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Local Knowledge in the Lips of Globalization: Uncertainty of Community Participation in NGO Activities

M. Rezaul ISLAM¹, Abu Bakar Ah SITI HAJAR², Abd. Wahab HARIS³

Abstract

Community participation in the local knowledge system (LKS) has been proved successful in the development activities of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is true in the developing countries like Bangladesh, where majority of the people depend on indigenous skills in their livelihoods. But gradually, globalization has become important process in many aspects of the development activities, which emphasises global knowledge (GK) and it has been proved more successful in many cases. It is seen that many NGOs emphasise the GK in their development interventions because of its high productivity and funding opportunity. Due to the poor socio-economical and cultural conditions and local people's traditional habits, the NGOs with GK intervention partially failed to secure participation of the local people in their development activities. This paper looks how globalization generates spans of uncertainties of community participation in NGOs' development activities. The findings of the paper are mostly based on literature review and some opinions are added from the authors' empirical investigation. The paper shows how the NGOs' interventions for community participations are distorted due to globalization. The paper argues that the NGOs in developing countries such as Bangladesh are mostly depended on foreign donations, and used global frameworks in development activities, which might not consider the local needs and local voices. First, the paper shows the position of local knowledge in the globalization and then analyse how the globalization

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distorted the ways of community participation. In conclusion, the paper offers a new way of thinking which can secure effective community participation in NGO activities.

Keywords: globalization; global knowledge; local knowledge; community participation; NGO; Bangladesh.

Introduction

There is a crucial debate whether local knowledge (LK) or global knowledge (GK) is more important for a country's social development. This is widening over time and it is now recognised that IK is much more essential for sustainable development (Islam, 2012). This paper looks how globalization generates spans of uncertainties of community participation in development activities. The paper shows how the NGOs' interventions for community participations are distorted due to globalization. The paper argues that the NGOs in developing countries such as Bangladesh are mostly depended on foreign donations, and used global frameworks in development activities, which might not consider the local needs and local demands. First, the paper shows the position of local knowledge in the globalization and then analyses how the globalization distorted the ways of community participation. And in conclusion, the paper offers a new way of thinking which can secure effective community participation in NGO activities.

Local knowledge and Globalization

'Local knowledge' (LK) is an important term in contemporary development studies. Since there are increasing international concerns about the negative impacts of globalisation, LK has been considered a key aspect in sustainable development. It calls for the insertion of local voices and priorities, and promises empowerment through ownership of the process. However, there has been little critical examination of the ways in which LK has been included in the development process (Briggs & Sharp, 2004: 661). LK, also known as 'indigenous' or 'traditional' or 'rural peoples' knowledge', is not easily or simply defined (Rouse, 1999: 1). In view of the marginalisation process, LK today means 'non-western' or 'anti-western' knowledge'. LK includes the way people observe and measure what is around them, how they set about solving problems, and how they validate new information. LK is locally based and recorded, for example, in the memories of the living and transmitted orally (Burgess, 1999). But it is dynamic and is 'developed to very specific biological, ecological, climatic and socio-economic conditions' (Ahmed, 1994: 12). It is a mixture of knowledge created

endogenously and acquired from outside, but then absorbed and integrated within the society by ‘trial and error’.

On the other hand, the concept ‘globalisation’ is a dynamic and deliberated word; it means many things to many people. Attempts to define globalisation usually seem clumsy (CEPR, 2002), partial, and complex (Sen, 2002: 1). Sen argues that it is still not altogether a well-defined concept. A multitude of global interactions are put under the broad heading of globalisation, but it varies from the expansion of intellectual and cultural influences across borders to the enlargement of economic and business relations throughout the world (United Nations, 2004). Some social scientists prefer a broad, rather unfocused definition, such as the “movement of people, information, symbols, capital and commodities in global and transactional spaces” (Kearney, 1995). Most economists understand the concept as free trade, and see the modern form of globalisation as part of this process. For instance, Eslake (2000: 2), says “...globalisation is...simply the logical extension of the tendency towards specialisation and trade that has been going on almost since mankind first walked on the surface of the earth”. Others, like Friedman (1998), regard globalisation as being not just about trade, but about the triumph of market forces, technologies, and democratic forces throughout the world. From the sociological and cultural point of view, Ludden (1997: 2) says the term globalisation refers to human networks of influential interaction which are measured and explained by many factors, including migration, trade, empire, technology, and the spread of languages and disparate cultural elements. Ottone (1996: 231) says that globalisation is commonly referred to either as ‘the knowledge society’, ‘the information society’, ‘the communication society’, or more generally, ‘the post-industrial society’.

