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Understanding Participation in Community Education and Development

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Abstract

The term "participation" is of relatively gaining popularity in many fields, even though the phenomenon it refers to has been highlighted decades ago. The concept provided a useful awareness on community education and development programs and empowerment. Community participation has become a focus of various agencies and organizations. Many are beginning to recognize community participation as a key to improve the social wellbeing and quality of life, especially to the underprivileged groups. This brief and general article presents introduction to community education and development, definitions of participation and the most referred typologies of participation.

Keywords: participation, typology of participation, community education and development

Introduction

A number of government agencies in Malaysia and other countries are actively implementing community development efforts, through numerous programs and initiatives targeting to improve the less-privileged community well-being and quality of life. Other than welfare aid and assistance in microfinance schemes (Hamdan, Othman, & Wan Hussin, 2012), it is also successfully done through many ways, such as skills training and entrepreneurship programs (Phillips & Pittman, 2009), and according to (Seferiadis, Cummings, Maas, Bunders, & Zweekhorst, 2017), these programs can be done by three levels namely the societal level (macro), community level (meso) and individual level (micro). All these programs are for the community in need. Thus, without their participation in it, the programmes will be useless, inefficient and therefore failed its purpose. Thus, it is important to develop a clear understanding about participation, as it will be further reviewed in this paper.

The most established definition for community development is "a generic term used to describe the processes by which local communities can raise their own standards of living" (UNESCO, 1956, p. 1). Years later, community development gets more complex as described by Koneya (1975) "Considering the size and complexity of its domain it is no wonder that community development should appear to be so disparate. No one person in the role of community developer can study or treat the entire domain at once" (p. 10). According to him, each community developer chose a field appropriate to their concern, knowledge, and resources. They will put effort in building up the community in one of four methods, namely "Group Dynamics", "Public Information Training", "Citizen Participation" and "Economic Development".

The community developer will propose Group Dynamics programmes such as leadership, problem-solving, and team-building course when they see the citizens lack of agreement and solidarity. Meanwhile, public information training programmes such as civic awareness programmes and political education is intended for minority and the elderly citizens who are already united but are disconnected from most other groups. For citizen participation programmes, it is crucial during the planning process to engage with the community, prior to improving their residential physical environment that probably faced some problems with safety, transportation, recreation, and health facilities. Finally, the economic development programmes are needed for communities that have the potential in term of labours, equipment, land and other resources.

Later, in 2016, a new global definition was extended out by the *International Association for Community Development (IACD)*, an accredited entity by United Nations that has affiliates all over the globe. According to IACD, "Community development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings" (Lathouras, 2016, p. 1).

However, as time goes by, so as the definition of community development evolved. As defined by Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan (2012), " a process that entails organization, facilitation, and action, which allows people to establish ways to create the community they want to live in. It is a process that provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action towards desired goals associated with the promotion of efforts aimed at improving the conditions in which local resources operate. As a result, community developers harness local economic, human, and physical resources to secure daily requirements and respond to changing needs and conditions" (p. 6).

One of the benefits of community development programs is that the participants, especially among the poor, have the opportunity to build their self-confidence (Hamdan et al., 2012; Ronderos, 2011) and improving living standards of low income communities such as in the 1Malaysia Program in Malaysia (Osman, 2018). A part from economic development of the less fortunate communities, community development also is seen crucial in reaching the public health wellbeing, farming communities and to name others but a few. This means, approach to the let people participate or be part of the work through the community development programs process can enhance a meaningful empowerment and therefore achieve sustainable (community) development.

Meanwhile, according to Minzey & LeTarte (1972), community education is a philosophical concept and not a set of programs. It is an expansion of existing programs rather than a substitute. The four integral program areas of community education are adult education, recreation, student enrichment, and public relations. "The ultimate value of community education lies in its ability to bring about change and subsequently resolve community problems."(Minzey & LeTarte, 1972). In handling education and development programmes in local community, community education does involve all those areas and approaches, rather than within the formal education institutions such as schools, colleges and universities, compare to community education which is also known as an informal education. Seay (1974) in his book defines community education as "dares to attempt to achieve a reasonable balance and effective use of all the institutional forces in the education of all of the people." True it is as stated by Armstrong (1977), the term community education has become an increasingly important aspect of adult education practice and that the term is not clearly defined, confused and contradicts as to its application. In some places those who are appointed to encourage community development are expected to be "community educators".

