

1. Comparative Economic Context

Introduction

Participatory development (PD) is a contender for filling the ideological void created by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the market liberalization in China. In fact, support NGOs in both urban and rural areas use social organizers much as Marxist parties used cadres to spread radical ideas about political and social revolution. The difference is that the goal of social mobilization is community social and economic betterment via their participation and self help. Thus, the vision is deliberately restricted to the improvement of a particular community. In socialist ideology, the energy of individuals and communities is to be harnessed to change society for the benefit of all. Here, the focus is on improving the well being of particular communities and the aggregation of such improvements could be viewed as summing to positive social change.

The second section of this chapter briefly describes prominent attempts at implementing PD in Pakistan. In the process, how PD differs from the conventional development approach is also explained. This is followed by an explanation of why NGOs and not the state or the market play a central role in instituting PD. Finally, PD is compared with the socialist and capitalist approaches to highlight its distinctive features.

Participatory Development¹

The most widely accepted model of PD in Rural Pakistan is that of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP). The AKRSP was introduced in the Karakorum Mountain Range region of Northern Pakistan in 1982. AKRSP's economic philosophy stood traditional development thinking on its head.² While infrastructure is often the end in traditional development, in this case it is an 'entry point' and hence a means to an end. The end is to help build and nourish community organizations and institutions, impart training, inculcate

saving habits and engender village self sufficiency and sustainable development.

This economic philosophy can be formalized by prioritizing AKRSP's objectives as follows:

1. Institutional development or social capital construction;
2. Skill development and training;
3. Saving mobilization;
4. Infrastructure.

By contrast, in simple terms, the standard model viewed the development of infrastructure (capital accumulation) as fundamental in order to induce growth. Savings and resource mobilization were seen as a means to this end. Skill development was emphasized only in some versions that give priority to human resources as complements to physical capital in the growth process. Institutional development was often the totally neglected dimension in the conventional approach and somehow assumed to emerge spontaneously from economic growth.³

As a pre-condition for the construction of village productive physical infrastructure (PPI), such as an irrigation embankment or link road identified as a top priority by the village, the AKRSP requires the establishment of a village organization (VO) with a saving society.⁴ AKRSP provides technical assistance and the necessary capital, but the VO provides the labor (in exchange for a wage fund deposit in the bank by AKRSP for the VO) and is responsible for maintenance and operation of the infrastructure created.

It is mandatory that all members save something on a weekly basis, no matter how little. The objective is to inculcate saving habits and to build up necessary village capital for collective loan collateral. The VO is the medium via which collective action is initiated or training provided for activities pertaining to social forestry, poultry and livestock. Separate women's VOs are formed to address the special concerns brought up in the gender and development literature.

Prior to the formation of the AKRSP, there were many examples of government infrastructure provision attempts in the Northern Areas, but field reports suggest that the funds were often misappropriated, and projects were never completed or, if completed, not maintained properly. The AKRSP is not without its critics, but many believe it to have followed an integrated approach that makes sustainable development possible.⁵