There were found a number of cross connecting opinions about the impacts of globalization in the society. Leen (2003: 3) argues that globalisation is neither novel nor new; it is a real danger of cultural homogenisation as the result of contemporary ‘western’ driven models. Current global processes have been shaped by the neo-liberal ideology. On the other hand, many authors argue that globalisation is a new and effective means for development. Sen (2003), for example, argues that globalisation has provided appropriate local steps. In the purest sense, it is not a threat to local cultures - imperialism is. It is seen that developments linked with globalisation have opened up boundless possibilities and new opportunities for human progress, and enhanced the quality of life for many people in the developing countries. Some authors have mixed opinions about globalisation. For example, Morgan (2005) argues that the rapid process of globalisation has clearly destroyed and damaged many indigenous and belief systems in recent centuries, though he argued that this is simply an inevitable process of historical change. As Karl Marx says, human beings make their own history, but not always, as they intend and not in circumstances of their own choosing (Layder, 1987).

Within this discussion, we find globalisation is a multifaceted and interconnected process involving economic, cultural, political and social change that is reaching the most remote communities (Buckland, 2004: 126). For a developing country like Bangladesh, globalisation arouses passionate debate (Hewison, 1999: 1). For example: (1) globalisation is debated as a worrying image of isolation and seclusion (Sen, 2003); (2) the problem towards democracy, equality and equity, increased poverty, declining development assistance funds, increased competition among international NGOs (Beausang, 2002); (3) the promotion of corporate capitalism (Ohmae, 1990); (4) a product of Western desire to subject and exploit the developing world (Mahathir, 1999; Hewison, 1999); (5) a peculiar force; diffusion of ideas, practices and technologies; western imperialism; de-localisation in social and economic exchange; (6) 'marginalisation of the practices and beliefs' (Delors, 1996 in Morgan, 2005).

Globalization: Uncertainties for community participation

Community participation in all its forms has become an increasingly important aspect of urban and rural policy in both North and South (Mitlin & Thomson, 1995; Lyons et al., 2001: 1233). Lyons et al., (2001: 1233) find participation has a significant effect on development, which Friedmann (1996) calls 'socially sustainable conditions'. The discourse of participation has become the common denominator of action for development agencies in a global world (Tembo, 2004: 1025). Participation is now considered an important component for securing community peoples' decision making and equitable opportunities. It must not be seen as a short-term or casual involvement of people. It is a 'social experience shared by individuals and groups, who live in economic and social relations to each other in a society' (Malki, 2006: 54).

Participation is a pre-requisite to collective action (Mondal, 2000: 463) and an integral element of economic improvement and social change efforts (Bowen, 2008: 65). The community workers should work on assessing community feelings through their active participation and then transform these into constructive community action plans (Malki, 2006: 52). The participatory plan of the NGOs is most useful to improve local people's confidence, traditional attitude, experience and skills. It is helpful to justify and verify their thinking within institutional arrangements. More participation within institutional arrangement decreases individual fears, apprehensions, and limitations, on the one hand, and increases 'social mobility' towards social empowerment, on the other.

Recently, the argument has been raised that due to globalisation, the development organisations (like NGOs) are facing varieties of challenges and uncertainties in this new millennium. The NGOs mainly big NGOs have been encouraged to directly confront policy level constraints to development, and move out

of programme implementation (Buckland, 2004: 28). These changes have been significantly influenced by official aid agencies and northern NGOs (NNGOs), and complex implications for indigenous NGOs and local communities. It is seen that many people, including local poor people in Bangladesh, have benefited by the scaling-up of reform-oriented development organisations. But this strategy has not overcome other powerful local, national and global constraints to development that have led to persistent poverty, gender bias and economic change that has not benefited the poor (Buckland, 2004: 128-139).