Hlela (2018) proposed to characterize adult education from an African point of view by comparing with the dominant methodologies in the hypothesising adult education with Community of Practice (COP), Transformative Learning Theory, Participatory Learning Action (PLA) and others. As per Hlela's exploration, community learning is portrayed by various sorts of learning which incorporates multiple types of learning that can happen during socializing, by accidental, self-thought and from problems that needs solutions. This means adult learning is a vast process of engagement. For an

example, learning in COP happens through real interests of people that creates them to become 'full member' which implies that the newcomers will end up to become an experienced member and in the long run becomes the veterans of a community oriented projects (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

What is Participation?

Participation is “the act of taking part in an activity or event” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2000, p. 849). However, if taking part without the freedom to be reflective and only to be treated as victims that needed savior, this will only lead the participants to manipulation and continue the status of the oppressed (Freire, 2005). Cohen & Uphoff (1980) reminded about the risks when participation was once accepted as a popular trending jargon and merely becomes lip service or hypocrisy and therefore participation lose its substance, relevancy and importance to the development programme. Participation has been an important part and highlighted in many types of community programmes. As have been described and visualized as Lego toy pieces by Rahnema (1992, p. 127), participation does not appear to have its own content, but it does has its own functions and purposes. Participation was also referred as a social process of taking part in various forms of activities, programmes and/or discussions to bring change and sustainability in the society. This general statement was supported and applied by many researchers in many fields namely Bracht & Tsouros (1990) in the field of public health, Sharma, Singh, & Padaria (2011) in agricultural extension, Devi (2015) in her doctoral thesis about community participation and sustainable livelihoods of the agriculture communities and et cetera. Participation is not as easy as it is spelled or say, it is a delicate process that needs to be understand and cannot be taken lightly. Participation is not a rhetoric thing, it needs to be inclusive, long-term supports, well designed with strong structure and also involves strategic planning of funds (Pelling, 1998, p. 478).

In short, participation can be understood in three situations as below:

Participation as-a-means-to-an-end (as a tool or medium)

Participation is seen as a means for accomplishing an effective project, therefore rising issues on the efficiency of the project outcomes (Clever, 1999). Participants in a variety of community organizations such as neighbourhood groups and mutual help groups have reported a rise in involvement, competence and control, and lessening of isolation (A. Zimmerman, 2000). Meanwhile, (Buchy, M., Ross & Proctor, 2000) stated that participation is a method, guiding principle and a movement for getting communities to be involved in the planning process with certain activities. In this spectrum, we can see that participation is understood as an instrument in building empowerment among the community members.

Participation as an end (outcome or goal)

Clever (1999) propose that participation is a process which upgrades the limit of people to improve their very own lives and encourages social change to the benefit of marginalized groups. Buchy, M., Ross & Proctor (2000), additionally stated that participation is a method, a belief system, a particular ethos for community advancement. In this range, we can see that participation is a piece of the puzzle needed in the process of creating and strengthening empowerment of the community.

Participation as a means and an end (process and outcome)

According to Imms et al. (2016), participation in activities that are important to people’s lives is a vital process or intervention that can be seen as a short term goal, that is to get people to be involve and work on the activities. Whereby, after the people has gain interest and engaged with the activities, the next goal is to encounter the challenges facing before the desirable triumphs, and that is the sustainable developments of the people. The outcome goal ends with opening opportunities

to young people with impairments and ensuring that they can reach their maximum capacity over their lifetime. Therefore, in this situation, participation can be interpreted as a process, a mediator, a short-term goal and also as an outcome and a long-term goal.

How Participation is Measured?

According to a research done by Zimmerman & Rappaport (1988), participation can be measure in as an analogue of participation which utilizes inputs to reproduce circumstances where the sources were approached to share their insights whether or not they would get involved to change the circumstances as have been described; the level of participation in community organizations which means the dimension of contribution in network associations implies the quantity of months one has included, the quantity of hours one has volunteered in a month, the quantity of initiative positions one has held, and one's participation at hierarchical gatherings for every association in which the person has enrolled in; and how deep is the involvement in the community events towards contributing to the success of the targeted goal.

