

# Listening to the Least: Engaging Communities in Development Programs in India

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## 4.1 Listening to the Least: Engaging Communities in Development Programs in India

**Baiju Pallicka Vareed**

**Abstract** Engaging community or following participatory practice in development was initiated by Non-Government Organizations and subsequently by various government departments. Working with stakeholders in communities demands an understanding of the local culture, social milieu and power dynamics. Local problems need local solutions as well as support and resources from outside the community. Community engagement is imperative while working with culturally diverse country like India, where no one size fits all. The vast voluntary sector consisting community-based staff of NGOs and trained social workers, have vigorously embraced engagement since the last decade of the last century. Community agencies ensure involvement of stakeholders and community members in all sorts of development activities including agriculture, livelihood, gender development, micro business and health and sanitation. This article discusses how citizen engagement is undertaken in community development programs in India by NGOs and government departments, with case studies from in rural, urban and slum dwellings

Key words: Community, Participation, Engagement, Social work, NGOs, Panchayathiraj, Stakeholders

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## 4.1 Introduction

India is a diverse country with huge population and diversity in beliefs, culture, languages, food styles and lifestyles. While diversity and plurality define the country, they pose challenges in addressing the social and economic development of the people as well. Three centuries of colonization left the country with economic, cultural and political impoverishment. India is home to 1.36 billion people of which 21.2 percent is below lives below the poverty line earning less than USD 1.90 a day (The World Bank, 2019). Report of National Sample Survey Organization of government of India estimates that in 2011 – 2012 there were 25.7% poor in rural areas and 13.7% poor in urban areas, putting it national total at 21.9% of country's population (Government of India, 2018). However, there are other independent analyst who says actual rate of poverty in the county would be higher than of government estimates. As of 2019, there are 313 million illiterate people in the country of which 59 percent are women (Chandra, 2019). UNDP (2019) places India at 129 in human development Index and 135th place in gender inequality index (United Nations Development Program, 2019). While 68.84% of Indians live in rural areas, 31.16% are in urban areas; 17.4 percent of all urban people live in slums (Census of India, 2011). Rural areas consist of marginal farmers who cultivate in their own small size lands for sustenance or work in other farms for daily wages. Caste system<sup>1</sup>, which divides people as superior and inferior and still deprive resources and social and economic opportunities for people from lower castes. There are rampant migration happening from rural areas to urban areas in search of jobs. This is a coping strategy used in the face of acute unemployment and consequent income variability. Studies have found that people belonging to remote rural areas, the chronically poor, landless, and those with low educational attainments are more likely to migrate seasonally/temporarily (Abdul Jaleel & Chattopadhyay, 2019). They constitute to be the working class living in squalid housing facilities and violent and unhealthy environments, with limited access to employment opportunities and income, little or no social protection mechanisms, and limited access to adequate health and education opportunities (Singh & Fatima, 2017). These facts as well as others portrait the deprivation faced by people through poverty, discrimination based on caste, and gender, sanitation and education.

On the other hand, India has achieved tremendous progress in reducing poverty, increasing literacy rates, promoting gender equity, ensuring sanitation and several other areas of social development in the last century, especially after the country became independent in 1947. This progress is the result of concerted efforts by government along selfless work of voluntary organizations and village level community

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<sup>1</sup> In the deep-rooted caste system in India, the upper caste treated the lower caste as untouchables, and appearance of lower caste person in front of an upper caste person fetched punishment from upper caste. Even though untouchability was abolished by law in 1955, discrimination based on caste is still prevails in society.

workers. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, who led the millions through non-violence and *satyagraha* for the independence of the country, focused on community work during the independence movement. He proposed constructive programs for community development with 18 focus areas which included communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, village industries, sanitation, basic and adult education, and focused work on farmers, Adivasis (Indigenous people) and students (Gandhi, 1945). These focus areas of community work were based on the social and economic context of the Indian society in the early and mid-twentieth century. Even after decades he proposed these measures the challenges of Indian society remain similar to what he listed out. This prelude is given discuss how communities are different, so as the problems faced by them.

