

**HELPING FISHERFOLK
TO HELP THEMSELVES**
**A STUDY IN PEOPLE'S
PARTICIPATION**



For Fisheries Development
BAY OF BENGAL PROGRAMME

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A Study by



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HELPING FISHERFOLK TO HELP THEMSELVES: A STUDY OF PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

A sub-project of the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) carried out in cooperation with member-governments, fisheries institutions, NGOs (non-government organizations) and the fisherfolk themselves.

The BOBP, which promotes small-scale fisherfolk communities in countries around the Bay of Bengal, is sponsored mainly by Sweden, Denmark and the UK. The main executing agency is the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). The project on 'People's Participation' was funded by the National Swedish Board of Fisheries.

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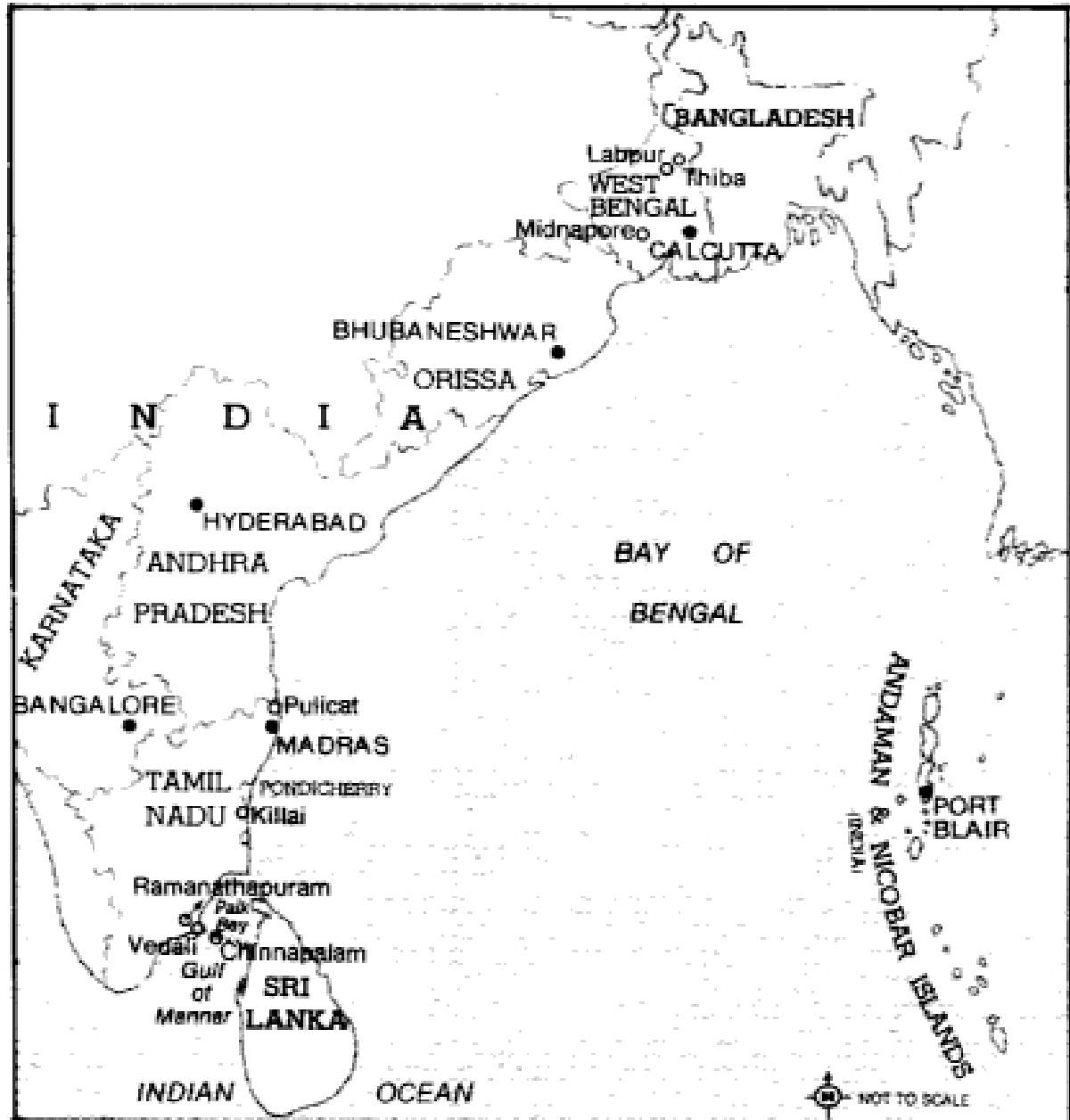
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BOBP MEMBER COUNTRIES



THE INDIAN EAST COAST



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Preface

The Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) is a regional fisheries programme of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), with headquarters in Madras, India. It aims at improving the conditions of small scale fisherfolk in seven member-countries around the Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand). Towards this end the BOBP develops, demonstrates and promotes new techniques and technologies in various fisheries disciplines; it also seeks to introduce new ideas and methodologies in fisheries extension.

In 1986, a special fund from the National Swedish Board of Fisheries gave the BOBP an opportunity to study and reflect on 'people's participation' in small-scale fisheries and fisherfolk development. The one-year endeavour covered a wide range of activities, and culminated in a regional consultation to put to test the year's learning. It was held in Bangalore, India, in May 1987.

The year's effort set out, optimistically, to evolve methods, strategies and techniques to enable participation in development. The first task was to scan the literature to study the state of the art and through reading and discussion to evolve an "operational" definition of 'people's participation'.

A series of appraisals were then undertaken with a working definition of PEP and a checklist of questions to guide the effort.

These included a study of BOBP projects in aquaculture, fishing technology and extension; appraisals of governmental efforts at participation like the West Bengal government's participatory rural development planning effort, and the Change Agents Programme of the Ministry of Plan Implementation, Sri Lanka; appraisals of NGO and international agency efforts such as the NORAD project on participatory fisherfolk rural development project in Sri Lanka, the DANTDA-CODEC participatory fisherfolk development projects in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and CIRDAP'S fisherwomen development projects in several Asian countries.

Simultaneously, several desk studies were initiated ICLARM undertook a study of self-regulatory fisheries management experiences in the ASEAN region ; FAO in Rome reviewed the role of fisherfolk organizations in fisheries management and development in industrialized countries; and Prof. Richard Pollnac of the University of Rhode Island produced a keynote paper for the Bangalore consultation to establish a framework within which the whole year's learning could be discussed.

Learning by doing formed an important aspect of the year's effort in participatory planning and implementation of seaweed culture trials in Tamil Nadu, India and participatory planning of shrimp pen culture trials in Chilaw, Sri Lanka, gave BOBP hands-on experience of using and benefitting from people's participation in their work.

