which citizens can engage in shaping the implementation policy. It can thus be seen that unrestricted participation has the capability of ensuring accountability at all levels.

Community Drama: a Survey of Participatory Strategies

Based on the erroneous conception that 'beneficiaries have no real choice: all they can do is accept the service offered or not' (Franco 1996: 16), community drama thus waded into the processes of provisioning, regulation and management of projects or government programmes. In other words, community drama attempts to empower beneficiaries of these provisions to participate in prioritizing these provisions. Theatre, in this perspective, gives the beneficiary of programmes an active stake but the ideal would preferably have been ensuring the efficiency of service delivery and not by only giving the citizen a voice in determining the kinds of services he wants or needs.

Nevertheless, drama, as used in Theatre for Development processes, has been strategized to eliminate monopolistic tendencies of the better-placed in the society in deciding for the entire community what kind of decision should be taken. It has also extended the definition of participation beyond select-consultation to enable communities exercise more control over the shape the provision should take. Theatre for Development, in doing the above, provides a vehicle for channeling *resources* to a range of development providers (which government becomes simply one among them) to meet the needs of the community. In practice, drama opens space for citizen engagement. However, much still depends on how community members take up the opportunities that theatre and drama makes available. Of course, also the conditions under which the poorer and more marginalized are able to participate.

Theatre for Development's searchlight on community development through drama is further trumpeted on the fact that in making demands on a demand-driven structure, strategies are needed to support those who might be least well equipped to generate proposals for development. Despite profuse participatory rhetoric, it appears community drama has rarely overcome the significant barriers to the participation of less vocal and powerful people in communities.

Provisions by Non-governmental Organizations

While the *users* and *choosers* approach outlined above focuses on spaces for user involvement made available by the government, often through the influence of supranational institutions, provisioning by institutions outside the remit of the government has come to play a vital role in social sectors in many communities.

Guided by assumptions about their comparative advantage in service delivery over government, there have been high expectations of the role that civil society organizations can play. So much emphasis has been put on this role that some observers such as Alan Fowler (1994) contend that NGOs are being transformed into *ladies for global soup kitchen, either substituting for, or complimenting Third World governments in providing welfare services to the ever-increasing number of poor and disenfranchised people(*cited in Rutherford 1997:8*)* Robinson and White, for example, suggest that an enhanced role for NGOs in service provisioning has often been justified on the grounds that they are perceived to be more participatory, less bureaucratic, more flexible, more cost effective, with an ability to reach the poor and the disadvantaged. Yet these assumptions are increasingly coming under question. Also as a diverse set of actors, the impact of NGOs depends as much on the socio-political context and relations with other actors, as on their organizational characteristics. This has implications not only on for accountability but also for viability and equity in service delivery.

Ironically, much of what has been said of the role of NGOs in community development seems to have overshadowed the importance of other more informal and indigenous forms of traditional and less formal societies. In many parts of Africa especially Nigeria, informal popular and community associations, self-help groups and networks are actively involved in bridging the service provision gap. These include religious bodies, traditional healers, midwives, parents' groups and other welfare associations. The failure to consider them in discussions of development plan contributes to and reinforces their marginalization. One may wonder if the growth of NGOs in communicating development plan may in fact have had a negative impact on the strength of local associations.

Social Movements and Government Policies

As the discussions moves to an understanding of participation that is broader and goes beyond participation in the provisioning of social sector services, the important role that citizen participation has played in development formulation has become evident.

Historically, movements in Nigeria have played an important part in making demands on the nation concerning social rights. The platforms of many national liberation movements in Nigeria included concerns about equality of access to education, health care, leadership, politics, compensations by rights, etc. The new democratic dispensation in Nigeria has ushered in movements centred on national struggles around rights, responsibilities and recognition.

Setting the role of social movements within the broader frame of meeting the rights of social citizenship, questions arise about the extent and conditions under which social movements can effectively make claims on the state. Much previous work on social movements focused on the resources available to these movements as the key to their effectiveness. Recent work suggests, however, that differences in the capacities of poor people for resource mobilization are less significant than differences in the nature of the state, which in turn affects the nature and extent of social movements themselves (Houtzager and Pattenden 1999; Tarrow 1998; McAdam et al. 1996:226). Here, the implications of the roll back of the state become especially salient, as capacity to support social sector provision and indeed demands for social rights in the social policy arena has been severely attenuated in many southern contexts.