Mutual help and voluntary service had been part of Indian culture. The deeply religious mindset of the community believed in doing good other people and contributing to community development. The grassroot level community organizations followed charity approach in helping the needy. The village level workers were not specifically trained to be social workers. Though social work education started in Indian in 1936 and flourished towards the last decades of the twentieth century, the focus of trained social workers remained in clinical and management work<sup>2</sup>. Community development projects were started in 1948 with the launch of an experimental community development program in Ittawa a small village in North India (Hegde, 2001). The focused community development activities including housing, livelihood programs and support for marginal farming covered all parts of the country by the 1980s. Development blocks still function as the formal channel of government for community development in the country. Their roles and status have been changed by the introduction of Panchayati Raj system, introduced by 73rd amendment of the constitution.

The central and state governments work through various ministries and programs to uplift people from poverty and provide them a decent life through education, technological advancement, habitation and health facilities. The vast number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which have been functioning with the voluntary motive of people's development too spearhead social, economic and political changes among the deprived communities in the nook and corner of the country. The NGOs have been started by Gandhian ideals of community work or religious spirit for helping others or sheer philanthropic purpose. While government mostly follows bureaucratic approaches in community work, NGOs utilize dynamic strategies and methods for community work. NGOs work among the vulnerable and deprived sections of communities which include women, child laborers, marginal farmers, people with disability, people living in slums, homeless and mentally ill

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<sup>2</sup> Social work is not a registered profession in India. Social work education is criticized in the country for following western methods which do not accurately address the issues of the country. India needs a community based social work education that addresses the problems around poverty.

people. NGOs as well as government serve in various settings including housing, health promotion, assistance for education of children, empowerment of women, livelihood activities, agriculture, water supply and sanitation. Community agencies and government department work in collaboration with elected representatives of local self-governments, community leaders, local community and religious organizations, financial institutions, government officials, political groups and beneficiaries of the program. This article discusses how stakeholders, especially community is engaged in the development activities done by the government and voluntary agencies.

## 4.2 Participatory Development

Academicians and community workers have defined concept of participation in different ways. The right to participation comes from the general acceptance in development that people have the right to participate in decisions which have an effect upon their wellbeing (Littrell, 1971). In the early discussions of participation, Cohen & Uphoff (1980) states that participation includes people's involvement in decision making, in implementation (of programs), sharing their benefits and evaluation of them. According to Bhose (2003) participation is a process wherein people involved themselves in planning, decision making, and carrying out projects, movement, or whatsoever towards betterment with or without external support. People may sustain these changes as individual, in people organizations and through social institutions. Participation should be treated as a voluntary process where disadvantaged people influence or control the decisions that affect their lives. Ananda (2009) suggests that participation involves policy making, though in a non-binding involvement by contributing through public consultation.

Participation in community development implies active and informed involvement of all stakeholders, mostly the members of the benefitting community, in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs for their wellbeing. Community work focuses on people deprived of their rights due to several factors including gender, location, class, caste, faith, education, and poor governance. So much so, participation of beneficiary communities explicitly means inclusion of deprived people in the development process. While this definition buys into a pragmatic approach of participation, on a broader and deeper analysis, participation reaches to accessing resources, formulating policies, engaging in civic administration, ascertaining human rights and strengthening democratic institutions. This article captures all the nuances of interpretations given to participation and would follow the pragmatic definition for discussions, whereas the latter is implied. While people's participation remains as the key them, development sector uses several other terms to denote the same. They include participatory development, civic

participation, community engagement, construction (of community) and citizen participation. As the essence of all these terms centers around participation, I tend to use participation in this discussion, not excluding the meanings implied by any such terms.

