

# Précis

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## Participation in Development Assistance

**W**hen primary stakeholders—individuals and community-based organizations—participate in Bank activities, development relevance and outcomes improve. Project-supported activities tend to be more sustainable. There is less corruption, because processes are more transparent and government officials are held accountable to the people they serve. The Operations Evaluation Department (OED) reports that between 1994 and 1998 community participation significantly increased in Bank-assisted projects and in the preparation of Country Assistance Strategies.

Participation is integral to the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PSRPs), and many other recent Bank initiatives. The task now is to improve the quality and effectiveness of participatory approaches and their impact on institutional development. This means making local participation a guiding principle in development, strengthening general capacity for participatory activities, and creating a culture that welcomes the use of participatory approaches.

### Background

Participatory approaches to development provide mechanisms for local stakeholders to influence and share control of development initiatives, decisions, and resources. Historically, primary stakeholders have had limited involvement in Bank operations. This began to change in December 1990, when the Bank's nongovernmental organiza-

tion (NGO) team proposed creation of the Participatory Development Learning Group. The Group's final report—issued in 1994—is the closest the Bank has come to a participation policy or strategy. It became the Bank's action plan for broadening the scope and improving the quality of stakeholder participation in Bank projects, analysis, and policy dialogue.

OED's assessment of progress in mainstreaming and developing community participation in Bank operations is based on a review of project files and other documents; a statistical analysis of databases on participation and closer analysis of participation in a random sample of 189 projects; an electronic survey and focus group discussions with task managers; and best-practice case studies of eight projects and four Country Assistance Strategies (CASs), involving missions to six countries: Bangladesh, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Kenya, and Malawi.



## Increased Participation

Primary stakeholders' participation in Bank-assisted activities increased significantly between 1994 and 1998. Among a random sample of projects, the share using participatory approaches rose from 40 percent of projects approved in 1992 to 72 percent in 2000. Most of the increase since 1996 involved collaboration and empowerment, the highest levels of participation (see box 1).

Participation has been greatest in projects with community-level activities, as in the agriculture, health, water supply, environment, education, urban, and social sectors. There has been less participation in infrastructure sectors such as transportation, energy, and industry, and least of all in public sector management, financial, and multisector (mainly adjustment lending) projects (see table 1). There was markedly less participation in the Middle East and North Africa and the Europe and Central Asia Regions than elsewhere.

Nongovernment stakeholders' participation also increased substantially in the preparation of CASs. The share of CASs formulated with moderate or high levels of participation increased from 24 percent in 1995–96 to 73 percent in 1999–2000. The increase in high-level participation—from 14 to 41 percent—was especially notable. Moreover, all of the 15 1999–2000 CAS reports for International Development Association (IDA) borrowing countries included discussions of participation; only one did in the 1992–94 cohort. This is a significant achievement in a short time frame.

## Uneven Quality and Impact

The quality and potential effectiveness of participation have not kept pace with its increasing quantity. Participation has been uneven over phases of the project cycle (see table 2).

For projects approved in fiscal 1994–98, only 12 percent involved participation in project identification, when par-



### Box 1: Levels of Participation

The typology developed by the Social Development Department (SDV) identified four levels of participation, ranked in order from least to most influence:

#### Low-level

- (1) Information sharing  One-way communication  
 (2) Consultation  Two-way communication

#### High-level

- (3) Collaboration  Shared control over decisions and resources  
 (4) Empowerment  Transfer of control over decisions and resources

Level of participation is different from quality of participation, which means “doing it right,” whatever the level or type of participation.

**Table 1: Projects with Primary Stakeholder Participation (as a percentage of projects, by sector)**

Sector	Projects with participation
Social sector	82
Agriculture	80
Health, nutrition, and population	75
Water supply and sanitation	72
Environment	70
Mining and other extractive	69
Education	65
Urban development	60
Transportation	46
Energy	39
Industry	30
Public sector management	20
Finance	16
Multisector	15
All sectors	53

Source: SDV participation database. Data are for projects approved FY1994–98. Social sector projects include social funds, social assistance, social protection, public works, and similar projects. Most multisector projects are adjustment lending.

**Table 2: Participation of Primary Stakeholders, by Project Phase (as a percentage of projects)**

Project phase	Participation
Identification	12
Design	31
Implementation	39
Evaluation	9

Source: Social Development Department database (projects approved during FY94–98).

ticipants could help define or raise issues about a project's relevance to their development needs. Only 9 percent of projects included participatory monitoring and evaluation, which ensures project implementers' accountability to primary stakeholders. Many projects allowed for only limited participation by women. The Bank and government agencies have insufficient understanding of how to encourage communities to contribute meaningfully to project design or to build community institutions that represent the diverse interest groups of a village and are suited to involvement in project implementation.

The quality of stakeholder participation in formulating CASs also varied. Sometimes meetings with stakeholders were little more than opportunities for the Bank to present and gain acceptance for its country programs. Participants were generally given little feedback after they were consulted. This left them uncertain if their contributions affected Bank strategy and discouraged their engagement in future consultations.