Two meetings, one of Indian fisherfolk NGOs, another of Sri Lankan fisherfolk NGOs gave important insights into participatory approaches of NGOs in the context of fisheries and fisherfolk development.

The year's effort – distilled into bibliographies, notes, papers, case studies and reports – were then discussed at the Bangalore regional consultation in the summer of 1987.

This volume attempts a process documentation of the PEP effort in its entirety. BOBP and the participants in the effort,

have had their paths and directions towards development *praxis* illuminated, we hope, to a certain extent. A beginning has been made; the test of course will be in participation, in practice.

An effort as large as this would have been impossible without the participation and support of the numerous scientists, scholars, development workers, government staff and BOBP staff who gave generously of their time and effort – and more importantly of fisherfolk who through their participation showed us the way. To all of them our sincere thanks. However BOBP bears the full responsibility for all the activities undertaken in connection with the “People’s Participation” sub-project.

L O ENGVALL

*Director,
Bay of Bengal Programme
for Fisheries Development*

1

Introduction

During the early 60s and 70s, development efforts in countries bordering the Bay of Bengal focussed on the establishment of large-scale fisheries. High production and productivity was the aim. The traditional fisherfolk of the area, the small-scale fishermen and their families, were to be absorbed by the large-scale fisheries (in the fishing itself, in fish processing, in fish distribution etc.) as well as by other sectors of the national economy.

The results, however, have not been as expected. High population growth, marginalization of farmers, and other factors have pushed increasing numbers of people into the small-scale fisheries sector, where limited capital can ensure food and a small income. This in turn has caused other problems.

Fish is a natural resource available to all. Since there are usually no restrictions on catching it, the growing inshore fishing efforts, as well as expanding large-scale fisheries, have caused fish stocks to be fully or over-exploited. As a result, small-scale fisherfolk have been particularly affected; their catches and incomes have decreased and they have faced regular confrontation with large-scale fisheries.

These problems can be solved partly by diversifying fishing methods, improving post-harvest technology and raising the price producers get. In the long run, however, there is need for regulation to secure sufficient resources for the fishermen. To make sure that such regulation will not generate unacceptable economic and social consequences for segments of the fishing population, efforts to raise productivity must be complemented with alternative efforts to tap other income opportunities and provide education, social services etc.

Development efforts with these objectives in mind require active participation by the people most concerned. Yet the ever so obvious fact that ‘people’s participation’ (PEP) is essential in any project meant for their well-being is only too often forgotten. That has been the case on several occasions; the very fisherfolk for whom development projects were intended were rarely involved actively in the efforts to help them.

Perhaps one reason for this is that participatory development seems to mean many things to many people. The concept seems so vague as to mean anything from answering of questionnaires to empowering communities to take control of their destinies! The result of such diverse thinking is often confusion.

The logic of fisherfolk participating in the improvement of their own lot is to enable them to critically understand themselves and their problems, to identify their needs and establish their priorities, to evolve their own methods and strategies to meet those needs and solve their problems, to mobilize local resources to this end and seek outside resources if necessary, and to implement all this activity through organized teamwork and learn in the process. Seen in this context, participation becomes not just the means but the very essence of development.

Several approaches to such ‘people’s participation’ have been identified, ranging from consultations with the target group before project planning, to allowing the target group acquire decision-making powers both in the planning and implementation stages, including utilization of the development funds. Several projects in the Bay of Bengal region have been implemented on this basis.

Some fisherfolk involved in these projects have been participating in problem identification and in the testing of results. Others are in daily contact with scientists and technicians, resulting in a fruitful dialogue. There has also been a high degree of participation in extension-oriented projects, such as community development, women’s activities, non-formal education etc. In most cases, however, the entire target group cannot be directly involved, so the selection of representatives has been encouraged, or organizations with representative leadership have been evolved.

While much progress has been made, several problems have also been encountered. Some are problems inherent to the region, possibly due to the socio-political and organizational characteristics of the beneficiaries or of the development agencies. Others are due to not using clear and tested strategies, methods and techniques. Also there are other more practical problems.

Fisheries administrations are neither organized nor manned by staff educated for 'people's participation'. The authorities concentrate mainly on the production of fish, neglecting other aspects of community life. Often ignored, for instance, is the fear that women in fishing communities generally have; they feel their comparatively strong position in the community is threatened by the new means of processing, distribution and marketing being introduced. Little effort has been made to establish organizations to represent the fisherfolk in discussions with the authorities or to develop extension systems through which the authorities could reach the fisherfolk. Much of this (including negative outcome), is known from several projects involving grassroots participation, but documentation is lacking about the experience gained during implementation of the projects.

The Bay of Bengal Programme (**BOBP**), in the mid-80s, undertook to remedy this lacuna by studying the techniques, methods and organizational strategies necessary to make PEP a reality.

As part of this effort, BOBP took a close look at its own experience and the experiences of other agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.

The chart overleaf (Fig 1) lists all the activities that were undertaken during the project. The aim of these activities was to learn as much as possible about 'people's participation'; what it is, how it happens and what the factors are that make it possible or hinder it.

The very nature of the subject means a study of widely diverse projects. To ensure comparability and a certain coherence, the investigators were provided, after briefing, with a checklist (on page 5) to guide them in their appraisal of the projects.

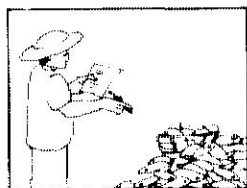
Their findings were subsequently discussed by government and non-government officials, project administrators, technical

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING BOBP'S STUDY ON PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

RESEARCH



Desk study: Bibliography on PEP



Study of self-regulatory mechanisms for fisheries management in the ASEAN region



Study of West Bengal Government's participatory rural development planning effort



Desk study: Role of fisheries organizations in fisheries management and development in industrialized countries



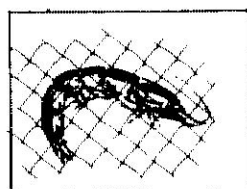
Desk study: Keynote paper on PEP



Desk study: Defining PEP

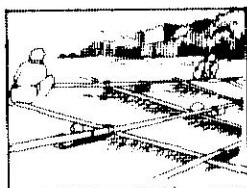


Participatory planning: seaweed culture trials: Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu, India



Participatory planning for shrimp pen culture trials in Chilaw, Sri Lanka

APPRAISALS



Study of BOBP projects in aquaculture, fishing technology and extension



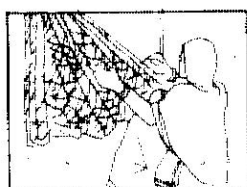
Study of Change Agents Programme, Ministry of Plan Implementation, Sri Lanka