It was in the 1970s that participation became subject of elaborate research and discussion among development scholars (Arora & Ahmed 1990). Community development literature, globally and in India, has been rich with instances of participation and community engagement since 1980s onwards. (Chambers, 1983; Cohen & Uphoff, 1977; Lahiri Dutt & Samanta, 2006; Voth & Brewster 1989). Participation was acknowledged as a transformative concept in community development in the early 1970s, mostly by the works of Paulo Freire (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Freire propounded a pedagogy that worked in equal partnership with people in community applying popular education that would liberate them from oppression (Freire, 1972). Along with that, several independent community actions in different parts of the world positioned community engagement as an integral practice theme in community development. The Gandhian principles of self-reliant villages and small-scale development were initial format of community-based development (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

Community participation has been identified as an integral component of sustainable development and hence current environmental policies and programs recognize the participation and active involvement of communities in planning and implementing programs as well as in developing policies (Ananda, 2009). It was NGOs who initiated participatory development in the country in the late 1970s, following the international attention to it and as suggested by donor agencies (Baiju, 2015). Subsequently various government programs embraced various methods of participatory approaches. This chapter now discusses how participatory development was integrated at various levels of government as well as by NGOs.

Box [Examples from practice 1] starts

*Case study 1 How a village leader changed the fate of his village*

Piplantri Gram Panchayat is in the Rajasmand district of Rajasthan state in India, has 1100 households. The hilly terrain and degradation of land by unregulated grazing and timber had converted the place to a dry area. Reportedly only two wells nearer a valley remained full and women had to trudge the distance and carry the water back uphill. There were only two schools, grade and children had to reach another school 15 km away for grades above ten. There was high drop out rates in these schools and mostly girls stayed home after 8<sup>th</sup> class. Only few households had individual sanitary facilities and without adequate water that was not going to emerge. Most of the employment came from nearby mining quarries.

The changes seen in the village are piped water supply to individual households, paved and relatively wider roads, powered supply and street lighting. There are two grade 12 schools, ii schools up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There are almost no dropouts and girls attend schools at least grade 12. There are nine anganwadi (preschools). Number of well-maintained common sanitary facilities, dustbins with regular waste collection and household level soak pits with kitchen garden help to keep the village environs hygienic and brought the highest honor of federal government for clean environment. There is irrigation that revived agriculture. The civic administration is revamped with more people participating in Gramsabhas.

The transformation began with election of Mr. Shyam Paliwal as Sarpanch (village head) in the state level elections to local self-governments in 2005. He started the spree of community development starting with upgrading existing school up to grade 12, utilizing government fund as well as contributions from villagers. Tapping the Total Sanitation Campaign fund provided by government, the village-initiated construction of toilet facilities in households and public places. This was supported by hygiene training aided by UNICEF. In order to address the pressing issue was the falling level of ground water, water harvesting through check dams on stream beds, rooftop rainwater collection in the schools and land treatment for retention of water were initiated through collective decision making and pooling resources from different government programs as well as voluntary contributions. Tree plantation was encouraged, and 1,500,000 trees were planted in about five years. All these efforts resulted in wells with full water and there is plenty of water for irrigation. Utilizing the government fund, the village provided piped water to every household. There are street lights in the village roads.

The central features of Piplantris transformation are the high drive of the village sarpanch, systematic and full use of available government programs and creative source of additional sources of social responsibility fund from corporates. Peoples participation in decision making and in developmental efforts through extensive meetings with the communities, mobilization of resources from community, open decision making and execution and monitoring of programs by community level committees, are no doubt another mainstay and have been crucial in the success of the Sarpanch.

(The case study is shortened version from IIT Delhi, 2018)

Box [Examles from practice 1] ends

**Commented [H1]:** I do not understand these two sentences? Please rephrase them.

**Commented [BPV2R1]:** There are two high schools providing education until grade 12 and 11 schools that provide education until 8th grade. Children, especially girls, drop out of education in rural areas, whereas Piplantri has almost no dropouts and girls attend schools at least grade 12.

**Commented [H3]:** Is this UNICEF?

**Commented [BPV4R3]:** UNICEF

**Commented [H5]:** Please check out this sentence, it's a bit unclear

**Commented [BPV6R5]:** In order to address the pressing issue of falling level of ground water, water harvesting through check dams on stream beds, rooftop rainwater collection in the schools and land treatment for retention of water were initiated through collective decision making and pooling resources from different government programs as well as voluntary contributions from community members.