Zimmerman & Rappaport (1988) has outlined 11 indicators of empowerment, namely Internal Political Efficacy, External Political Efficacy, Mastery, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Competence, Desire for Control, Civic Duty, Control Ideology, Chance Control, Internal Control and Powerful Others. All these 11 measures represent 3 constructs of psychological empowerment which are personality, cognitive and motivation. The groups of individuals defined by the participation measurement were then compared with the 11 indicators of empowerment. What is empowerment? What does it got to do with participation? Participation is crucial for empowerment process. Empowerment for individuals may be seen as a process whereby “the individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes” (Mechanic, 1991, p. 641). For a group of people with same interest and problems, participation is the bridge they need in order to reach their goal of self-empowerment.

Typologies of Participation

These measurements is somewhat correlated with the typology ladders of participation introduced by (Arnstein, 1969) which measure the participation level based on the extent of citizens' power. According to her, “Citizen Participation is Citizen Power”, means the more power the citizen has, the more participative they are. When Arnstein wrote her article, The United States was in a heated controversy with the black Americans, Puerto Ricco's, Mexicans etc. she called as the “have-nots”. She wrote her article based on federal social programmes as examples to participation namely; urban renewal, anti-poverty, and Model Cities Programmes. Her ladder of participation tries to explain the extents of citizen participation in the programmes.

Ladder of Citizen Participation by Arnstein (1969)

The eight types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each stair corresponds to the extent of citizens' power in determining the end products (Figure 1).

The lowest 1st and 2nd steps objective is to enable the authorities to increase the awareness of the participants. Meanwhile, for the 3rd and 4th, they are the lowest levels called “tokenism” which means the authorities let the have-nots to embrace and to have a voice to be heard. However, participants were still lack of power and were taken merely as tokens, but not taken to consideration. The 5th step is the higher level of tokenism whereby the participants can give assistance, but only the authorities can make decisions. Climbing up the ladders 6th and 7th are the levels with increasing degrees of decision-making, where the 8th stairs means the have-nots has achieved full managerial power.

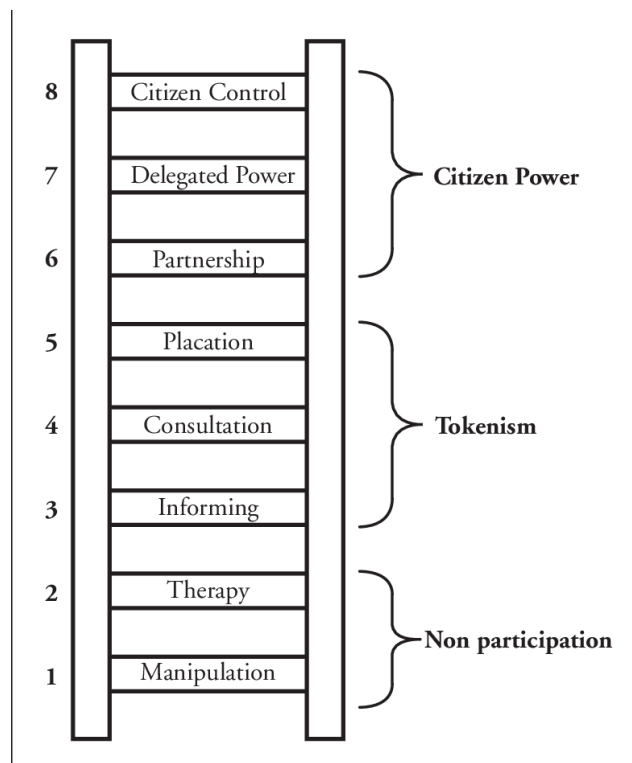


Figure 1. Reprinted from Arnstein, S. R. (1969)

Even so, this model has some limitation because it is only suitable to be used in situations where the participants are demanding for power, that is for the less privilege people within an organization or community. The ladder was categorized in Samah & Aref (2009) as the “Empowering” and “Non-empowering” groups (p. 48). Also, according to Collins & Raymond, (2006) and Reed (2008) in Reed et al. (2018), the ladder is already outdated and that the ladder mainly explains the negative impact of manipulation and lower levels of participation. However, this is somehow slightly differs with the typology introduced by Pretty (1994) that studies participation in the rural farming and sustainable agriculture context. He, however, extends and elaborates his arguments and ideas in a bigger and flexible paradigm that made this typology more acceptable in application towards any research or fields related to development and participation.