The majority of Bangladeshi NGOs are largely designed, funded, and managed externally (Hashemi, 1996; Buckland, 1998: 237). In connection to this, the government-donor relations in Bangladesh are shaped by a history of donor dependence and reactions against it (Green & Curtis, 2005: 389). There are a number of issues where NGOs' initiatives for peoples participation become challenging. Essentially, NGOs' donor dependency becomes a matter of power relations (Wallace & Chapman, 2003: 8). This suggests that NGOs share an international development culture reflecting their own national cultural norms (Jamil, 1998: 43). With this, the local level planning, organisational accountability, autonomy and social trust became problematic to apply so-called 'universal knowledge'. The 'accountability' problem is traditionally concerned with the unequal relationships within the aid industry between donors, Northern and Southern NGOs (Lewis, 2007; Edwards & Hulme, 1995: 5). It is because the donors bring universal values, self-colonisation and elitism, individualism and anxiety. The NGOs often pretend to represent 'fashionable' and universally acceptable development ideas, knowledge and skills. As a result, enormous pressure gets put on the rural poor to comply with certain 'universal conditions' (Nyoni, 1987: 53).

These universal conditions are considered as inappropriate or invalid, where less consideration is given to its validity (Wood, 2007: 6) for the local context. It creates dual dependency (Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995). It is directive, not facilitative (Garilao, 1987: 119). Ahmad (2006: 629) calls this 'donorship', rather than partnership. The NGOs find this inappropriate. This is because there is a fundamental gap between the socio-economic conditions of developed countries and the developing world. This kind of 'imported knowledge' does not always fit well with the national development priorities and development systems (OECD, 2003: 10). Such kind of aid based development practices have long been a barrier to sustainable technology. Schumacher (1973) believes that foreign aid is able to play only a limited role in bringing about sustained economic development. Such substantial input of foreign aid is doing much damage to the spirit of self-respect and self-reliance; its loss is greater than its gains. It creates a 'development' gap, which does not encourage innovative practices (Hossain & Marinova, 2003: 9).

Development is not apolitical, and 'the process of organising and empowering communities and poverty groups is in itself a political act' (Garilao, 1987: 119). This de-politicisation (see Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995) of NGO development

efforts, for example in experienced in Bangladesh over the last twenty years, is part of a broader global trend in NGO policies (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Fisher, 1997; Hulme & Edwards, 1997; Kamat, 2004). As a result, the NGOs are increasingly shaped by the Western-dominated international development discourse (Rahman, 2006: 456-457). However, this explanation can also be seen as 'one-sided' (Rahman, 2006: 456), 'marginalised', question of 'sustainability' (Grootaert, 1998; Khan, 2006: 174), since this Western development model ignored the important influence of local conditions that the NGOs face as their constraints and policy choices. Within this discourse, do aid agencies have the right to be the 'voices of the poor' and to decide correct approaches for humankind and to speak on behalf of grass roots' communities? Islam (2009) found in his study in Bangladesh that the Western model could not explicitly promote participation, but created confusion among the blacksmiths and goldsmiths in rural communities versus NGO workers in Bangladesh, due to the lack of social trust. Islam (2009) used the following comment from one respondent in his study:

"Sometimes the donors do not want to extend their projects or increase the funding for those though it needs to continue these for its local community demands. It is a big problem that we cannot provide any follow-up services for them. We all know that these social development projects need to serve continuously for a longer period for achieving actual outputs. But they are bound to stop those at a 'half-done' stage because of donors' discontinuation of funding supports".

(Source: verbatim of interview with a staff member of Practical Action Bangladesh (an international NGO) working in Bangladesh. Interview was taken on 14 August 2009).

