

## **COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY APPROACH A Critical Assessment**

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**Abstract.** This study critically evaluates the effectiveness of participatory strategy in mobilizing community for utilizing the services of development project in the tribal and feudal structure of Nasirabad area of Balochistan. The community development, which is an important component of pat feeder command area project, is analyzed in the light of research questions such as to what extent the project has been successful in mobilizing community for development and what factors have badly affected the participatory strategy of project and what are its policy implications. The data used in the study is based on both survey data and project documents, simple statistical methods like mean, standard deviation and coefficient of variance were applied. The major findings include that project has been partially successful in motivating the community towards exploiting the project resources while most of the community organizations remained unsuccessful. It was also found out that the community organizations would not remain sustainable due to institutional and financial problems, therefore, changes are needed in the participatory approach in the tribal structure of Balochistan.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Community participation has become one of the important features of new development paradigm. Most of the poverty alleviation projects especially designed by World Bank and Asian Development Bank entail involving the beneficiaries in the designing, implementing and monitoring of development projects. However, the potential benefits attached with participatory approach are controversial. The review of literature, to a greater extent,

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confirms the results of effective participation in the form of empowerment of communities, social capital and sustainability of the projects (World Bank, 2000). Moreover, regional specific irrigation projects in Pakistan also claimed the benefits of formation of farmer organizations in the form of greater efficiency, mobilization of social and cash resources. There is enough evidence to show that the performance of the government-managed system is less effective than that of farmer-managed system.

On the other hand, there is some empirical cross-country evidence denying the effectiveness of community organization at targeting the poor due to feudal and elite dominance. The same approach is also criticized for being slow and complex process (Mansuri and Rao, 2004).

Since pat feeder command area development project has been completed in the area where the feudal class is still dominant and where the community is heterogeneous both in terms of assets and social powers, the benefits and costs of community mobilization can be easily tested for determining the effectiveness of participatory approach.

The overall objective of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of participatory approach in community development of project area. The main question, which will be discussed, is whether the project has strengthened the capacity of community organizations by providing the required inputs from the project such as creation of awareness, skills and knowledge through training. The other subsidiary questions include: Did participation of Agricultural Development Groups (ADGs) members in development process increase as visualized? Did it increase the capacity for making collective decisions independently? Did it improve the accessibility and efficiency of community? To what extent the community organizations will remain viable.

## **II. DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

Data used in this paper were mainly drawn from the survey conducted for M. Phil. thesis. The tools used to get primary data in the survey include questionnaire, observation guide and discussion with key informants. Whereas secondary source of data was based on project documents, government reports and other related literature review.

Effectiveness of community organization is evaluated both in qualitative and quantitative indicators like capacity building, participation and empowerment. The efficiency of community network can be detected through changes in knowledge about community affairs. The simplest way to quantify such knowledge is to use set of binary yes/no questions. In this regard, certain dichotomous questions were asked. The results related to

community development were assessed in such a way as to see its implications for participatory approach.

Data analysis is carried out both at the project and distributory level. Data were organized and presented both in tabular and graphic form. Appropriate descriptive methods have been applied for data analysis. Descriptive tools include measure of central tendency, dispersions, proportions and frequency distribution.

### **III. PROJECT'S VERSION OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACH**

Before going to analyze the project efforts at strengthening community organizations in the light of above questions, it should be noted that prior to intervention, the common farmers had no representation or social participation in any village level organization. There was no formal community organization. The feudal class dominated the organizations/institutions such as cooperative societies and water users associations. It was, therefore, decided by the project to organize the new community organizations on the basis of self-help for collective actions. The community was organized on the premise that the local communities are the best protectors of their interest; therefore, they should be grouped so that they can play effective role in the development process of project area. These organizations were formed in different groups like ADGs, Women Development Group and Water Users Association both at village and minor level. These root level organizations were supposed to play effective role in the whole service delivery system (agricultural technology, socio-economic infrastructure, credit and saving services).

The project strongly believed that reaching the poor through building capacity of community members is the only way to get them out of vicious cycle of poverty. In this regard, participatory approach was adopted. The mechanism was designed in a way that the communities should not be passive recipients rather be active partners of development process. On the basis of self-help, communities were supposed to contribute both manually and financially in utilizing of project resources. For example, community groups had to pay some portion of cost contribution in the form of labour and material on constructions of water channels and user services for artificial insemination of livestock etc. In other areas like giving training, selecting sites and monitoring the project, the participatory manner was encouraged.