### 4.3 Panchayathi Raj System

Community development work in India carried out by the central and state governments through ministries in governments at various levels as well as through various development programs and government agencies. The development blocks started in 1952 still continue as the major government agency for community development in the country. However, the Panchayati Raj Act introduced in 1993 brought a sea change in the community development in the country. This act instituted a system of governance with three levels of local self-governments: Gram Panchayat at the village level, Block Samiti of Panchayat Samiti at the block level covering five to seven Grama Panchayath, and Zila Parishad at the district level, covering all Panchayats in the district. These councils are governed by representatives elected by people in every five years, with the funds collected from their jurisdictional area as well as those shared by government and by various central and state programs. The panchayats are responsible for development, maintenance and running of facilities that serve the community, including schools, hospitals, agriculture and local industries.

Case. Gandhiji shared that his idea of village *swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity (Gandhi, 1945). Gandhiji emphasized the need for sanitation, education, cottage industries and annihilation of discriminatory practices like untouchability and alcoholism. But when Gandhiji dreamed of Gram (village) *swaraj* (self-reliance) India was not an independent country. After independence of the country in 1947, it took decades to bring together the country as a nation by consolidating princely states, formation of states on the basis of languages, addressing needs of agriculture and industrial development and along with it fighting challenging social and economic situations like untouchability, illiteracy and unemployment. There were different types of community based local self-governments that existed in different states in the county, which got streamlined to a single structure throughout the county through Panchayati Raj Act. The needs of community have changed from the times of Gandhiji, even though the main problems in rural areas are around poverty, discrimination based on caste and gender-based inequality. Panchayati Raj system has reserved seats for women ensuring fair representation of women in the councils, so as representatives from communities that have historically been deprived, classified as scheduled class and indigenous communities called as scheduled tribes. The headship of various councils is rotating for women and representatives from backward communities, which is based on the population of backward communities in that particular *panchayath* area. These measures have contributed to significantly challenging the patriarchal gender roles and political leadership of women and deprived communities.

The main deliberative bodies of the Panchayat Raj are the Gram Sabhas, made up of all voters living in a division or ward of a Gram Panchayath. The gram sabhas meet at least twice every year, collectively review the plans for the community,

chose the beneficiaries for various programs and make priorities for the local development. The Panchayati raj system introduced in the country used participatory decentralized planning for local development (Harilal, 2008). Some states like Kerala vigorously followed decentralized planning of community development programs, other states implemented decentralized planning at different levels. The government does not employ professional social workers at any levels of community development programs<sup>3</sup>. However the employees working in Panchayath offices and government programs get training on various government programs that include technical details, beneficiary selection, fund management and leadership skills. There are grassroot level community workers called *Gramsevak* or village workers, who work closely with community. The discussion on working in community with deprived communities in India invariably need to include schemes and programs implemented by the central and state governments for community development, as they too are catalysts in reducing poverty, women empowerment, technological advancement and social harmony in communities. The important players in implementation of Panchayati Raj system are the government appointed staff at different levels and offices of Panchayati Raj system and representatives elected in every five years. Panchayathi Raj system does not appoint any (professional) social workers at any levels of its process. This fact should be understood in the context that social work is still not a registered profession, and has yet to acquire specified roles, mandate and legal entity. However, people with social work education get recruited to different positions in Panchayati Raj system as secretary of Gram Panchayat and village extension worker as well as to specific programs implemented through panchayaths like National Rural Health Mission that provides health services to the deprived communities in association with Panchayaths, and National Rural Livelihood Mission which focusses on promotion of livelihood programs for deprived communities.