Islam (2009) shows that the NGOs are delimited by the aid process; there was insufficient dialogue, or an attempt at dialogue that would sometimes be totally unheard. The partnership relations in NGOs' activities are inhibited by the instrumentality that each side brings to the equation: donors seeking conformity with current reform prescriptions or conditionality clauses, recipients seeking least (political) cost thresholds (Green & Curtis, 2005: 389). In this condition, both parties felt constrained in being more responsive and accountable to their superiors than to others. Like Green & Curtis (2005: 397) we believe that under these circumstances, improved donor co-ordination in any form may be conceived more as a threat than an opportunity by the national government. In addition to this, the South-Asian NGOs' have tensions regarding cutting-off funding supports from the donors (Fernandez, 1987: 43-44). Globalisation, new (and ever changing) trade agreements and aspects of the emerging new international political order all contain perceived threats (Green & Curtis, 2005: 397).

Due to donors and external pressures, NGOs' organisational autonomy regarding low managerial capacity (Kusumahadi, 2002: 4) and inconsistent with the operations (Hulme & Edwards, 1997: 8) is now an issue. It is observed that there were some barriers to increase control over programme management, where a certain level of external/donor pressure exists. NGOs always have shortages of funds and had to depend on donors. NGOs face some problems from the donor agencies, such as project discontinuation and lack of flexibility. Islam & Morgan (2012, pp. 379-380) mentioned that NGOs' central management is not decentralised enough to implement some local peoples' urgent demands, such as loan supports, equipment supply, and supports during natural disaster. Rather NGOs are based on the new public management (NPM)⁴ approach. Too much donor dependency is bad for an organisation. An organisational self-assessment can facilitate some serious realisations to do with investments in learning versus investments in doing, policy awareness versus policy influence, insulation versus influence, and independence versus partnership. A foreign partner may damage a local NGO's credibility and effectiveness, especially as a leading voice in the policy arena (VanSant, 2003: 7).

However, in crisis states capacity is often limited, which increases the risk of corruption (Larbi, 1999). Islam (2009) found that the public-sector reforms are externally driven by donor conditions and timetables. The over-ambitious nature and the demand for quick results fail to take account of weak institutional and management capacities (Larbi, 1999). These kinds of capacities can use a new technocratic language, whilst failing to deal with political problems and contradictions arising between the situation of people in developing societies and the fashionable neo-liberal ideology (Arce, 2003: 855). However, we argue that the NGOs need to develop partnerships with consideration of fair measures and accountability. It is necessary for funding organisations and NGOs to put themselves in each other's shoes in order to understand better their mutual constraints (Donald Terry, in Ebrahim, 2004: 11).

⁴NPM originated from the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state in the 1970s in developed countries such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand. The use of management techniques and practices drawn mainly from the private sector is increasingly seen as a global phenomenon. NPM reforms have shifted the emphasis from traditional public administration to public management. Key elements include various forms of decentralising management within public services (e.g., the creation of autonomous agencies and devolution of budgets and financial control), increasing use of markets and competition in the provision of public services (e.g., contracting out and other market-type mechanisms), and increasing emphasis on performance, outputs and customer orientation (Larbi, 1999).

Local knowledge: Boost up local participation

Participation has become an act of faith in development. It is a tool for achieving better project outcomes as the process increases the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives, and facilitates social change to the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalised groups (Cleaver, 1999: 597-398). Effective participation is a form of citizen empowerment and the more equal sharing of power between the strong and the weak (Paul, 1987; Nelson & Wright, 1995: 8). From a development perspective, participation can promote new values, attitudes, knowledge and skills among citizens and build their capacity as agents of change (Bowen, 2008: 76). It is true that the theory of participation is complex and deals with many intangible components, such as empowerment and self-reliance, which are difficult to assess and even more difficult to standardise for all development scenarios (Smith-Seen, 1995: 31). Choguill (1996: 431) considers community participation as a ladder for underdeveloped countries. The concept may be thought of as an instrument of empowerment, where development should lead to an equitable sharing of power and to a higher level of people's, in particular the weaker groups', political awareness and strengths (Choguill, 1996: 432; Bowen, 2008: 76). As for participation, the agenda should be decided by and for the community as per local needs and knowledge (Agrawal, 1995). It argues further that improvement within the context of development cannot occur without the participation of the community (Hayward, 2000; Simpson et al., 2003: 283). Resources cannot be used to their full advantage unless the community drives the process that determines their allocation. The Government cannot say 'Let there be empowerment'. Unless residents of a community in crisis feel that they determine their own future, no programme, however well-intended, will succeed.