The other objectives of participatory approach were to develop a sense of greater ownership, better implementation and empowerment of

community which were severely lacking due to high rate of illiteracy and strong hold of feudal structure in the area.

Besides in case of micro credit, pro-poor policy was adopted so that the feudal/big landlords could have little interest to take part in the activities of credit mobilization. The amount of loan was so meager that could not attract the big farmers to participate in loan activities.

In view of the above background, let us examine the selected performance indicators of community development.

## **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Community development can be assessed both by qualitative and quantitative indicators. Some of the important indicators against which the project affects on community's performance are evaluated as under:

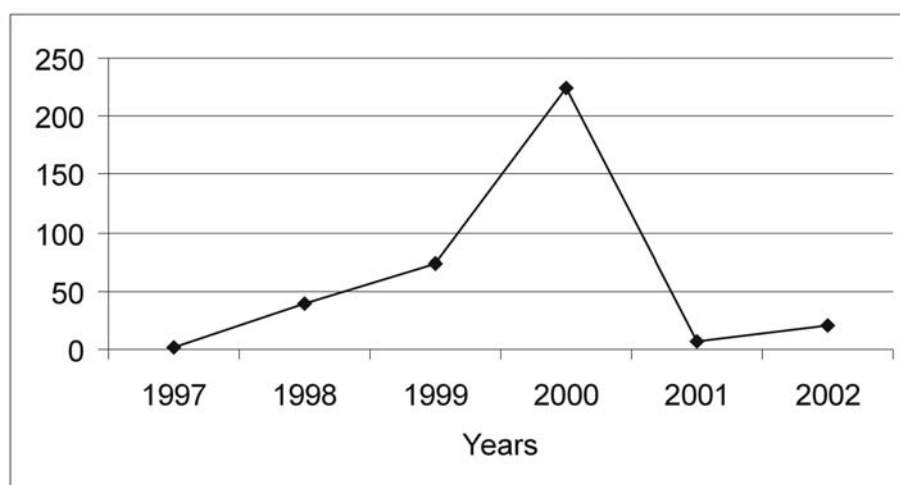
### **1. Capacity Building of ADGs**

The effectiveness of community organizations can be assessed by applying the criteria of capacity building which may be generally defined as the process by which individuals, institutions and societies acquire knowledge and develop ability to better perform functions. Building the capacity of organizations is critical for effective poverty reduction as it helps the poor to exploit opportunities within their communities and develop links with external departments.

As regards the issue of capacity building of community in the study area, the project documents confirm that the project management as per targets has achieved the desired quantitative results. The review of results regarding formation of ADGs and the time and frequency of training bring out the satisfactory picture as illustrated in Figure 1.

The dynamic analysis of project efforts in enhancing capacity building of ADG members reveal that the tempo of group formation was very slow in its early years despite the fact that training was demand driven as it was provided on the desire and needs of beneficiaries. The overall frequency of training in different activities is low with the exception of Agricultural Technology and On Farm Water Management practices (OFWM). The skills and knowledge provided in agriculture and livestock is evident from their performance. The overall adoption rate both in agriculture and livestock is impressive which means that project succeeded in strengthening the capacity of farmers for utilizing the project resources.

FIGURE 1  
Formation of Water User Association



Source: Agriculture and Cooperatives Department, Pat Feeder Command Area Development Project, Agriculture Extension, Dera Murad Jamali.

The effectiveness of community network, which is an important element of capacity building, can also be detected through changes in knowledge. Sets of binary questions were asked from the sample members of ADGs. The results shown in Table 1 reveal that the project has considerably improved the level of knowledge on all selected indicators which has greater implication for capacity development of organization as it keeps the institutional process more transparent.

TABLE 1

Indicators Related to Farmers' Knowledge about Community Organization

| Indicators               | Respondents (Frequency) |    |       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----|-------|
|                          | Yes                     | No | Total |
| Knowledge of bylaws      | 193                     | 63 | 253   |
| Transparency in accounts | 257                     | 23 | 280   |
| Record maintenance       | 408                     | 18 | 426   |
| Record checked           | 406                     | 18 | 424   |

Source: Survey Results (2002).