Study of Fisheries Social Development Organizations, Ministry of Fisheries, Sri Lanka



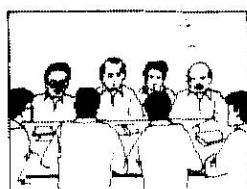
Study of a NORAD project on participatory rural development, Sri Lanka



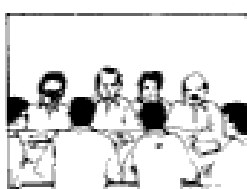
Study of DANIDA-CODEC Project on participatory fisherfolk community development, Chittagong, Bangladesh



study of experiences with CIRDAP participatory development projects with fisherwomen in Asia



Meeting of Indian Fisherfolk NGOs to discuss PEP in fisheries development (Dec. '86)



Meeting of Sri Lankan Fisherfolk NGOs to discuss PEP in fisheries development (March '87)

personnel, agency representatives and BOBP staff. The fruits of these discussions and the investigations that preceded them are the pages that follow.

In these pages, ‘people’s participation’ is defined, issues and questions are raised, methods and strategies discussed, and directions and approaches suggested. All this could help other agencies as well as governments to achieve more active ‘people’s participation’ not only in small-scale fisheries projects meant for the development of the fisherfolk themselves but also in any other rural activity with similar aims.

Checklist used in BOBP Appraisals of ‘People’s Participation’

This is the checklist BOBP investigators were provided with to ensure comparability and a certain coherence in their appraisal of the widely diverse projects studied.

- * What does the project staff understand by ‘people’s participation’? Why do they feel ‘people’s participation’ is necessary?
- * How does the project actually put into practice their concept of PEP in day-to-day planning, implementation and monitoring?
 - How and why was the project initiated? Why was the particular community chosen? Which came first, the technology or the community?
 - How was the project planned? For whose needs? By whom? If there was ‘people’s participation’ how was it actually put into practice? Did the community have information and access to policy?
 - Organizationally, how did they participate? Was it only leaders or were there committees, general meetings or any other means of participation?
 - Was the indigenous knowledge of the people used at all? How was this knowledge tapped and made use of?
 - How was the project presented (sold to) the community? What commitments were made and what commitments sought?

- How do the staff see the project? And do the people see it in terms of intent, benefit, impact, etc?
- How were the people involved in the implementation? Were they involved in planning, day-to-day management, labour inputs, resource inputs or in any other form? How did the people organize their involvement?
 - How were the people involved in monitoring and evaluation? Did they have access to information and did they have the power to influence the course of action and make mid-course changes? How was this organized?
 - Did the community have access to information? How was the access ensured?
 - Did the community have any non-project expertise to turn to for help and advocacy?
 - What has been the experience of PEP in the project? How has it helped or hindered, and, if so, how and why?
- * How has the community changed since the activity?
- Has it increased confidence?
 - Has it ensured better organization?
 - Do people now take initiatives?
 - How do they approach new problems?
- * List particular techniques, methods, management strategies and policies that have helped make PEP possible.

2

Defining 'People's Participation'

The very purpose of development activity, seen in its broadest socio-political sense, is:

- to enable people to critically understand their situations and problems;
- to identify their needs and to prioritize them;
- to evolve methods of resolving these needs and problems;
- to mobilize local resources to such an end;
- to implement the activity in an organized manner; and
- to monitor, evaluate and learn from the effort.

Naturally, the participation of the people is necessary for such an effort. But it is the very lack of involvement and organization amongst people for various political, social and historical reasons, which is one of the causes of under development. Since development efforts cannot stipulate people's participation as an initial condition, such participation should be actively promoted as an integral part of each programme/project and should work, within a time-frame, towards an ideal (even if it may not be wholly achievable) condition.

A working definition of this ideal of 'people's participation' could thus be:

The development and nurturing of attitudes, beliefs, and processes that would enable development agencies and the intended local beneficiaries to work together for the uplift of local beneficiaries. They must know

and understand their own needs, list their priorities, then organise local resources or materials to answer those needs or choose programmes/projects best suited to the needs from those offered by the outside agencies, and thereafter involve themselves in every aspect of the project, from guiding and planning to implementing it with active local participation, monitoring its progress and evaluating its performance and worth.

Such a definition of the ideal implies that:

- local traditions, knowledge and experience are not only necessary for the success of programmes and projects, but in many ways may actually be superior to external ‘expertise’; development programmes and projects become less of doing and imposing and more of motivating and enabling a shift from management to extension as it were;
- the technology and practice of development have to be demystified and simplified, and free access to information given to the people not only to learn, but to critically understand, use and work with knowledge;
- the relationship between the people and the development practitioners resembles that between a client and a consultant rather than between a receiver and giver. For this to actually work, it would require that the two partners be at least on par, which, in turn, means empowering the community through organization, mobilization and consequent socio-political structural change;
- communication patterns between the partners should move away from consultations towards negotiation;
- decision-making (in a real sense) is shared (if not totally expropriated) by the people; and
- ‘successful’ development, with and through ‘people’s participation’ might eliminate the role of, and the need for, the development practitioners who set the whole process in motion.

The single biggest constraint to development through ‘people’s participation’ is that it depends much more on *attitudinal* and *belief* changes amongst both development practitioners and intended beneficiaries than on the acquisition of knowledge or development

of particular skills and techniques. Training, the classical solution, helps, but, by itself, it is not sufficient to overcome this constraint.

Other constraints include:

- The fear of change in the power structure that could be a consequence of empowering the community. Since development agencies and practitioners usually belong to, and work for, the groups in power, there is reason to be a little sceptical about their commitment to promoting processes that may, in time, undermine the very structure that supports them.
- The danger of being diverted from specialization. Most development agencies increase their effectiveness by technical specialization. But concentration on 'people's participation', which generally takes time to get under way, could divert the agency from its proven capabilities and dilute its specialization, especially when it feels the need to bring in 'others'
- Doubts over representativeness and accountability. For the intended beneficiaries to constructively participate, they would require organization. And organization means leaders and representatives to do the actual work. But how representative are these leaders of the people and how accountable are they to them? Such doubts could undermine people's participation.
- The part-time nature of participation by the beneficiaries. Participation in complex programming requires enterprise, managerial ability and time. But all are usually in short supply and difficult to rectify, especially as development is only a part-time activity of the intended beneficiaries.
- The need for self-perpetuation and self-reliance. People's participation, to succeed, needs to be self-perpetuating and self-reliant, not dependent on continuous inputs from the very people the beneficiaries have to negotiate with, decide over and monitor. If advocacy groups are to act as promoters and mediators, it can only complicate an already messy issue.