It is important that how community participation is envisaged, who is included and who is left out, is worthwhile (Fraser, 2005: 287). The ownership is one of the central notions of community participation; and it is questioned whether this is fair. Other questions relating to justice and democracy include identifying whether different community activities are accorded lesser value because of the people who perform them (Fraser, 2005: 287). Within development studies, analysts have attributed the frequent failure of development projects during the 1950s to 1970s to the lack of local understanding on the part of the designers (Puri & Sahay, 2007: 135); it is because the participatory development approaches are largely ambiguous in policy circles. This often resulted in ill-conceived and inadequately designed programmes in NGOs. Sometimes unrealistic expectations, such as 'including the excluded', are elusive and frustrating (Bhatt, 1997: 373). One of the principal critiques is that the services for community people are imagined, implemented, and monitored by international funding agencies in combination with national bureaucracies (Green, 2002). It is important to take into account people's needs, perceptions, and IK about the problem in the design

of development models. Consider the example of India, where, like many other developing countries, the belief in the superiority of scientific and technical knowledge and methods over IK of communities, and traditional practices is embedded in the functioning of scientific institutions and continues to persist, which adversely influences effective participation (Sahay & Walsham, 1997).

Table 1. Summary of literature survey around participation in development

| Theme | Emerging perspectives |
|--|---|
| Who defines the participation agenda? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Earlier; externally driven; people (end-beneficiaries) not involved in design/implementation; not owned by people, development programmes unsuccessful. 2. Importance of people's participation comes into focus; increasingly practiced; occupies centre stage in development approaches. 3. Move from participation towards empowerment of people. <p><i>Critique:</i> hidden agendas of governments; development agencies to usurp power while appearing to promote participation as power to allocate resources still embedded in these structures.</p> |
| What is the capability of the people to participate? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shaped by socio-political context; constricted by limited domain knowledge; language barriers, illiteracy. 2. Latent capabilities can find expression through facilitation by a sympathetic external agency; empowerment through democratisation and recognition of both instrumental and constitutive roles of participation also enhance this capacity. <p><i>Critique:</i> "community" assumed to be a monolith, unproblematic entity; public discussions may inhibit people from expressing opinions frankly; also "local" networks of relationship and power, often invisible to outsiders, deeply modulate what individuals contribute during PRA-like meetings; "time-table" approach counter-productive; recourse to participatory action research suggested.</p> |
| What is the role of institutional and social structures? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change from central control to more decentralised systems of authority and governance. 2. Human agency expressed as participation has the potential to modify present institutional/bureaucratic structures rooted in historical contexts that hinder participation or to even create new structures. <p><i>Critique:</i> Western "blueprint;" political technology.</p> |
| How to sustain and scale up participatory processes? | <p>By integrating local efforts to larger networks of power and politics.</p> <p><i>Critique:</i> Focus on process but not viability or wider acceptability of the end product.</p> |

Source: Puri & Sahay (2007: 142)

Table 1 shows evidence of how the hierarchical and top down institutional structures promotes user participation. It shows that the participation process is still confined within hidden government agendas, political paradigm and external control. Efforts to initiate changes in institutional conditions to promote participation are linked to power asymmetries inherent in bureaucratic structures. It is argued that the whole concept of development in NGO activities is 'foreign'; that is why it is hard for developing countries to really own the process. Even if the NGOs are using 'democracy' to achieve development, it is a foreign tool. Here is quoted an opinion of a respondent from the study conducted by Islam (2009):

"Sir, I believe that the concept of 'development' means different things to different countries and people. I think we could not offer convincing concepts to the goldsmiths. Sir, tell me how a goldsmith could understand the concepts

'market chain', 'sustainable livelihood', 'community development' and so on that we are offering. Can they own those or can they take them to mean what they want and involve those they want? My answer is 'no'. My thinking is that we make the development process so complex, wide and obscure so that poor and uneducated people cannot find their own way''.