## 2. Level of Participation in Development

Effective participation of community organizations in the development process is prerequisite for improving the prospects of project. Through

participation, ownership and responsibility are transferred to the beneficiaries and in doing so they are empowered (World Bank, 1996). The higher participation ensures viability of organizations especially in a situation where community members are highly heterogeneous both in terms of assets and ethnicity.

The results regarding participation of farmers in all phases of project cycle present divergent output. The participation results indicate that gradually the community involvement declined in the project cycle. The degree of participation in identification phase and site selection of water channels was significant but in the implementation phase it was found poor. Similarly participation was also found significant in case of direct interest. For example, the attendance of members was usually found to be hired at the time of loan disbursement. On average only 33 percent of ADG's farmers had full participation in the whole process of project development from identification, selection, designing and implementation due to poor performance of NGO and line departments specially in the initial years of project implementation. Besides, the spirit of self-help has also not been properly inculcated among the community members for the reasons of poor training and supervision by the project staff.

Similarly level of participation in the meetings was also found low (50%) badly affecting the functionality of the community organization. The immediate effects of poor participation coming out are that community has been found weak to undertake their development activities and get reach to the resources of project. Another effect of poor participation is that the ADG members have low level of awareness as how to practice the organizational rules.

### **3. Ability to Make Decisions Independently**

Taking decisions independently is another sign of community empowerment. On average, in 68 cases decisions were not influenced by political or tribal leaders, which means that in majority cases decisions without outside interference and dictations have been made. Normally decisions making is processed in a systematic way about development issues. First, they openly discuss then after consensus development, they make decisions in a democratic way, such a mode of decisions give them confidence to take the initiative to improve their circumstances. They were found more vocal in expressing their desires for education and health facilities. While in the remaining cases, tribal leaders/big landlords directly and indirectly influence their decisions. Based on this result, it may be said that decision making

without interference of tribal elite is an indicator of change which means that the community members by and large are getting free from the grip of exploitative forces.

#### **4. Conflict Management**

Conflict arising is a common phenomena in any working system due to interest clash among the community members. Normally conflict arises over water distribution, water theft, *warabundi*, misuse of fund, crop theft, refusal to contribute to fund rising. Most of the times these conflicts/disputes are resolved by the leadership of ADGs and WUA occurred among the community members. In some cases, conflicts/grievances are resolved by tribal chiefs or project staffs.

Generally mechanism to resolve conflict is built-in tribal set up. The tribal chiefs and elders of the community as per the traditions of area resolve the disputes. However, with the formation of ADGs, the traditional source of conflict management has become weaker. Now they are playing active role in the resolution of disputes.

Improved social interaction among community members is an important index of effective community organizations. Community based projects are evaluated in terms of externalities. If positive social externalities in the form of better gender relation, unity and cooperation are the outcome of project then such intervention is considered successful.

The perception of farmers about social interaction was found positive as is evident from the following figures. A majority of respondents (60%) is of the opinion that it created unity. Similarly, tolerance and collective working spirit are the other outcomes of community organizations accounting 25 percent and 15 percent respectively. However, 10 percent are of the opinion that a community organization is the source of conflict among the community members because they do not target the supremacy of leaders due to jealousy.

#### **5. Linkages of Farmers with Different Departments of Government Institutions and Private Centres**

Strong linkages between government institutions and farmers are important for agricultural development. The policies of institutions like agriculture research institutes, extension services and capacities of farmers are directly related. Construction of successful interaction with government agencies and technical expert improve the working relationship, which in turn increases organizational capacity of community.

The overall results regarding linkages are disappointing. Only 15 percent respondents consider this interaction satisfactory. While a majority (74%) is of the view that it is to some extent satisfactory. While probing the reasons, it was come out that the large and influential farmers utilize the extension services in a better way. They get technical knowledge and other project services in more quantity than the small farmers due to their influence over the project staff. The negative implications of poor linkages with these institutions have been found small farmers who need to be capacitated in terms of education/information.

## **6. Fund Raising Ability**

The effectiveness of community organization especially in irrigation project can be assessed by its ability to raise financial resources. The fund generation is required within the community members not only for the repair and maintenance of watercourses but also for undertaking any collective activity. Moreover, fund raising through cost recovery provides an alternative operational and maintenance strategy which is necessary for sustainability of project.