This definition and amplification of people's participation emerged from the analysis of the case studies considered during the BOBP's year of study. The gist of that learning is presented in the subsequent chapters.

3

Understanding 'People's Participation'

Encouraging people's participation in development projects is not a new concept. It has been known over the years as 'grassroots development', 'citizen's participation', 'community participation', 'popular participation' and 'self-help', among other things. But whatever this widely talked of concept's name, the concept of people's participation itself seems to mean many things to many people, and there has been much confusion and misapplication in its implementation. Therefore, there is a need to clearly understand the level of people's participation that is necessary to achieve the goals of a specific programme. To arrive at such an understanding, people's participation should be looked at in terms of:

- I. The quality of participation.
- II. The types of participation possible.
- III. The phases of participation.
- IV. The proportion of those potentially affected who really participate in such schemes.
- V. The representativeness and accountability of the leader and the local organizations of the potentially-affected community.
- VI. The degree of people's participation in terms of labour and money inputs.

A closer look at these criteria to judge people's participation is revealed in the following pages.

Quality of participation

True participation of the people requires them to:

- 1) have a meaningful say in the project, and**
- 2) exercise effective control over the processes and activities involved in it.**

This participatory involvement of community leaders and/or the community (in this study, mainly fisherfolk) can be at seven levels; in order of increasing importance, they are:

- a) Participating as ordered, but without having contributed to the decision-making.**
- b) Participating by choosing one from several predetermined alternatives.**
- c) Participating by providing minimal information and suggestions.**
- d) Participating by providing extensive information and suggestions.**
- e) Participating by critically evaluating the alternative projects that evolve out of the extensive information and suggestions they themselves have provided.**
Participating by working together with planners and administrators to collect and/or provide relevant information, interacting with them in the creation of development plans, and monitoring and evaluating the project during and after implementation.
- g) Participating by creating their own plans with the assistance of outside expertise, then voluntarily submitting them to responsible development agencies for implementation and, thereafter, involving themselves in all steps from project development and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.**

All these levels of participation are apparent, singly or in combination, in the several case studies presented with this report.

Types of participation

The different types of subjects that projects deal with lend themselves to different types and levels of people's participation.

For example, in a research and development project, such as designing a boat or testing the technical feasibility of a particular type of aquaculture, the participation of the beneficiaries would be more necessary at the stage of problem-identification or when the results were being tested than in the actual research and development. Where a technology is being transferred, it would be better if the community worked closely and in daily contact with the experts, learning from them and, in turn, helping them to learn from the community.

At the other end of the spectrum, projects aimed at community development, creating income-generating activities and non-formal education lend themselves to a high degree of people's participation. But whatever the project, successful participation is possible only if the community has a working knowledge of the activity and has the confidence to work as a partner on it.

Phases of participation

People's participation also varies with the project phase. For example, some projects may involve people only at the stage of problem identification, project identification or planning. Some may involve people in the actual implementation either through contributions of labour and money or in actual management and decision-making. Yet others may involve people in monitoring, evaluation and post-evaluation. It must be noted that here, as in the different types of participation, educating and training the community can play a major role in increasing participation.

The potentially-affected who actively participate

There must be a quantitative dimension to people's participation, assessed in terms of the proportion of the potentially-affected people who actively participate in a project. Vague terms like 'community leaders' and/or 'fisherfolk' have to be much more precisely defined. There must also be a qualitative dimension that specifies the relevant social, economic, political, cultural and other strata of the community represented in the effort.

A particularly difficult but necessary aspect of this last dimension is that, to achieve social feasibility, it is almost always necessary

to involve those groups and strata of society in the development process **who may not benefit from the exercise or who may actually stand to lose from it.** Involving fish traders in a project that **enables** fisherfolk to take control of their marketing is a good example of this hard-headed reality.

Representativeness and accountability of the leadership

Since everyone in a community cannot be directly involved in any partnership for development planning, the role of leaders, representatives or organizations, as well as their actual representativeness and accountability, become important in assessing the quality of people's participation.

Leaders, representatives and organizations may or may not represent the desires of the common fisherfolk. In fact, evidence indicates that community leaders frequently use their positions to enhance their own status rather than to ensure the welfare of the community. Moreover many organizational forms, traditional and modern, such as co-operatives, local bodies and associations, do not, in practice, have any mechanisms of accountability that will enable the members to correct the decisions and actions of their representatives.

There are also instances where no partnership or organization exists. In such cases, the planning agency may even have to create an organizational structure with all its attendant problems.

Labour and monetary inputs in participation

Finally, the community's contribution of labour and money needs to be considered. This is not only the most visible and most easily measurable aspect of people's participation, but it also most clearly indicates the people's involvement.

The extent of the community's physical contribution and the other five dimensions detailed above provides a precise assessment of people's participation leading to more realistic statements of project objectives, strategies and work plans enabling more accurate evaluation.

4

Securing 'People's Participation'

That fisherfolk should participate in activities intended for their development is self-evident. But this rarely happens. This has been mentioned before and it will be repeated in the pages that follow.

Fisherfolk, in their small, often remote, habitats, have generally lived fairly secluded lives; the trader and occasionally the tax collector are their only contacts with the outside world. Development, if any, welfare and the solution of problems were once local efforts initiated and implemented by the fisherfolk themselves. But, today, development activity and welfare have increasingly become government (or agency) functions and are implemented in the community by outsiders. One of the first problems that arises from this separation of the developer and the object of development is the question: *Whose needs, what needs and whose priorities are met in the development effort?*

Fisherfolk rarely separate and articulate their needs and their problems into neat classifications. They have their indigenous knowledge and expertise developed through generations of experience. This knowledge, while it might be considered unscientific and not 'modern', does have a separate and, often, sound logic of its own and meets the everyday requirements of the community. Thus fisherfolk prioritize their needs and problems on the basis of their own logic, world view and local context.

Development agencies, on the other hand, are usually specialized groups working in some specific areas, for example on motorization of craft or aquaculture or education. Their understanding of

fisheries and fisherfolk is usually at the macro level; consequently emphasize macro problems, such as increasing fish catches to feed urban markets or the need to export fish to earn foreign exchange for the country.

The result of this dichotomy is that development programmes usually deal with problems and needs perceived as important by development experts, with the community's own needs and priorities getting second place, if at all. When this happens, and the needs left by the people are not heeded, they can hardly be expected to be eager and enthusiastic about programmes and projects. This, in turn, affects the quality of the programme and their long-term sustainability.

Involving people in defining and prioritizing their problems that need to be tackled is a sure way of getting them involved. Such involvement often makes for success and quality. This does not mean that the problems and needs identified by development experts are not important; all it suggests is that a beginning should be made with the needs and priorities of the people themselves. In time, and with increasing confidence and solidarity, other areas of effort can be incorporated into programmes with equal success.