In recent years, more attention has begun to be paid to mechanisms that can enhance the accountability and responsiveness of the state. The rights-based approach to development opens up the space for new alliances between social movements to demand accountability. This renewed interest in the interface between citizen and the state gives rise to an interest in participatory mechanisms and processes that can provide a means for more direct citizen engagement in enhancing the quality and scope of social provisioning, and can influence social policy.

Ensuring Accountability in Democratic Governance through Participation

It is grossly erroneous to assume and see theatre as an opposition to the governments; despite the fact that government's postures in Africa are usually considered deceptive in their feigned concern for the plight of the ordinary people and with policies that invariably help to prolong the people's exploitation and wretchedness.

Some critical practitioners like Zimbabwean Stephen Chifunyise and Bole Butake of Cameroun have positioned, with reference to previous reactions from governments on practitioners who were termed *rebellious* like in the case of the Kamirithu experience where Ngugi wa Thiong'o was sent to jail, that a confrontational approach cannot be helpful since all it does is to make martyrs of practitioners, while leaving the villagers in the state of poverty and desperation. This paper, to this end, calls for a more pragmatic and more realistic approach in which the government will be involved as collaborators with citizens' in promoting necessary development.

The increased recognition of the capacity of civil society organizations and networks has led to greater attention to the third model of citizenship, in which citizens work to demand greater accountability of the state through newer forms of direct democratic interaction and consultation in the policy process. With greater recognition of the civil society and increasing of good governance, the concept of participation shifts from beneficiary participation as a means of holding the state accountable through new forms of governance that involve more direct state-civil relations.

Traditionally, in democratic governance like Nigeria, accountability is thought to be maintained in a number of ways, e.g. local elections, strong and active opposition parties, media, public meetings and other procedures. Increasingly discussions of governance and accountability focus on forms of broader interaction of public and private social actors, especially at the local level. Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizens influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation but through theatre and drama. This is the kind of participation that Theatre for Development argues will improve the efficiency of public services through making government more accountable and democratic.

Participatory approaches have increasingly been used to enable the people express more directly to those with the power to influence the policy process. Participatory policy research processes such as Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) in South Africa for example, have helped create spaces for change at local government and national level, as well as international discourses. By bringing together those who are directly affected by policy and those who are charged with ensuring responsive service provision, opportunities are opened up for enhancing accountability and responsiveness.

De Sousa Santos (1998:65) offers an important example of participatory budgeting in Brazil which has continually ensured transparency. According to him, the exercise has enabled citizens to engage directly in municipal fiscal planning through elaborate consultation and negotiation process.

It is worthy to note at this point that while a number of participatory methods adopted by Theatre for Development focus on enhancing the participation of the masses in matters that affect their lives, this paper proposes a broader and all encompassing kind which focuses on maintaining accountability of government agencies (particularly) through proper monitoring and evaluation. After all in both Bolivia and India, legislation allows for local vigilance committees to serve a monitoring and watchdog role. Although one may argue that there has been no evidence that these committees have developed the capacity and independence to do their job but nevertheless, there may be great potentials from what they do.

Conclusion/way-forward.

This paper positions that rather than Theatre for Development focusing on self-provisioning among civil societies and rural communities in order to chart development, it acknowledges the importance of the state in service delivery but equally insists on the role of the masses in demanding and negotiating directly with government for greater performance and accountability. It is also the utmost belief of this work that through such participation, users of services can potentially shape policies not only as beneficiaries or consumers in predetermined programmes but as nationals exercising rights of agency, voice and participation.

Majorly, this paper has attempted to go beyond the *users* and *choosers* model that is traditional with Theatre for Development to consider a more actor-oriented approach, in which those affected by government policies act as citizens on their own behalf. In particular, the paper has argued that the concept of community development through active participation by the masses should be expanded to include not only concepts of social rights but also of social responsibilities exercised through self-action and social accountability achieved through direct forms of democratic governance. This is reflected in the title of this paper which is a call for a proper repositioning of participation to encompass the multiple dimensions of nationals. It is the hope of this paper that this may provide a move out of the impasse.

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