The results on this issue are discouraging. More than 62 percent ADGs have raised no funds due to poor motivation and unwillingness of community members. The factors are three folds:

- (i) The reason for poor ability to raise the fund lies in the psyche of community who used to avoid paying user fee for public services. They used to receive public services with low prices (subsidy) or without any payment. In other words, they have receiving mentality which is widely prevalent in the tribal set up. This type of attitude could not be changed within project period. It needs long time institutional change with strong backing of government.
- (ii) The target groups were not involved in the stage of planning due to which they seem to be not convinced to share the cost of services.
- (iii) The purchasing power of poor farmers did not allow them to share the burden of cost of resources.

Assessing the performance of community organization on the basis of different criteria, capacity building, participation empowerment and accessibility, it may be pointed out that the potential role of community visualized by the project was not realized to the full extent. Indicators related to community organization show slow progress, which implies that the intended empowering effects did not come out as a result of poor



implementation of participatory approach. Similarly variations on selected indicators (5.2%) reveal a wide range disparity which shows that effectiveness of community development indicators are not consistent. Most of them have below performance. This also implies that some ADGs are successful while some ADGs performance is not satisfactory.

TABLE 2

## Comparison of the Performance Indicators of Community Development

| Indicators                             | Mean % | Standard Deviation | Coefficient of Variance % |
|--|--------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Participation in Meeting               | 56     | 13.69              | 54.76                     |
| Participation in Development Process   | 25     | 13.59              | 45                        |
| Cash Mobilization Ability              | 50     | 40.00              | 80                        |
| Conflict Management                    | 33.3   | 18.86              | 56.58                     |
| Linkage with Government Deptt.         | 50     |                    |                           |
| Ability to Make Decision Independently | 25     | 44.90              | 99.6                      |
| Awareness                              | 50     | 12.51              | 25                        |
| Perception About Social Change         | 27.5   | 17.41              | 63.31                     |

Source: Survey Results (2002).

### **FACTORS ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN THE STUDY AREA**

The question arises why participatory approach could not bring out the desired results. The reasons for poor performance of community organizations can be attributed to the following factors:

- (i) Poor social mobilization
- (ii) Tribal affiliations
- (iii) Lack of regular monitoring and evaluation
- (iv) Non-realization of NGOs role
- (v) Lack of narrow targeting

#### **1. Poor Social Mobilization**

One of the reasons for poor performance of community organization is that the project could not motivate the community to fully participate in process of development. The project staff has not experience about the conditions of

poor communities organized swiftly without motivating them. Rushing to help the poor through participation may be self-defeating unless institutional capacity of poor is developed (World Bank, 2004). In fact, lack of organizational skills and lack of ownership have been found limiting factors. If the development of community organization work was conducted by NGO it would have brought positive results. The experiences of different community based projects also confirm the positive results of NGOs' participation in social mobilizing of people (Evans and Bataille, 1997). Capability approach by noble winner, Amartya Sen calls for partnership among government, NGOs and community organization which is missing in the instant case. Generally there is mistrust between government and NGOs in the province due to their conflicting approach. The need arises to create and strengthen NGO government collaboration by creating new organizational framework that could facilitate interaction between government, NGO and CBOs, for example, Balochistan trial management where different actors of development are working amicably.

Only in the area of micro credit, the role of NGO (Taraquee Trust) is evident for community mobilization. What is more important is that the role of community group is itself important for social mobilization provided groups are enthusiastic about the targets of project. The creation of desire and ambition among community members is a long-term process which can be consolidated with strong motivation.

## **2. Tribal Affiliations**

Tribal and inter tribal relations determine their social, political and economic behaviour of people in the study area. Population is ethnically diverse with the presence of numerous tribes, sub tribes and clans. Clashes and conflicts between them are still existent (Ahmad, 2003).

Though the beneficiaries now recognize that through formation of project-sponsored groups, they have been provided with a forum to sit together and resolve their disputes and differences amicably. The new organizational structure in the form of community organization has been found to be more responsive to the needs of development than the old tribal structure. However, it was observed that tribal ties and loyalty are still considered as protective umbrella and majority of people want to resolve their problems within the framework of tribal structure, so it can be said that the influence of only viable and strong community organization can dilute the tribal influence which does not appear to be the reality of ground in near future.