In tackling the needs and the priorities of the people, agencies might consider the following ways of securing people's participation.

- I. Since development agencies specialize – and that is the efficient way to manage knowledge and activity – the needs and the priorities of the people often lie outside the agency's capabilities. Knowledge of these can help agencies to diversify their work and *bring in other agencies to meet the people's priorities*, thus ensuring, in the long term, the success of their (the agencies) own specialized programmes.
2. Agencies must also realize that growing population and limited resources simply mean that all the people cannot be equally helped towards their development. For the agency, this means it must decide on what is its target group and how it should be chosen; for an individual in the community, on the other

hand, the question is one of being helped or not, of breaking out of poverty or being drowned in it. The central question here is not who is selected but how the selection is done and by whom. The solution lies not in increasing the availability of resources nor in developing more national approaches to the selection of beneficiaries, but in *legitimizing the selection* in the eyes of the *community to ensure social feasibility*. *This can obviously be done better, and in a more legitimate way, by decisively involving the community in the process.*

3. A rather alarming trend, given increasing populations, increased fishing efforts (often due to the introduction of more efficient technologies), the open access nature of many fisheries, and the poor and often non-existent traditional management of resources, is that the catch per fisherman seems to be dropping. Resources management, to ensure sustained yields and equitable distribution of benefits, seems to be the only way out. The remote, scattered locations of fisherfolk villages and the long coastlines make one thing certain; that *resource management would have to be done mainly by the fisherfolk themselves*. No agency or government could regulate or police resource management if the communities themselves did not believe in it and want to do it.
4. The fishing occupation has some specific attributes not found in other occupations. These attributes are:
 - The mobility and migratory nature of fisherfolk who move with the season and the migration of fish;
 - The division of labour in the fishing community that places responsibility on women for tasks which are frequently shared, or considered men's work, in non-fishing communities;
 - The high degree of co-operation and egalitarianism amongst fishcrews on the one hand and the intense competition between them, due to the open access nature of many fisheries, on the other; and
 - The geographic and socio-political isolation of fishing communities from the general population mainstream.

Because of these special attributes of the profession, *encouraging and ensuring participation by fisherfolk in development is the most efficient method of increasing the chances of success of projects meant for them.*

An analysis of the foregoing makes it obvious that, if development is seen as people taking control of their lives, analyzing it, giving **it and working towards improving** it, then their participation is essential, as all this has to be done only by them and not by others **for and on behalf of them.**

5

Participation: End or Means?

Participation in development is a complex, multi-dimensional concept which is difficult to quantify. It **also deals more** with processes than with specific end-products. These make **it difficult for development practitioners to monitor or evaluate participative** programmes, particularly from the point of view of achievements. The problem is that participation, while **it is most** often considered a tool, is also, in the context of the meaning of development, an end in itself.

Participation, with its peculiar dual nature of being a tool **and an** end to be achieved by the tool, suggests that, no matter how little the participation to begin with, it is a positive step towards not merely efficient and socially feasible action but towards **development itself**.

Who participates in whose activity?

Development, welfare and problem-solving were, in the past, activities that families, kinfolk and communities tackled. But with **development and welfare increasingly and, unfortunately, often** exclusively becoming government responsibilities, or, at best, agency functions, the question of who participates in whose **activity** becomes very relevant.!

Generally speaking, it is the development agencies who, nowadays, do something for the beneficiaries. Whether this involves transferring technology, or building infrastructure, or stating problems, or whatever other task, the effort is that of the agency.

What the agency seeks, requests, persuades, even entices the beneficiaries to do is to participate in the agency's activity in order to achieve what the agency set out to do. In other words, the participation of people in the development agency's activity, which, of course, is intended to help the same people. There appears to be a certain contradiction in this approach, viewed from the angle of developmental action.

In the ideal case, where the community has identified its problems, articulated and prioritized them, thought through the causes, evolved solution options and planned and organized itself to implement action, the activity is strictly the people's. Should they be unable to undertake some aspect of the activity and voluntarily approach an agency, then it would be the agency participating in the people's activity.

But given the political, historical and social context of under-development, which has deprived people of their initiative, self-reliance and confidence, the practical reality is that it is the external agency that, usually, has to seek the participation of people in development.

This is an acceptable beginning if it is clear to the agency and to the people that *this is only a beginning* and that both parties have to work at processes and strive for ends that would eventually turn the tables around.

The second step the agency will have to take is to make possible development by the people themselves rather than do it to or for them. This shift in thinking can, and will, have dramatic implications to not only development but to the development agency's culture as well. What will emerge, or needs to emerge, is a shift from the developer-developpee hierarchy to a situation of partnership where both the agency and the people see themselves as co-workers in development. This shift in approach might even require the agency to hold back on what it believes to be true, scientific and modern, and begin a dialogue that, in time, will enable the beneficiary to, on his or her own, come to the same learning – perhaps to a learning which blends the agency's learning with indigenous learnings and realities.

If the community of beneficiaries has to participate as partners, then *the agency cannot claim an infallible right to the 'word'*, to what is right and wrong. The *'word' has to evolve out of a dialogue* between different sets of perceptions of needs and problems, between different solution options. So with each party to the negotiation understanding the legitimacy of the other party's participation and the fact that *the eventual result will be negotiated via media*.

Education as a means of legitimacy

If the so-called under-developed fisherfolk community has a sufficient understanding of the subject under discussion, is capable of acting accordingly and commands respect from the development agency concerned for these abilities, then it may well not be in need of developmental aid in the first place. But this is seldom the case in developing countries. So it is necessary to understand that the process will (at least to begin with) be between unequal partners. How can it then be ensured that fisherfolk will have a better than even chance to participate on equal terms? How can fisherfolk be ensured a fair deal when they often view their relationship with development agencies as a patron-client one? One obvious and complex answer is to *empower fisherfolk*, more of which later.

There is 'however' another approach that can ensure *fair participation* of unequal parties in a negotiation, and that is *through education*. Education about the negotiation process, training in presentation and negotiation skills, knowledge of the subject under discussion, can all go a long way to making negotiations the two-way or multi-way process it should be.

For example, let us assume that an agency that specializes in boat development is negotiating the possibility of developing a particular craft for a community. The community may be able to describe its situation, its needs, its problems and its knowledge of environment, all of which would enable the agency to conceive a design for the craft. However, when it comes to actual design and development, the fisherfolk would find themselves out of the discussion because they would know far too little about boat design

to either contribute to or monitor and evaluate the design. Education at this stage can help the fisherfolk, not by making boat designers of them, but by giving them a working knowledge so that they can at least participate marginally in the decision-making.