The Panchayati raj and Nagarapalika system have helped in decentralized democratic governance, political empowerment, ushered gender equity and sharing of power to local self-governments. The decentralized planning helps for participatory planning of development schemes, informed selection of beneficiaries, participatory monitoring and evaluation of projects. The poor and deprived people got a say in the planning and implementation of local development programs. A homeless person can state his need for a house in the Gramasabha, the grassroot level body in decision making. And the same community gathering prioritize who deserves to get assistance for house construction, if there is a greater number of applicants than the resources available. The local panchayath council collect revenue form their jurisdiction as well as received fund from state government and they decide on what improvements should be made in the local community. The Grama Pachanyaths invest in maintaining elementary schools, Panchayath Samithi looks after high schools. So as Grama Panchayath is responsible for medical service and supply of

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<sup>3</sup> There are only few positions in government service that asks for social work education. Many social work qualified people join various government services including community work.

medicines in local community hospital, whereas the still larger hospitals with more beds is under the mandate of Panchayath Samithi and the larger district level hospital with specialized treatment is managed by Zilla Parishad. (There is difference in the role divisions in different states). All such facilities are great resources accessed by people who cannot pay for service in private sector. The primary institutions providing services in health, education, community services, local development, sanitation, and infrastructure are managed by representatives elected by people who potentially make use of them.

However, this discussion does not undermine nepotism, corruption, technical issues and other limitations faced at different levels of implementation. Nevertheless, the deprived communities' access many of the services and programs through the government in their neighborhood, which they could access through centralized systems. As Harilal (2008) points out participatory decentralized planning is not a panacea for social and economic problems. Even in a state like Kerala that boasts of achievements in stakeholder participation, decentralized planning failed to include tribal (indigenous) communities in the development process (Thomas & Narayanan, 2015). The conservative ideology of national and state governments has shifted from involving communities in decision making to following top down approaches in local development. As institutionalization loses the soul of every new idea, mandatory guidelines by government for participation made it an administrative procedure than a process of local community development.

Box [Example from practice 2] starts

*Case Study 2. Engaging Community in Slum Redevelopment*

This case study presents community engagement experiences urban housing project in slums of two cities in India. Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation launched in 2009 Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) scheme with the purpose of creating slum free India. The scheme introduced public participation and cost sharing between the central government (50%), the state and urban local bodies (ULB) (38%) and a minimum of 12% for beneficiaries of upgrades to slum-housing and infrastructure. RAY advocated for making services and amenities available to those who have been deprived of their rights, and for creating legal title in city spaces and design their own houses. Under the scheme, every identified slum would develop a detailed project report (DPR) incorporating feedback from slum dwellers and other key stakeholders. This case study by two workers in the execution of the project in two cities acknowledges the dynamics of participatory consultation and decision-making.

Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh state, has total area of 143 square kilometres with 1.01 million population. Gangtok is the capital of the state of Sikkim, that has a total population of 0.1 million people spread across 19.62 square kilometres. The scheme successfully engaged the community in preparing the

DPR, designing the houses and executing the project through six key steps in participatory decision making:

(1) A Process Ignition Workshop was hosted, gathering slum-dwellers, city councillors, and officials from ULBs and state department, where the RAY was introduced. A community mapping exercise was undertaken using picture cards, to understand the way the people would see their settlement. Community representatives were selected in Raipur for the purpose of raising awareness about RAY and animating street-meetings.

(2) Participatory Poverty Mapping was conducted (in one slum) by using household items such as wheat flour, pulses, and tree leaves, that highlighted houses, ponds, temples, etc. The participants brainstormed poverty indicators in their settlement and identified the houses they thought were most disadvantaged.

(3) Further discussions were undertaken through street-level meetings to identify the causes of and solutions to problems facing the community. In both cities, the participants identified the issues affecting them, and prioritised them.

(4) As mandated under RAY, a socio-economic survey of all the slum-households was conducted in the local language, by enumerators selected from the community, which helped to build rapport with community. Every surveyed household was linked to a GIS-based map of the settlement and survey data was publicly displayed.

(5) The options for housing and infrastructure development were finalized with the help of technical experts and shared with the community in accessible language.