Typology of Participation by Pretty (1994)

According to Pretty, there are seven different types of participation that can take place and interpret in development projects. Each type of participation should accomplish the components listed above, in order to be accepted and interpreted as that type of participation. The most important benchmark of participation type is the “Functional Participation” for a development to be sustainable.

Table 1. Adapted from Pretty, J. N. (1994).

Typology	Components of Each Type
Passive Participation	Participation happens in a one-way communication style or by announcements from the project managers or external professionals. Not open for people’s responses.
Participation in Information Giving	Participation happens by answering questions in surveys from extractive researchers. Not able to impose influences since the findings of the research are not shared or reviewed for truth.
Participation by Consultation	Participation happens when people are consulted, and external agents listen to views. The external agents outline the problems and

Participation for Material Incentives	solutions; and open for people’s feedback. However, this type of consultative process does not grant any part in decision-making, and the agents are not obliged to take the views of the people. Participation happens in exchange with material incentives. However, people are not involved in the development or learning process. Therefore, people have no interest in continuing the activities when the incentives end.
Functional Participation	Participation happens by groups that are formed to meet the project objectives of any social organization. Their contribution is not at the early stages of project cycles, but after important decisions has been made. The establishment relies on external initiators and facilitators but can also become independent.
Interactive Participation	Participation happens with active communications between all actors. Needs to follow common principles such as a defined methodology and systemic learning process, needs multiple perspectives, interdisciplinary group inquiry process, context specific, facilitating experts and stakeholders and must leads to sustained actions. This type of participation leads to action plans, formation of new local institutions, strengthening of existing ones and promote innovations and ownerships among all actors.
Self- Mobilization	Participation happens when people take initiatives without help from external institutions to change the systems. However, it is not certain if self-initiated mobilization and collective action can threaten the existing disparities of wealth and power.

Functional Participation is achieved when people's thoughts and knowledge are valued, and power of control is given to them to make decisions freely without the interference of external agencies, then only at that point, the long-hauls financial and ecological renewal will transpire. Most types of participation will undermine the sustainability of a project, lesser from supporting the objectives of sustainable development. Thus, extraordinary consideration must be taken when utilizing the term participation as a point of reference. This is parallel to what Paulo Freire has written in his eminent book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 about reflective participation. What can be understood and relate about reflective participation and functional participation is that, only true reflection of the thoughts, knowledge and life story of the oppressed will unveil their true situation. It is very crucial that they accept the truth about themselves as a first step that will influence their next actions. This reflective step will then lead to their conscious involvement and therefore leads to successful participation.

White’s Typology of Participation

The politics of participation are underpinned by tensions around actors, terms and power (White, 1996). To her, participation is seen as political and that democracy system dominates the development circles. At national dimension it is found in the talk of common society and great administration. At the program and undertaking level it shows up as a pledge to support. This is trumpeted by offices directly over the range, from the colossal multilaterals to the littlest individuals' associations. Scarcely a task, it appears, is presently without some participatory component.

Table 2. Reprinted from White, S. C. (1996).

Interests in Participation			
Forms	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Functions
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

As indicated by White's Typology above, there are four noteworthy sorts (shapes) of interest, and the qualities of each. The main segment demonstrates the structure (or types) of interest. The second demonstrates the interests in investment starting from the top partners (the program architects and specialists), the third section demonstrates the point of view from the 'base up' partners (the members) and the last segment depicts the general capacity of each sort (or structures) of cooperation. "Practically speaking, any task will regularly include a blend of interests which change after some time" (White, 1996, p. 8).

Conclusion

This conceptual article has made clear about the concepts regarding participation in relation to community development. It is important for a researcher in this field to have deep understanding and clear meaning of participation and how to utilize it. The perspectives of participation depend on how we look at it. Either it is meant only as a means or beyond. Participation as an end. Analogically, is participation a piece of a road map or is it a destination towards a goal, and that is the empowerment. Participation typologies presented in this paper has characterized the dimensions of participation to explain how to understand participation in a programme or project, based on the citizen's level of power (Arnstein's), behavior of the participants in developmental projects (Pretty's), from the stakeholders' interests (White's) and also how it can be measured. Despite the many researches done and contribution of knowledge by many scholars, there are still room for more studies to be done to elaborate on this matter. Thus, it is important to study this topic further and to understand more thoroughly concerning the importance of participation in the true needs of the community.

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