

PARTICIPATION

DEFINITION

Participation, in the development context, is a process through which all members of a community or organization are involved in and have influence on decisions related to development activities that will affect them. That implies that development projects will address those community or group needs on which members have chosen to focus, and that all phases of the development process will be characterized by active involvement of community or organization members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FOUNDATION

ADF is committed to the concept that development projects are most likely to succeed when there is active involvement and commitment of those people who will be effected by and have a vested interest in the activity to be pursued. Ideally, then, the projects that ADF funds are initiated by, reflect the priorities of, and present the ideas put forward by the members of the implementing group. Projects are the result of a self directed effort based on a shared vision of, and commitment to, solving a problem that affects them.

Similarly, the management and decision making processes the group uses requires active involvement and transparency of all members which is evident in a free and open exchange of information. As a result of participation, all members of the group or community understand not only the goals and objectives of the project; they also understand the roles and responsibilities each member has in the implementation of the project.

Since ADF works directly with grassroots groups, it understands that the proposals it receives often require refinement. Therefore, the Foundation expects that the questions it may pose about project feasibility or viability will require that ADF allow the time for the group to address the issues raised, consider options and reply. In this way, ADF cedes the leadership of the project design process to the group rather than impose revisions to the plan.

ADF includes project participants in the project refinement process as a necessary step that provides participants with the opportunity to learn how project proposals are analyzed. It also encourages consideration of ideas that might not have been included in the original concept. In this way project participants understand and concur with any project design revisions with the result that commitment to the project is not impaired.

In the broader development context, it is important to note that these opportunities for grassroots groups participation in the design of projects enhances the probability that such groups will begin to appreciate the value of participation and may become active in other spheres that affect their lives. Moreover, it is only through participation at the grassroots-level that marginalized groups become contributors to economic progress in their countries. For, the foundation of national economic growth and prosperity rests in part on the extent to which those with the least are able to become economically viable.

OWNERSHIP

DEFINITION

Ownership, in the development context, refers to a group's right to decide how and in what order it will address its development needs and to control the design and implementation of projects they intend to meet those needs. Moreover, it means that all individuals, who comprise the group, are able to influence and participate in the decision making processes associated with each of the phases of the development process: problem identification, project design, implementation, including how benefits will be distributed, and evaluation. Finally, with ownership comes a sense of responsibility and motivation needed to actively and persistently work toward project success even when faced with obstacles.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FOUNDATION

ADF acknowledges the right of groups and communities to control their lives including the decision over what and how development activities should be pursued. Thus, ideally, projects funded by the Foundation will show clear evidence that the project has been initiated by an organization or group that has broad based participation of its members in decision making processes. As a result of this participation, all members of the group will see themselves as owners of the project with vested interest in, and a commitment to undertake, the tasks required for project success.

Thus, ADF staff must be willing to review project ideas and proposals received in order to provide feedback, then allow the group to address issues that may affect the feasibility or sustainability of the project in question. In addition to allowing for the time required to revise the project design, the Foundation must frequently provide modest resources for the group to investigate and consider options, and then to make project design decisions based on those deliberations. In this way, ADF avoids imposing design changes, understanding that people work hardest to accomplish goals they have set for themselves.

The Foundation also promotes group ownership beyond the project design process. It does so by disbursing funds for project implementation directly to the group, and it provides funds for technical assistance and training, but leaves the selection and control over the technical assistance provider to the group.

ADF believes that its adherence to the principles of ownership described above avoids project failure associated with participants lack of commitment to or a sense of responsibility for the success of the project. It also believes that group ownership of a project reduces the risk of mismanagement or misappropriation of resources for, group members will believe they have the right to express their concerns and assertively seek remedies for any such problems.

Finally, ADF believes that projects designed, implemented and evaluated by groups who sense their ownership of the processes involved, results in improved self-esteem and leads to feelings of accomplishment and empowerment that will serve the population long after the "project" has been completed.

EMPOWERMENT

Lacking in the skills and resources needed to compete in modern, increasingly technological society, poor communities are generally left out of development and the benefits therein. Traditional development schemes often overestimated the transferability of attitudes and characteristics necessary for their adoption and success. Poor people have either had to adapt and join the development parade, or be left behind, with little say in the matter. At the other end of the spectrum, has been the idea and challenge of responsive participatory development, which has given first priority to the development ideas of the people who stand to directly benefit from the fruits of those ideas. By encouraging local populations to create and implement their own solutions, they empower themselves and their communities. ADF began championing this approach in the 1980s.

DEFINITION

When individuals in a community have access to and can manage their own development resources such as information and skills training, they develop a sense of control over their lives, which can ultimately lead to a stronger involvement in their community's health and their own growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FOUNDATION

Ideally, empowerment, in the development context, is that state of belief in one's ability or capacity for determining and carrying out self-development. It comes from the experience of tangible success through a project's history, from conception to actualization. It is the successful experience and reward from a job well done and the positive consequences of that feat. An important aspect of empowerment is that it can serve that group in the future, individually and collectively.

Empowerment is built through enhancing capacity, participation, and ownership. When persons in a group or community become more educated and better trained, they become more effective in their pursuits, consequently, the group is seen as a "force to be reckoned with," and can have an impact on the community as a whole--giving them a sense of identity and control over their future. The Foundation encourages this process through the provision of training and skills development as groups undertake projects. Empowering individuals and groups enables both to stand up for their rights and gives them a voice in the decisions that affect them. Civil society is nurtured and enhanced by the participation of its members from a position of strength.

From an operational perspective, ADF provides grantees with the opportunity to manage their own projects' finances, bank accounts, program decisions, procurement, and management of goods and services. ADF also provides training funds so that grantees can acquire the skills needed for their active participation in their projects and provides local field teams to counsel grantees on appropriate procedures. ADF has found that many benefits flow from the whole concept and attainment of a group's sense of empowerment. With increased skill development and capability, self-esteem and self-confidence naturally follow; contributing to increased ownership and commitment. Increased capability and concrete examples of achievement foster community respect and give a voice to segments of the community which may have been previously overlooked or demeaned.

Empowerment, fortified by capacity, extends far beyond the projects themselves, changing perceptions of, and increasing respect for African grassroots communities. This change in perception occurs both in the local environs as well as in the international arena. The increased responsiveness of local institutions increases that group's chances of access to additional financial and social support, thus enhancing the group's sustainability.

On the other hand, the consequences of not encouraging empowerment are extremely damaging to grassroots development, often negating the entire development effort. Lack of a feeling of empowerment often leads to discouragement, apathy, and worse, dependency on forces outside the group/community.

When all of the control and authority is in the hands of a donor, whether government or institution, the recipients continue to look to others for all answers, making development efforts uneven, inequitable, and restricted to those who control the resources.

The African Development Foundation has found that when people genuinely feel in control over their resources and actions -- when they feel empowered, all aspects of their development efforts are enhanced and strengthened. Empowerment is made possible by using participatory approaches.