(6) Community participation was also extended to implementing and monitoring the civil works sanctioned under the DPR. While in one slum, community preferred to raise their houses themselves, in others the ward committee supervised timely completion of milestone works of the houses by the contractors.

However, this engaged process came with its own challenges. People were sceptical of RAY's commitment to full community participation in planning for historically they had designed to exclude community. They feared "token participation" where end-products would bear their signatures but largely reflect government. But community meetings, and discussion of options for developing housing and infrastructure with the community priorities brought them to the process. One of the biggest learning from this project is that ultimately, slum-dwellers are able to suggest simple solutions to complex problems. Small street-corner meetings have yielded splendid results with a spectrum of important issues being given space for discussion. Community's knowledge and opinions on development models are formed through experience and may not always align with policy makers' priorities. Programmes must inculcate patience and a zeal for ongoing community dialogue to ensure

that their aspirations are understood and respected in the planning process to effectively engage communities.

Adapted from Gurung & Bhattacharya (2015)

Box [Example from practice 2] ends

#### 4.4 Participatory Development by NGOs

The other major player working with deprived communities are the Non-Governmental Organizations, which are popularly known as voluntary organizations (and as nonprofit agencies in the West). India has a long history of voluntary organizations and voluntary actions. The independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi focused on working in grassroot communities by eradicating social evils of untouchability and social and economic upliftment. Many community leaders followed ideals of Gandhiji and continued to propagate his missions through voluntary organization. Another major category of voluntary organizations was started by religious communities based on principles of charity as propounded in their religious teachings. The country has several organizations started by philanthropists with the purpose of serving local communities or a section of deprived people like people with disability or empowerment of rural women. NGOs are generally registered as trusts or charitable societies under the legislations of each state. There have been several social service organizations started by corporate houses in last two decades focusing on target populations. NGOs appoint community level workers for frontline service and people with social work education at frontline as well as managerial levels. Voluntary organizations were mostly based on concept of charity during the first few decades after independence. Most social workers start their professional career in NGOs. NGOs began to take up social justice issues during 1980s and came to public limelight in 1990s (Patrick, 2010) NGOs advanced to professional approaches, scientific methods and secular worldviews in their practice in last three decades.

Voluntary organizations effectively worked in the nook and corner of the country where government machinery could not reach out. While voluntary organizations mobilized funds from local community, religious institutions and wealthy people in the earlier periods, international donor agencies began to support NGOs in the second half of last century. Along with international funding came strategies and methods in community development which have been successfully experimented in other parts of the world. The central and state governments began to partner with NGOs in the delivery of community services in the 1980s, which ascertained the significance of third sector in the country. India moved to a liberal and open economy in 1990, after which there has been sporadic growth in corporate sector. As a result, several corporate social responsibility projects are implemented in partnership with NGOs.

NGOs work among the grass root people and reach to communities where government cannot effectively reach out. (Baiju, 2015; Bhose, 2003). The main target group of NGO sector are marginal farmers, women, children, tribal communities and other socially and economically backward communities. The activities of the NGOs are numerous, and they include non-formal and supplementary education, innovations and financial support for farming, livelihood promotion, micro entrepreneurship, vocational and skill trainings, promotion of saving schemes, women empowerment activities, life skill learning, housing, sanitation, drinking water supply, psycho social counselling and recreational programs. There are several NGOs that work for environmental conservation, promotion of technology, rights of sexual minorities, abolition of bonded labor, legal aid, innovations in education and governance. There are nonprofit organizations focused on research, publication, media advocacy, campaigns, networking and liaising with government. This third sector occupies a significant position in the development of grass root level communities in India.

The government-initiated projects followed top to down approach where the so-called experts within government department planned the schemes without much consultation with the communities whose problems the programs tried to address. (Pieterse, 2001; Tesoriero, 2006) Efforts to involve communities, beneficiaries and stakeholders through various established methodologies began to get into the various community development projects in India. However, it was the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that spearheaded these changes, followed by government projects. International donor agencies, including various United Nations agencies supported many of the NGOs working at community level with funding, training for staff and introduction of scientific methodologies of work<sup>4</sup>. Introduction of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) followed by Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was the first organized form of participatory development in the country. Robert Chambers who theorized PRA, developed methodologies and wrote extensively on it, conducted workshops for community workers and NGO staff in the country. He applied PRA in communities with staff of NGOs and developed new methodologies based on his experience from them.