(Source: verbatim of interview with a staff member of Proshika (a national NGO) working in Bangladesh. Interview was taken on 7 September 2009).

We think, we can participate in the process, but never really own it, because the concepts and the tools are foreign. Consider the question asked by Laaksonen (2006: 7): "Who are the people I am talking about?" Each country has its own traditions of democracy, while each context has its own principles of how to understand development or sustainability or democracy, but how is it a participatory method then? Laaksonen (2006: 7) again argues that if it is supposed to come from the people themselves, how are we going to take participatory development to the Middle East for example? To them it makes no sense. They have never heard about these languages and concepts of participatory development or democracy. We can't avoid the fact that we are in the global world, and many people struggle against the idea that they will lose their identities, their nation, their language, and everything that they have very bitterly fought for in history (Laaksonen, 2006: 8-9). We think that the ideal participatory plan is one, where the power in term of decision-making capacity is given to the people. We suggest that the organisations or the structures are designed and planned to implement the development projects that should help marginalised people. Empowerment also means using the IK and capacities that are available on the ground. These indigenous structures of participation enable people at the local level with the elected representatives to participate in discussions about the development problems and work towards resolving them. The local people themselves should determine their own project - what they prefer and how the resources should be mobilised internally, and what would be needed from outside. Because, they would participate in implementing the project, so the issue of sustainability is easier to keep in mind. So, the ideal is that the project is intended, managed and resourced internally and the community is the master of the process. Empowerment participation emphasises collective voice. Collective voice is something, where people and their representatives, put forward their wishes, needs and expectations, something that ultimately is a local decision. And through the exercise of collective decision-making and democratic practises, the people also learn the art of 'winning some and losing some' in the negotiations process (Laaksonen, 2006: 5-6).

One of the important problems of participation is structural constraint (Namazi, 2006: 66). In this aspect, it was found that the NGOs do not take into consideration the local people's native capacities, endowment and abilities for community

development management, decision-making, planning, resource mobilisation, resource allocation and priority setting, and determining the future of the members. The tools and methods of participation in NGOs are problematic because these are invariably stimulated by external and generally professional agencies (Patel & Mitlan, 2002: 125-126). The implications of such external interventions for knowledge management itself block a participatory process (Eyben & Ladbury, 1995: 197). These external tools and methods ignore local knowledge, where poor people may decide it is better not to participate (Cleaver, 2001: 51; Mosse, 1995). A number of arguments given by Mosse (1995), Biggs et al., (2007: 241), and Kothari (2007) which were problematic regarding its construction of knowledge and validation. We think that community people are better able to determine their own language, knowledge and preferred development options. This statement may be compared with the view of Patel & Mitlan (2002: 127-29), that there was no social change to the benefit of low income communities if the poor do not participate in the designing, managing and realising of that process of change.

The above discussion suggests that development interventions that seek participation have two problems. First, the distribution of power within the community may mean that the poorest members are incapable to get their demands tabled and considered (Gaventa, 1999: 25) and/or may not feel able to take part in the process. Hence there is an issue about ‘who participates?’ Secondly, the process of securing participation and empowerment may involve conflict, often within the community itself, as social relationships change and a new set of winners and losers emerges. We think:

“Why are we following whole sets of development policy and strategies from the outside? Why are we not thinking about local conditions and whether these fit here properly? We are sure we need to think about that. But really we have a very limited scope to do so as we are directed by them”.

(Source: verbatim of interview with a staff member of Proshika (a national NGO) working in Bangladesh. Interview was taken on 7 September 2009).

This raises a set of issues about how such conflicts can be managed successfully. More generally it raises issue of ‘who manages the process of participation?’