Of course, it could be said that it would be impossible to explain sophisticated, scientific subjects to illiterate fisherfolk. But since *people who are required to face the consequences of an action have the right to decide on that action, this right has to be legitimized through education.*

At this point, it can be asked how such benevolence, as providing education, can be ensured on the part of the agency. The answer is the empowering function of development, which *gives the community sufficient power to hold the agency accountable.* It should be pointed out that the learning process should be mutual. The community too has a responsibility and duty to educate the agency about its needs, views, worldviews, situation and environment. If this does not happen, then the whole process could turn out to be one of educating the community to agree with the agency, and that would be persuasion, not negotiation.

Organisations in participatory development

Participatory development activity by its very nature means working with groups and communities. People often choose to work through formal organisations that already exist or are created specifically for the task at hand.

There are two essential aspects to the organizational approach. One facilitates day-to-day activity, with the community choosing representatives to speak on its behalf or undertake specific tasks. The other is a more political aspect which involves empowering the community to make sure it gets its rights and to hold external agencies responsible.

Development agencies by their very nature work with communities only for short periods of time. If the developmental activity has to be self-sustaining and self-perpetuating, then the participating people's organization has to have permanence and the ability to sustain the involvement of the community. Unfortunately, most people's organizations are formed as a response to outside agencies

and are short-lived, these advocacy groups or middle men collapsing when the stimulating outside factors diminish.

An important fact worth considering is that the existence of an organization in a community does not necessarily ensure people's participation. Organizations frequently benefit only the wealthy and influential members of the community. Leaders often do not represent their constituencies and, worse, are not accountable to them. There is also the reality that several socio-cultural traditions tend to be authoritarian. In such communities, the leadership would oppose any form of organization that promotes democratic and egalitarian norms. The development agency would then have to consider whether it should use an existing traditional form of organization in the community, or help it form a new organization.

Governments and agencies in fisheries development seem particularly attracted to the co-operative form of organization. If it functions properly, it can be an ideal organization, ensuring democratic management and an egalitarian distribution of benefits. However, while there have been a few spectacular successes, the experience in general with fisherfolk co-operatives has not been particularly good.

The reasons for success and failure are many, but it has not been convincingly proved that the co-operative form is inherently bad. On the contrary, it seems to be an ideal form, given the right conditions. Fisherfolk practise their enterprise primarily on an individual, family or crew basis except for a few collective tasks. imposing a co-operative structure on an essentially non-co-operative enterprise that is very competitive often sows the seeds of failure. Communities which have had success with the co-operatives have generally made use of them to handle those aspects of their enterprise that lend themselves to co-operative action such as marketing, savings and welfare activities, and post harvest processing of fish.

In India, government perceives the co-operatives as a channel for development benefits to the community. It considers underdevelopment in fisheries as being due to the primitive nature of the traditional technology, resulting in low productivity.

So its solution has been to enable fisherfolk to acquire assets that would help them to make better catches and earn a better income.

The co-operative was, and is, intended as a *means to make available assets through credit*. The Indian co-operative also helps identify and select beneficiaries for allocation of scarce resources, thus placing responsibility for this difficult, conflict-prone task on the community. This saves the government from getting into difficulties and shifts the conflicts to the community. Such an effort has, with all its faults, made available large numbers of crafts and gear to poor fisherfolk in India. Fishing, however, is an individual task and so repayments are an individual responsibility; in these circumstances, the co-operative, it has been found, is not the best means to encourage proper repayments.

Government perception of co-operatives as credit-granting and resource-allocating institutions has encouraged fisherfolk in India to see *the co-operatives as a means to tap government benefits and welfare*. They do not appreciate the organizational aspects, because, in functional terms, their activities continue as before. They also perceive, encouraged by politicians, *the benefits they receive as political gifts in return for the support they give the political system*. This makes the commercial viability of the system impossible, as *no one feels compelled to pay back a gift!* The politicians for their part see the co-operatives as a means to channel the benefits of government funds to their constituents.

Thus, the co-operative structure answers the perceived needs of all parties concerned without functioning as a genuinely co-operative body. The lesson of all this is that *what matters in an organization is the way it is perceived and the way it actually functions. Not what it is supposed to do!*

On the other hand, several fisherfolk communities in India have successful organizations which have made possible the development of the communities by functioning as co-operatives without being statutory co-operatives. There have also been organizational strategies evolved using existing forms of traditional and modern organizations to better purpose. The West Bengal Government, for example, decided to use elected, local government bodies, its *panchavats*, for the participatory development activities it planned.

However, to ensure people's representation and accountability, it used another form of organization – the peasant groups which had historically evolved to meet a different set of needs of the community.

The example of developed countries

Unfortunately, where government and agencies in developing countries have imposed some form of organization, and the most obvious examples are the co-operatives, the organizations themselves do not seem to have contributed to effective participation by the people, particularly the poor. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to study the conditions under which different forms of organizations have emerged meaningfully from communities elsewhere and in which the people have taken an active part. In this context, it is important to study the experiences of fisherfolk organizations in industrialized countries on the one hand, and self-regulatory, traditional organizations that some communities have used to 'manage' their resources in unregulated fisheries, on the other.

There is a great diversity of fisherfolk organizations in industrialized nations. This is largely determined by the structure of the fishing industry. In capital-intensive fisheries, there are labour unions. In large-scale fisheries there are also owners' associations which represent their interests *vis-a-vis* the fisherfolk unions. In small-scale fisheries, the organizations are more broadbased, including owners and workers, since the distinctions between capital and labour is rather hazy here. The principal types of organizations in small-scale fisheries in the industrialized nations are: (i) local organizations, such as co-operatives, which are affiliated to regional and national bodies and perform essentially economic activities; and (ii) associations and unions on a national or regional basis or based on a specific fishery to represent the members' interests *vis-a-vis* government and other interest groups. In this set-up, a fisherman may enter into several alliances for different reasons on the resources level, the technological level, on the marketing level and even in terms of government support to fisheries.

The labour movement in fisheries in the industrialized nations emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the fish prices obtained. Organizations were initially established at the local level as marketing co-operatives to directly counter local fish traders, and they later grew into regional and national movements to fix minimum prices.

Fisherfolk organizations were also created to represent the interests of a particular section of fisherfolk vis-a-vis other fisherfolk competing for the same fisheries resources. And in some cases, organizations evolved to manage common property resources.

Various factors appear to have either facilitated or impeded these organizations. The social background of the fishing community seems to have been important where traditional groupings did exist in the form of mutual aid associations, family loan associations and fisherfolk guilds, as in feudal Japan. Co-operatives were often grafted on to such traditional forms to develop and institutionalize the economic functions of these informal groupings. Greater cohesion and participation appear to have emerged from these traditional socio-political forms, which struck a balance between the economic necessities of survival and the solidarity required by their members. The fisherfolk appear to have organized themselves essentially to maintain, or regain control over the means of production and over the sale of their products.