PRA evolved into various realms of community work like Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), Participatory Forest Management (PFM), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Partnership in Sexual Health (PSH), Participatory Technology Development (PTD), Participatory Resource Management (PRM) and Participatory Resource Mapping (PRM). (Baiju, 2015) These different models formalized participation of stakeholders, especially the beneficiaries in the development programs in the areas indicated in the names. Non-government organizations started to apply rural appraisal methods in 80s. PRA gave a structured format for participatory development that was used at planning, implementation, monitoring

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<sup>4</sup> Even the highly acclaimed Ettawa project that started the community development projects in India was funded by the Ford Foundation.

and evaluation phases of community development projects. Tools like wealth ranking, resource mapping, matrix ranking, Venn diagram, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews helped to assess the needs, identify the resources and plan for development along with the local community. Mapping, Venn diagram, cobweb analysis and other tools were used for monitoring the progress of community development programs as well as evaluating them.

These tools of PRA help to shed the power centered on the community workers and delegate the power to the community to apply their knowledge and styles of learning. These tools replaced conventional tools like survey where community members were the subjects and the social work agency decided its format and content. Whereas community engagement tools shared power with community in choosing the methods of study, facilitated the process and critically analyzed the findings. The process of engaging the community as such was an empowering process.

Box [Example from practice 3] starts

*Case Study 3 Participatory approaches lead to community ownership of livelihood schemes by Indigenous community.*

Aralam Tribal Resettlement area in Kannur district of Kerala State in South India is inhabited by 1096 tribal families. Most of them belongs to a tribal community named 'Paniya' who are considered to be least developed among tribal communities in the state. They live in the land freely distributed by state Government, but lack means for livelihood. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD [www.nabard.org](http://www.nabard.org)) with their mandate of tribal community development sanctioned a livelihood promotion project to the community. Centre for Research and Development (CRD [www.crd-ksgd.org](http://www.crd-ksgd.org)), a local nonprofit organization is the implementing agency, who started to work in the community starting July 2016.

The community had several projects for their development, most of them did not bring desired results; no wonder the community shunned the community workers in the community. The agency adopted a community participatory bottom up approach. The team from CRD made the initial entry through the Oorumoopans (Tribal Community Chieftains), who agreed to convene few community meetings. The workers camped in the area, visited every household and listened to the community members. The community came together for participatory analysis of their livelihood situation through various tools of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), facilitated by community workers. This led to developing action plan for livelihood, where importance was given to the activities which community had been traditionally skilled at. The entire plan was devised with people's participation and the Gramasabha, local community assembly gave their feedback and final assent.

Community was mobilized through Self-Help Groups (SHG) consisting 15 to 20 families, who raised savings and mobilized capital for their ventures from banks apart from the NABARD financial assistance. The community members now have individual and group projects including agriculture, animal husbandry, small trades, and technical ventures, which fetch decent livelihood. Entire beneficiaries for the livelihood and group-based lease farming activities were selected through the SHGs. Local leadership and management skills were strengthened through capacity development workshops, and visits to other similar projects. In order to maintain the transparency and accountability, implementing agency publicly displayed technical and financial details of the project, so as the physical and financial targets for every family. One example of using community resource and skill was developing a community nursery that raised seedlings and organic manure for all agricultural activities that replaced buying them from open market. Community involvement was ensured through sharing labor or materials for every venture. The community is in the process of setting up a farmer producer company, with shares from community members for input supply, processing, value addition and marketing of their own products.

The partnership between government agency (NABARD), implementing agency and local community became successful in promoting livelihood of people. The important points of success are unconditionally listening to the community, empowering the community as decision makers, focus on their traditional practices for livelihood and provision of material benefits to the community.