### **3. Lack of Regular Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Organization**

The project due to poor institutional capacity could not properly monitor and evaluate the performance of community organization. The monitoring and evaluation strategy used by project is covering only quantitative aspects of community development such as training level of participation, number of workshops etc. It did not touch upon the important aspects of capacity building like sense of ownership, commitment and satisfaction. As a result, the real feedback on the performance of community organization was not channeled so the project staff remained ignorant about the real change going on in the perception and attitude of target groups if monitoring and evaluation was conducted regularly by professional consultants, the situation would be quite different. Similarly if participatory approach was adopted by involving communities in the process, it would have brought out the ground realities.

### **4. Lack of Narrow Targeting**

Targeting the needy is critical for any poverty alleviation project. The project must have clear target groups because the problems of different strata of population are not similar. Moreover, narrowly targeted programme are prescribed for the reasons of efficiency and flexibility. In the instant project, benefits are for the entire population of study area. If the project targeted some of its packages only for the poor it could have more beneficial to community as a whole. In this regard, NGOs could play a key role in the implementation of targeting the poor. Conventional wisdom suggests that NGOs can reach the poor in a cost effective manner as they have experience doing with poor. When this problem was discussed with the project staff, they told that in the initial stages of project, it was politically not possible to identify the poor and then launched special packages for them without the approval and consent of community leaders of the project area. However, they hired the services of Balochistan Rural Support Programme, which could not continue its work in the field due to their internal conflicts and mistrust among government, NGOs and donor agencies while the other NGOs in the province were lacking the required institutional capacity.

## **IV. SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY GROUPS**

In view of the above poor performance, the question arises whether the community organization will remain sustainable, if not, what will be its implications for future project strategy regarding participatory approach. Although sustainability of community organization can be assessed in a

broader framework, its future viability may be analyzed in terms of financial and institutional dimensions with available information.

As regards financial sustainability, potential problem regarding sustainability of community organizations may arise due to shortage of money. In fact, regular sufficient supply of money is cementing factor keeping them together. Since the project is no more funded by the government nor by any other agency, it will be a big challenge for any NGO to create financial resources both from the beneficiaries and the donors with or without the support of government.

Cost recovery is an important element of project financial sustainability. The fee to be covered from the use of services is necessary to generate revenue. The results reveal that cost recovery for both operation and maintenance as well as for services of livestock is likely to undermine the long term project sustainability especially with respect to agriculture technology because the mechanism devised by project was not followed.

As far as institutional sustainability of community organization is concerned, creating the institutional infrastructure to sustain the project benefits over the long run is necessary. It is stressed that “unless appropriately sensitive organizational strategies and channels are subsequently employed and adequate gestation time provided, the resultant beneficiary will be vulnerable to distortions and will have limited effectiveness” (World Bank Report, 1999-2000).

One of the threats to sustainability is fear, apprehensions expressed by the farmers that without any external institutional support (NGO, government and donor agencies), the group members might find themselves at odds with big landlords if the clash of interest in irrigation water due to share or other productive resources. It has been discussed with some of members of ADGs that community groups are ineffective for social action due to tribal differences and infrequent meetings. This trend can be considered as potential threat for project sustainability because most of the work is of collective nature. Another threatening factor is poor involvement of small farmers in the community organizations. Though landless tenants have been given due consideration while structuring community organizations, their involvement in the implementation process was not satisfactory. One probable reason may be that approximately 80 percent of the ADG members were landowners followed by landless tenants occupying 21 percent. In the long run, it may get worse due to influence of landowners over local institutions.

Moreover, some of the ADGs were formed at the later stage of project, which could not grow on sound ground rather they are considered to be at infancy stage from capacity point of view. Their chances of survival are also weak. So it may be deducted that community organizations, which were supposed to be the future owners of project, have dim prospects to be sustained.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of above discussion, it can be concluded that participatory approach has partially succeeded in mobilizing and strengthening the community organizations in the project area. If the role of NGO, which is catalyst in sustainable participatory development, was realized during implementation, the objectives of community development could be fully achieved. The effects of project on community development may prove temporary if alternative development activities will not be started in the study area. Because the experience of similar project like social action programme, minor irrigation schemes in the province have proved that unless follow up efforts of social mobilization of community is conducted, the communities cannot be kept viable. Moreover, the participatory version of project in its theoretical framework seems to have been failed in efficient and effective utilization of community groups. So the policy implication arises to modify participatory approach in the light of social, political and cultural ground realities of the tribal structure. In this regard, it may be suggested to categorize the community for effective targeting before launching any community based project. In a nutshell, it can be stated that participatory approach is a long-term process requiring strong support from the government and donor agencies.

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