The question is what would be the methods and strategies of participation? There are a number of approaches and techniques of participation, such as citizen control, delegated power, partnership, placation, consultation, information therapy, and manipulation (Bracht & Tsouros, 1990: 2002), which were used during 1950 to 1980. Again, Carl Roger’s ‘people-centred’ approach in 1987 and Sen’s ‘freedom-centred’ approach in 1999 argue for community participation. We offer Sen’s (1999) ‘freedom-centred’ approach as the most acceptable method for effective participation. We also think that this approach has enormous

opportunities to consider local needs and local voices. It is argued that social, political, and economic freedoms are both primary ends and key means of development because of their constitutive as well as instrumental roles. The constitutive involves expansion of basic freedoms enjoyed by people, whereas the instrumental role seeks to contribute to economic progress (pp. 36-37). We suggest that this way of participation can secure the guarantee of the local people to solve their financial crisis. Therefore, this kind of participation is crucial as an instrument or strategy of development or management, 'it must also be valued for its intrinsic value' (p. 53). The functioning of individuals relate to their achievement, while capability is the ability to achieve. Capabilities thus provide space to achieve different combinations of functioning within the freedom to choose the desired ways of life. The paper agrees with Puri & Sahay's (2007: 139) opinions that capability in the context of participation includes five elements: (a) acceptance and internalisation of the responsibility to participate, (b) authority to carry out the consequences of participatory action and take relevant decisions, (c) access to resources necessary to participate, (d) ability to communicate effectively and freely in conditions established to elicit participation, and, (e) the knowledge participants have about the problem domain.

Conclusions

Community participation is based on the democratic fervour can achieve extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people. We find that the poor and marginalised individuals and communities are frequently not able to achieve the full potential of their capability because of constraints imposed by social/institutional structures of customs, control, and power. This observation may be compared with the study of Puri & Sahay (2007: 138-39), who found in their research in India that limited domain knowledge (such as that of computer-based information systems) may also dilute the ability to participate, for example, due to a lack of formal education, language barriers, or limited prior exposure to technological solutions. Therefore, the 'extraordinary possibilities' that Umali hinted at can find expression only if the right conditions exist.

However, this paper proposes neither local nor global knowledge rather offers a new way of thinking which can accommodate the possibilities of local knowledge in one hand, and conquers the uncertainties of globalization on the other. Like Laaksonen (2006: 5), this paper emphasises the new thinking of decentralisation of knowledge paradigm. This way of thinking can accommodate both local and global knowledge, where local peoples' participation can secure the maximum target limit. This paper proposes that a more 'dynamic vision' is required of 'community' and 'institutions' for this kind of new thinking of participation. It should integrate social networks and recognise dispersed and

contingent power relations (Cleaver, 1999: 609). This approach should be on the basis of the ‘negotiated nature of participation’ and a ‘more honest assessment’ of the costs and benefits to individuals of becoming involved in agency and state-directed development processes (Cleaver, 1999: 609). It would incorporate the local context on the one hand, and be free from external control on the other. This paper supports this way of thinking from Laaksonen (2006: 10) who shows, in an example from Tanzania, that Nyerere’s policies⁵ bring good results, where all villages first make their development plans and then the representatives from different villages meet in World Development Committees and bring forward their propositions, which they can’t implement by themselves. The development plans should be formulated, developed, and implemented by the local initiatives and authority; only support came from the funding authority.

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⁵ Julius Nyerere was the former and founding President of the United Republic of Tanzania. His rural development was based on encouraging people to live and work together on a cooperative basis through the formation of organised villages or *ujamaa* (a Kiswahili word meaning ‘familyhood’, the concept on which Tanzanian socialism is based). In addition to raising the standard of living, Tanzanian socialism also aimed to develop a particular quality of life which is people-centred. It attached commitment to the belief that there are more important things in life than the amassing of riches, and that if the pursuit of wealth clashes with things like human dignity and social equality, the latter will be given priority ‘for the purpose of all social, economic and political activity must be man (Kassam, 1994).

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