Economic factors seem to have been the driving force behind such organizations most of the time. In the case of fisherfolk in the industrialized nations, their economic interests were most vulnerable in fish marketing and in access to fishery resources. In organizing to assure themselves of resources, the primary objective was to ensure adequate catches and incomes for members; the aspect of preventing over-exploitation or conserving the resources appears to have become important only recently. However, a finding from the Maine lobster fishery and from the Japanese fisherfolk guilds indicates that sea rights, traditional or endowed by government, tend to make people conservation- and resource-management-oriented.

A major force behind organization in these countries has been government itself. Governments promoted organizations to channel

assistance to fisherfolk more efficiently, and to avoid conflicts associated with the sector – by internalizing the conflict within the organization and taking itself (government) out of the battle lines, as it were. But an aspect of government activity that set out to help fisherfolk but which, in the long run, did not succeed was subsidies and welfare inputs. These tended to destabilize and often destroy organizations by defusing the forces that encouraged cohesion and solidarity.

The experience of industrialized nations reveal that their fisherfolk organizations grew from the same issues that are presently observed in the developing countries: such as, monopoly practices in the fish trade and supply markets; introduction of large scale technology; and inequitable distribution of access to fishery resources. It also suggests future trends.

With development, increasing employment opportunities outside fisheries, better fish marketing and technological innovations, the organizing appeal has shifted from these to access to increasingly scarce and depleted resources. And this raises the question of how the organizing potential of the resources issue can be transformed from one of reaction to crisis to one of actively involving fisherfolk in the management and development of fisheries resources.

Self-regulatory, traditional organizations

The lessons from the experiences of self-regulatory, traditional organizations that managed unregulated fisheries are fewer but nevertheless important. These lessons must, however, be drawn with extra care, because the conditions of secluded environment, lesser populations, less destructive traditional gear and no competition from other sources are difficult to preserve or create. Experience shows that under pressure from external and internal forces, these traditional forms often collapse and cease to function. What can, however, be useful is to determine the social, economic, political and environmental factors that encouraged such communities to organize themselves to manage and conserve their resources.

The non-governmental agency

There is yet another alternative, based on the fact that the community often feels less confident in dealing with outside expertise

on equal terms. **In such cases**, a non-governmental agency (NGO), not necessarily of fisherfolk, but one that has built up solidarity and confidence with the community, could act as an advocacy group to bridge the gap and promote the working relationship between the community and its organization and the agency.

The involving of a third party has its pros and cons. An NGO, **because of its work**, may be much closer to the community than a government or agency. By acting as the community's advocate, **it may be able to ensure accountability until the** community acquires self-reliance. It can also provide the educational and training inputs to enable a more productive and fair relationship between the agency and the community. On the negative side, the NGO can slow down the empowering of the community by expropriating the leadership role and creating a new and unhealthy dependence. However, given the disorganized state of Third World **fisherfolk, their geographic seclusion and their lack of political** entitlement due to their small numbers *vis-a-vis* the rest of the population, NGOs working with, and for, fisherfolk may prove to be important in the transition period until fisherfolk can organize themselves.

The role of the organization in participatory development is, understandably, very important and almost a necessary condition, it would be seen from the foregoing. It, however, places a heavy burden on the agency, which often has to strengthen the very organization that not only will eventually have to negotiate with it but will also have to hold it accountable. Agencies and government with their own objectives cannot be depended upon to display such benevolence at all times. Participation through organization is, in this sense, therefore, much more difficult to plan and is unpredictable in nature. It suggests that there is need for the development agency to commit itself first to participatory development and to the associated ideologies and attitudes, before it seeks out strategies to foster organization among fisherfolk.

6

What Aids or Hinders Participation

Development agencies considering the participatory approach often ask themselves: Is it possible to be participatory in every situation and context, given the availability of knowledge, commitment and ability? And the answer obviously has to be: No! Participation grows out of meaningful relationships, that enable people to share and work together, and, as in personal relationships, some work and some don't!

The BOBP's one-year effort discovered several reasons why some participation approaches worked and others didn't. The reasons listed and discussed in the next few pages could be considered a 'do's' and 'don'ts' list for other agencies. But it might be wiser to consider the suggestions listed more as guide posts giving direction to the activity rather than as deterrents to action.

Have a legitimate role: A participatory project is a sort of negotiated activity in which the people and the agency work together for some commonly shared objectives. To be able to negotiate successfully, each party has not only to respect the other party but it must also feel that there is a legitimate role for that party. The agency and its members must really *see a role for the people in the project*; only then will the agency's role in the organizational process be considered legitimate, and successful participation will result.

Enable 'equalness' to facilitate negotiation: For negotiations to be conducted meaningfully, the parties involved must be

reasonably equal. Unfortunately, agencies and the people they negotiate with are often at different levels, not only in terms of power, but in terms of knowledge and ability as well. This could lead to the activity to be implemented being more agency-oriented. The agency, therefore, has the key role and *the responsibility offirst creating 'equalness' through educational programmes* that develop communication and negotiation skills as well as power of analysis. Begin with the felt needs of the people: People negotiate only when there is something in it for them and they feel that they can get it from the other party by this means. For participation to be successful, therefore, it is necessary for all the parties involved to know what it is they want. This is easier said than done. Agencies have their own agenda and the people their own. Not only the content, but the priorities may vary. But if successful participation of the people is the aim, then the beginning has to be made with *what the people consider are their needs and which the agency agrees are areas of concern.*

Learn from and with people: Participation suggests that the people and the agency are agreed on wanting to do something about the way things are. But an agency might not fully appreciate the circumstances and predicament of the people unless it is willing to learn from them. Only by learning from, and with, the people their social dynamics, and their needs and priorities, can the right agenda be mutually agreed upon and implemented with the whole-hearted participation of all in the community.

Build confidence as a prelude: People may be dissatisfied, but they must want to do something about that dissatisfaction. More important, they must have the confidence that they have the ability to do something about it themselves. A whole range of cultural, social and historical factors, including *past failures, can weaken this confidence.* Thus, *confidence-building is a task the agency may have to set itself* before participation can be assured.

Help organization to emerge: Some form of organization is necessary if participation is to succeed, because there is a need to take decisions, allocate tasks, take responsibility for particular tasks, all of which can be done better when a community or group

is organized. Often, agencies may even have to help create the organization. But *more important than the mere existence of organizations is how they actually function*. Organizations and their leaderships can be just, egalitarian, democratic or benevolent, but they can also be otherwise. These factors inevitably play a major role in the agency's relationship with the organization and those it represents.