(The case study was developed by Centre for Research and Development (CRD [www.crdksgd.org](http://www.crdksgd.org)) and published with their permission)

Box [Example from practice 3] ends

#### 4.5 Challenges of Participation

Even The World bank, who has proposed community based (participatory) programs to reduce poverty and invested billions of dollars - including in India - raised concerns on the effectiveness of community driven approaches. A study by Mansuri & Rao (2004) finds that The World Bank's portfolio alone has approximate \$7 billion for community based and driven development projects (p.1). But they argue that 'evidence suggests that decentralized targeting has not always been effective, especially in targeting projects to the poor within communities' (p. 29). They find that decentralized projects are dominated by local elites and fail to address heterogeneity of communities, thereby not targeting the right beneficiaries. Another criticism they raise is that the uncritical use of the term community used in most of these

community driven projects often obscures local structures of social and economic powers; and community is defined an endogenous construct determined by the parameters of a project. They also found from studies that communities with poor organization and less social capital are less likely to get access to community driven projects, and sometimes end up poorly mismanaging the projects given to them.

Engaging communities is not easy and is always challenging, as service providers need to share their power with community and seek involvement of community in decision making. There has always been criticism that little is done in reality to ensure citizen participation in community development, though much lip service is done about it. Community development has been done *to* a community, rather doing *with* them, making people dependent on service providers (Garkovich, 1989). The government systems are vulnerable to corruption, bureaucratic procedures and inefficiency of the system. The nonprofit sector often suffers from paucity of funds, technological update, infrastructure facilities, competent staff and vested interests of community leaders. The leadership in local communities, though come up with the idea of serving community, are often inclined to the interests of political parties and religious groups they represent. The voluntary agencies are forced to follow directions from the local leaders than the plans of the agencies. Elections to local in Panchayathi Raj institutions are contested by candidates of political parties, and political party that wins majority of seats get to rule the local government. The local governance is influenced by interests of the political parties in power and individual interests of members. There have been checks and balances been brought by government as well as voluntary agencies to overcome the challenges and work for the development of communities.

Despite the challenges and limitations Panchayathi Raj institutions and voluntary organizations are thriving by engaging with communities in their development. There are several case studies on local self-government under the leadership of local village leaders transformed their communities to prosperity. The case studies compiled by Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi, 2018) include Ralegan Siddhi (Maharashtra), Piplantri (Rajasthan), Ramachandrapuram (Andhrapradesh), Gangadevipalli (Andhrapradesh) and Hiware Bazar (Maharashtra). Some key factors contributed to this success were strong leadership of democratically elected village heads, utilization of natural and community resources, effective use of various government schemes, use of corporate social responsibility funds, and ensuring the participation of local community.

## 4.6 Conclusion

As social work is not a regulated profession, it is not a requisite for many positions that require social work skills. The nonprofit agencies and government programs working with communities employ workers who receive training to work with communities. Nonprofit agencies embrace advanced practice methods of

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working with communities and develop innovative strategies for community practice. The local self-governments and various government programs also adopt to inclusive development and devise strategies for engaging communities in the development. Technological advancement and social media play an important role in communications with the community, and the community agencies rampantly uses social media and devices in community work. Effective use of technology nestled with advanced methods of development practice would bring new horizons of community work in the country.

National governments are enforcing laws that curtail rights of people, especially of deprived communities and minorities. Community work demands a refocus on enhancing rights of people including for livelihood, housing, education, entitlements, right for expression, diversity in beliefs and practices. Such work involves transparency and accountability from government as well as governments' trust in people. One of the ways to strengthen participatory community work is to examine the theoretical framework, methodologies, language, strategies, and tools for engaging with communities. They should be capable of defining the real community with a deeper understanding of power structures and cultural intricacies and ensuring involvement deprived member of the community. The competencies of social workers and community workers are significant in understanding communities, analyzing power structures and effectively engaging with communities. The paradigm shift in community work is that social workers learn and work with communities than applying expert knowledge and work for the community.

#### 4.7 References

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