The impact of participation on institutional development has been modest. Participation usually involved only an

## Box 2: Working Together to Change El Salvador's Community Schools

In the EDUCO program in El Salvador, beneficiaries—the students, parents, and teachers in program schools—were given a voice in decisionmaking. Parents were elected to community education associations and given responsibility for hiring and firing teachers, managing the school budget, fundraising, and organizing field trips. A monthly school for parents triggered parallel adult and child education processes. Everyone benefited, often in unexpected ways. In learning how to manage funds and to administer the EDUCO program, *members of community education associations* learned how to write checks and use calculators and overcame their fear of banks. Some said this was the first time government or city people had listened to them. They appreciated being able to get rid of bad teachers and serve their community. *Students* also got involved, felt more dignified and appreciated, and were less susceptible to arbitrary abuse and punishment from teachers and principals. EDUCO schools experienced less violence than most traditional and urban schools. *Parents* felt they played an active role in their children's education instead of passively accepting government-provided programs. They raised funds for extracurricular activities and school improvements and utilized the lessons learned in the parents' school in their daily lives. *EDUCO teachers* felt that they were valued. They were involved in their students' home lives and interacted more with parents. Overall, bonds between teachers, parents, and students were strengthened, and closer relationships were built between communities, schools, and the Ministry of Education.

enclave within the community, project, or government—partly because Bank-assisted projects often bypassed existing processes or organizations. Project participation has not substantially influenced implementing organizations, and participatory processes have not been widely replicated or scaled up in other projects or development activities in the region or organization.

### Significant Benefits

The Bank's shift to a more participatory approach is recent, and most of the projects employing best-practice participatory processes are still being implemented. Even modest participation brought about improvements. Project design became more relevant as beneficiaries, many for the first time, influenced the placement of facilities such as rural roads and markets, indicated the level of service they wanted and were willing to pay for, and selected community projects they considered important. Playing a role in decisionmaking—far more than contributions in cash, kind, or labor—led villagers to assume ownership of a project, increasing both impact and sustainability. Participation also improved transparency and accountability in contracting and procurement and bettered relations between men and women, between villages and government agency staff, and among members of groups that have not traditionally cooperated (see box 2).

Participation made preparation of country strategies more relevant. In Kenya it sharpened the focus on key constraints on development. In Guatemala it broadened the development agenda addressed in the CAS. It led to a greater focus on participatory strategies, especially in projects. Participation in the preparation of country strategies generally strengthened Bank partnerships with participants and increased the participants' sense of ownership.

### Significant Costs

The costs of participation averaged 2 to 12 percent of total project costs. Government bore most of the costs, often financing them with resources from the project loan, but

donors helped as well, especially in IDA countries. Communities assume significant costs for project participation, contributing labor, materials, cash, and time for meetings.

Bank costs for participation appeared to be substantial during the preparation of operations. Hard data on costs were scarce, but Policy and Human Resources Development grants or trust funds often financed participation in project preparation. The costs of participation in formulating CASs ranged from 4 to 30 percent of total preparation costs in the strategies studied. When the level of participation was high, it accounted for 20 to 30 percent (\$50,000–60,000) of CAS budgets.

### Factors Working for and against Participation

Within countries, the biggest constraint on participation was government skepticism about participatory approaches. Most government agencies also lacked the capacity to engage in participation. Communities did not have enough training and ongoing technical support, and community capacity building was rarely a long-term objective. Within the Bank, the most significant constraints were scarce staff time and money, rigid project cycles, inadequate incentives, and inconsistent management support.

Within a country, Bank advocacy and persistence helped overcome government resistance. NGOs were valuable but underused partners, and government agencies often turned to them to build capacity. Implementing agencies did best if they were led by an internal champion of participation. It was helpful if a project could build on existing processes, organizations, or models. Within the Bank, the most important factor was the task manager's belief in, and experience with, participation. Once Bank staff practiced participatory approaches, they tended to keep using them. NGO-civil society specialists in the Bank's field offices made an important contribution by facilitating participation in CAS consultations.

### Next Steps

Participation is a keystone of the CDF and the development of PRSPs, but the Bank has some distance to go to get its

part right and to improve development effectiveness. The Bank needs to:

#### Develop country-level approaches and other instruments to strengthen the long-term impact of participation.

- Encourage and support government commitments to participatory approaches and to creating an enabling environment for participation.
- Use Bank instruments as mechanisms for developing participatory approaches together with government and other stakeholders. A period of experimentation will be needed to determine what works best.
- Develop a more systematic approach to participation, making it a guiding principle that is reflected in shifts toward decentralization, institutional reform, transparency, and accountability.

**Build capacity in client agencies and communities to foster participation.** The quality, sustainability, and long-term impact of participatory activities are limited by lack of capacity in client agencies and communities. Too often capacity was developed not on an ongoing basis but for a single Bank activity.

- Strengthen and work with government institutions.
- Support the development of national, district, and local government capacity for participatory approaches.
- Support the development of capacity for community participation.
- Increase capacity for participatory monitoring and evaluation.

**Work more with partners to implement participatory approaches.** The Bank cannot and should not try to play the dominant role in implementing participatory approaches. Other partners have more experience and are better positioned for many tasks.

- Work with local and international development partners to promote participation.
- Support existing champions of participation rather than reinvent participation with each operation.
- Recruit local experts experienced in participatory processes to establish in-country teams that could support communities in participatory tasks.

#### Improve the quality of participatory processes in projects and in CAS preparation.

- Develop benchmarks, standards, and guidelines with which to evaluate participatory activities.
- Analyze local institutions and the social and political landscape as part of the design process.
- Take a long-term, results-oriented, partnership approach to participation. Do not rush the process, encourage open-ended first rounds of participation, listen well and provide feedback, and increasingly emphasize results and impact, not just processes.

- Start the process early by encouraging participation in project identification and in activities essential to the preparation of CASs—such as sector strategies and economic and sector work.

**Reduce constraints and improve Bank institutional support for participation.** To develop a more coherent and strategic approach, consider developing a participation strategy and action plan.

- Determine institutional responsibility for leadership in participation.
- Create incentives for task managers to experiment.
- Make skills and experience in participatory processes explicit criteria for Bank staffing, recruitment, and human resource development.
- Develop more effective training for, and knowledge management about, participation.
- Improve documentation on participation. Require its discussion in project identification documents and supervision and implementation completion reports.
- Determine the benefits and costs of various types of participation.



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