Do not increase the groups: *The more homogeneous a community, the greater the consensus on interests, needs and priorities and the easier the participative process.* Increasing the number of parties concerned in a negotiation only multiplies the complications several-fold.

Do not impose 'collectiveness': While organizations have several advantages, they have their disadvantages too, especially in the case of fishing communities whose occupational habits, like migration, disrupt the functioning of organization. *Fisherfolk, while they are extremely co-operative and egalitarian within fishing units, can be intensely competitive when the interests of different units conflict*, especially in regard to the open access nature of fisheries. The share system used in fisheries often hides capital-labour conflicts, which are further defused by a hazy separation between owners and workers. This is another cause for disruptive conflicts, as it allows people with opposing interests to be classified as one. Often organizations attempt tasks which are considered individual, familial or, at best, the responsibility of a fishing unit/crew and this just does not work, as no one takes joint responsibility for what is non-collective work.

Do not foster dependence: Governments and agencies often look at development in terms of welfare and incline towards subsidizing costs. This tends to make people dependent on such hand-outs and *undermines their self-confidence* in their ability to look after themselves and cope with their problems. Participation cannot be whole-hearted in these circumstances.

Do not be dictatorial: Development agencies which are elitist, which feel that they alone know what needs to be done, and which are not democratic in their own functioning, or participative in their

decision-making, will find it extremely difficult to convince communities they work with to be participative. In most cases, *the agency, its characteristics and its behaviour can be the most important factors determining the success of participative development.*

Do not be inflexible: Agencies usually tend to specialize in order to be more efficient. Their *managerial cultures also tend to make them more rigid and tune-conscious.* In participatory development, where others are involved, these characteristics may work against the activity. The people's needs may not coincide with the agency's capabilities, the time taken to achieve something real in the field may not fit well with reporting and budgeting schedules, mid-course corrections may not be easy to bring in. Agencies need to have a far more flexible approach to their work if they wish to promote participation.

Do not forget commitment: In any partnership there is need for accountability. But it is particularly difficult for people to hold an outside agency accountable unless they are empowered; *agencies have the privilege of walking away.*

No real mechanisms, except trust and solidarity, exist to ensure any accountability. And so, the character and commitment (or even benevolence) of an agency is of considerable importance.

Reading the preceding points may give the reader the feeling that the scales are weighted against participation being successful. In fact, with decreasing socio-political and geographic isolation and increasing populations, transfers of more efficient technologies and greater pressures on limited resources, things can only get more complex and difficult. But in such situations, the negotiated participatory approach is perhaps the only solution. And that in itself could be an incentive to evolving better means and techniques to ensure participatory development.

BOBP's findings over the years suggest that an agency's ability to be participative depends to a large extent on its own character and attitudes, on its way of functioning and on its commitment to the concept, rather than on techniques and methods. Participative development, it was found, not only developed the people whom the agency set out to help, but it also developed

the agency that set out to do the helping. In fact, the very fact of setting out to help required certain changes in attitude and this is something for agencies to reflect upon. Some attitudes which might require rethinking are, from BOBP's experience:

No place for unilateral decisions: In a world of 'haves' and 'have-nots', where certain agencies have taken upon themselves the task of helping others less fortunate it is only too often that these agencies feel that they alone know what the problem is and what needs to be done, that *they alone have the 'word'!* The participatory approach, however, grows out of the exchange of the agency's knowledge with the people's, *blending in the process the modern and the scientific with the traditional and the indigenous.*

Agencies always did the deciding in the past and many do so even today. But if agencies really intend to become participative, the directions, objectives and priorities must evolve out of negotiation and not out of unilateral decisions. *Are agencies ready to share power with or empower communities with whom they work?* That is the question the agency must answer.

Need to realize limitations: If an agency wishes to work with a community and help develop it, it really has only two choices:

- it can diversify its capabilities or bring in other agencies to be able to address the special needs of the people; or
- it can accept its limitations and negotiate for the use of its particular ability, of course keeping in mind that development in these circumstances would only be partial.

This should not be seen as a reason for all agencies to become diversified or generalist agencies. Rather, they must be more realistic about the objectives that can be achieved, given their limited capabilities.

Getting the people to do more: Agencies must do less and help people to do more. This requires a big change in the attitude of agencies, since it brings in the problems of meeting deadlines and arbitrary 'quality' standards. It is always difficult to get somebody else to do something you can do; it takes longer and often does not meet your standards. However, since the goal is to get people to do it on their own, agencies will have to rethink *how they can get others to do what the agency has the expertise to do.*

If communities are to participate actively in their development, the technology and techniques will have to be demystified, made simpler and more accessible. Agencies will have to release information (which is often equated with power) freely to the people. But to many agencies this is a threatening proposition, for there is always the feeling that when people learn to do what you set out to teach them, they may eventually lose their need for you, eliminating the need for the agency! Giving the community access to information requires, in some way, *handing over what is perhaps most dear to all human organizations – power*. Are agencies ready for it?

Coping with change: Working with communities, empowering them, enabling them to work with justice, democracy or what have you, an agency will find the community going through basic structural changes. The agency has to face these changes and its implications. Even more important, *the agency is bound to change too*. Agencies will have to cope with both.

Answering its own organization: When an agency mobilizes and organizes people, it may, sometimes, find the organization it created holding the agency accountable, regulating it, taking decisions and standing as equals. Should an agency, then, *create what could become a Frankenstein's monster?* The only way for an agency to feel comfortable in such a case might be to take sides and join the people, ending the duality.

The attitudinal changes suggested above, all arising out of BOBP's experience, are, it is understandable, difficult to accept with equanimity. But they are findings agencies should concern themselves with and should lead to the changes that they need to make in themselves if they are to do justice to what they set out to do. That would be more in the spirit of participation.

From the studies and cases developed by BOBP as a part of its year-long project, all of them detailed in the Appendices, several techniques, methods and strategies have surfaced. But this agency has realized that a manual of 'do's' and 'don'ts', based on its findings, is not the best way of getting other agencies to understand participation or change their approach to ensure participation.

One thing BOBP became more and more convinced of during its study was that, in the end, participation is a human act that grows out of beliefs, attitudes and caring. And, as in human relationships, the thing to do with participatory development is to begin the quest at home with oneself, with one's own agency, and to reflect and clarify the 'why' and 'how' of development so that, out of it would grow a set of attitudes and beliefs that would not only enable the agency to do what is needed but also show it what it might do but should not.

BOBP has already made a small beginning on what it recommends for other agencies, putting its findings into practice in its programming. Other agencies are certain to be able to learn from its mistakes and achievements.