

Book Review

NGOs and Participatory Development in India. Baiju P.V., 2015, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company Pvt.Ltd., ISBN-13:9789351251354. Paperback pp.x+134, Price: ₹450.

Participation as a concept has received wide acclaim in the context of grassroots development. The different strategies for stakeholder involvement in the planning, implementation as well as the evaluation stages of a project are of wider interest. The book under review caters to upgrading the knowledge and skill levels of development workers, NGOs and students of the social sciences. The book explores the concept of participation, participatory rural appraisal as a tool for participatory development and the response of NGOs to participatory practices.

The inspiration for the book is the research conducted by the author on the participatory practices in the development programmes of nine NGOs in the Wayanad district in Kerala, India. The book has seven chapters which are progressive in nature. It concludes with lessons learnt from the field and possibilities for further studies.

Chapter one starts with the evolution of the voluntary sector in India. In this chapter, the author gives the rationale for selecting the area of research and the methodology of the research followed. The significance of the study is explained in terms of the effective practices employed in the participation and the philosophical basis of participatory approaches. The various participatory intervention models are introduced in this chapter, including participatory rural appraisal and the research questions. The study explored key areas like the means adopted by NGOs to get participation, training activities done for capacity building of the staff members, reliability of the participatory approaches, innovations done for ensuring participation, advantages and the challenges faced in using participatory methods. The profile of the NGOs and the beneficiaries are also described. The conceptual and operational definitions of the concepts like participatory approaches and NGOs are given. The design of the research follows a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

Chapter two deals with NGOs. The author provides definitions of NGOs. The development oriented NGOs are divided into first generation (relief and welfare), second generation (community development), third generation (sustainable systems development), and fourth generation (people's movements) in terms of the strategies adopted by them. This will give the reader an opportunity to assess the evolution and adoption of different strategies by NGOs over a period of time.

The history of NGOs in India is highlighted in the book. In this section, the evolution of the voluntary sector as a necessity in the context of the shortcomings of governmental efforts in community development is elaborated upon. The categorisation of NGOs into five types according to the scale of operations and the location of head offices, and four types of funding mechanisms available for NGOs is an addition to the literature. Statistical details with regard to the number of NGOs and the volume of aid channelled to the Indian voluntary sector throw light on the importance of studying the relevance and effectiveness of their activities. The contribution of NGOs to development is also discussed with a people-centred development vision and viewing development as a people's movement rather than as a funded project. The evolution of NGOs in other parts of the world and the approach of NGOs in supplementing government efforts is underlined. The author is keen to address some of the criticisms of NGOs which focus on technical deficiency, lack of accountability and the excessively politicised character of NGOs. Development NGOs in poor countries need to address concerns such as accountability, internal reform and mechanisms for regaining trust and confidence, developing quality ratings and preventing unhealthy competition between small NGOs. The chapter concludes on a positive note as the government of India has accepted the position of NGOs.

In Chapter three, the concept of participation and participatory approaches adopted by different players in the development sector are discussed. The initial sections of the chapter attempt to define and describe the concept of participation. The concept is introduced with the presentation of reviews from the literature which gives a common notion that participation needs to be considered as the process in which people are involved in the decision-making process, implementation of the programmes, sharing the benefits and in the overall evaluation. It is also

stressed that participation needs to be considered as a basic human right which is essential in social and economic development. The chapter goes on to discuss the typology of participation with regard to a range of varying intensities and types of community participation. The author relates the concept of participation to the process of development and introduces the concept of participatory development as the process by which populations, and especially their least considered members, influence the decisions that affect them. Participatory approaches in the changing paradigms of development strategies are discussed in the chapter which also gives their historical evolution. The idea of people-centred development needs to be disseminated to all the people concerned. In particular, government functionaries in the developing nations must be targeted so that they develop a positive attitude towards people as well as to the strategy. The participatory nature of the community development Programmes initiated in 1952 is also elaborated upon. The Kerala's People's Plan campaign, women empowerment through Gramasabhas, transformation of the local ecosystem of Vasnditaluk in Gujarat, participatory natural resource management as happened in Hivare Village in Pune, and the MGNREG programme implemented in Andhra Pradesh are some of the cases where participatory approaches were adopted in India. The examples drawn from the international arena include the cases of Honduras, India, the Philippines, Poland, Brazil and Pakistan. These have elicited the participation at all levels of the programme by empowering the neighbourhood associations, underlining the acceptance of participatory approaches among the international community. But along with these cases, the role of NGOs in the success of the above-mentioned programmes should not be sidelined.

Chapter four discusses the concept and application of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) as one of the widely recognised and established methodologies of the participatory development process. PRA is defined as 'a family of approaches and methods to enable people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions to plan, act, to monitor and evaluate'. The key historical milestones which directly and indirectly contribute to a confluence PRA is presented in the chapter which helps the reader to understand the evolutionary line. Three foundations of PRA, the 11 principles in PRA and 20 important tools of PRA are also introduced. The field applications of PRA, especially in India, are elaborated upon in

the chapter which describes the use of PRA in stimulating community participation, conservation expeditions, art work and even in psychiatry. Several studies are cited which revolve around the practice of PRA among NGOs and the Government. The findings show encouraging results so far as the feasibility and effectiveness of the participatory approach, methods and the tools used in the process are concerned.

Chapters five and six exclusively deliberate the findings of the research conducted by the author. In chapter five, the profile of the NGOs in the study and the beneficiaries are presented. The study covered eight NGOs and one GONGO (Government-owned NGO) and a very brief profile of the organisations is presented. The legal entity of the organisations and organisation-wise details regarding the type of building, geographical area of operation, details of the staff, target population, number of CBOs, field activities and sources of income are shown as tables. The profile of the beneficiaries like gender, age, marital status, religion, family size, education, family income, family status, duration of association with the organisation and position held and the present position in CBO is given. It is also noteworthy that the personnel from the NGO participate in the CBO programmes while the participation of other stakeholders, especially from the Panchayat Raj Institutions, is inadequate.

Chapter six explains the findings of the study with regard to the application of the PRA and the benefits gained. A diagrammatic sketch of the sources of triangulation is presented in the chapter which is very clear for the reader to get a bird's eye view of the process. Triangulation has happened through the sources of data and at the tools of data collection. The chapter sheds light on the rationale for the use of participatory practices, the stages of the project where PRA is applied, PRA workshops and trainings implemented by the NGOs, programmes where the PRA has been applied in NGOs and CBOs, people's participation in participatory programmes, tools of PRA used, results of participatory programmes, challenges in the application of participatory approaches and participatory approaches in organisations. The analysis presented in most of the tables represents the responses from the NGO as well as from the beneficiaries which gives the reader a chance to compare the benefactor-beneficiary perception differences. The problems faced in the field application of PRA is a useful guideline for a practitioner, particularly one who is naive in the area. The

analysis is also backed by a review of the available literature. The differences between NGO and GONGO is mentioned as the study included eight NGOs and one GONGO which used PRA as a part of the policy of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) of the national government. They differ mainly in their choice of the PRA tools and the stage of adoption.

The final chapter summarises the findings of the research and discusses learning in the field. The researcher discusses concerns in adopting participatory approaches and offers suggestions. A more professional approach in NGO governance with a special focus on ensuring the quality of staff members, the mobilisation of funds from local and corporate houses, technology assisted documentation in the NGO, involvement in research and advocacy, and expanding the coverage of target are some of the suggestions. The need to consider and adopt PRA as a useful methodology by NGOs in daily discourse and areas for further exploration are recommended.

The findings of the study will be useful for both the academic community and practitioners as they could explore the concept and practicality of participatory approaches further. As this research has taken the Wayanad District of Kerala state as the location of study, the adaptation of the findings with a different pattern of NGOs as well as the beneficiaries is going to be a challenge for the professionals. The detailed bibliography gives the reader a guide to seek more on the concepts mentioned. The book provides a good flow of the concepts and its interlinkages are well established.

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