

## 2.0. Community Participation

### 2.1. Definition

The focus of this chapter is to provide an explanation for the term “community participation,” a concept central to this research report. The definitions presented by various theorists have been presented in an effort to give a comprehensive overview of the term. Following closely the definition of community participation, are also discussed critical issues related to it such as the stages and levels of participation and the need for it.

Participation does not necessarily imply self-help home building by undernourished and over-worked people without credit, with inadequate tools and poor materials . . . The central issue is that of control and power to decide. John F.C. Turner in Housing by People (133).

The discussion of community participation in architecture, first initiated in the 1960s, became a buzzword in mid-1970s after the sites and services housing schemes received funding and acceptance by the World Bank in the developing countries (Hamdi, Housing 76). However, it is important to understand the meaning of community participation as it has been misused and abused in many projects claiming to have community participation as a project component. First understanding the meanings of the words ‘community’ and ‘participation’ individually can best explain the term ‘community participation’. Nick Wates defines the word community in The

Community Planning Handbook, as a group of people sharing common interests and living within a geographically defined area (184). Nabeel Hamdi in his book (with Reinhard Goethert), Action Planning for Cities: A Guide to Community Practice, points out that the term community has both “social and spatial dimensions” and that generally the people within a community come together to achieve a common objective, even if they have certain differences (Hamdi, Action 67). The concept of a community works on the age old principles of ‘unity is strength’ and ‘united we stand’. A group of people always has advantage over a single individual in getting his or her voice heard, especially in the case of have-nots of the society.

Charles Abrams in his book, The Language of Cities: A Glossary of Terms, defines community as, “that mythical state of social wholeness in which each member has his place and in which life is regulated by cooperation rather than by competition and conflict” (60). It is clear that a community generally has two certain elements, that is, physical boundaries and social interests common among the people. On the other hand, a community sometimes may have one element dominating the other, for example, a community

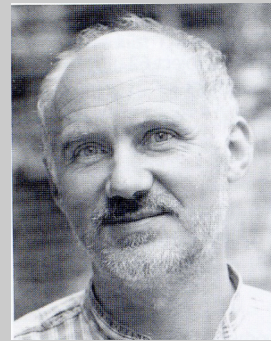
**Box 1. Charles Abrams**

Born in 1902, Charles Abrams made pioneering contributions to the area of housing trends and land issues in both the developing and developed world through his numerous books including, The Future of Housing (1946), Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing (1955), Housing in the Modern World (1964), Man’s Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World (1964), The City is the Frontier (1965) and The Language of Cities: A Glossary of Terms (1971). He also held teaching positions at Columbia University and MIT as well as being an advisor and consultant for the United Nations, the Agency for International Development and several governments worldwide (Abrams, City 395).

of students or a community of artists generally need not belong to the same physical boundaries. In this case, they come together on certain ideological grounds.

Nabeel Hamdi presents an opposing view that the communities are not necessarily always organized and cohesive and sometimes lack the “sense of community” and “social identity” (Hamdi, Action 67). He explains that for community participatory projects, it is not a must to have an already well organized community right from the beginning but the sense of community can be achieved during the course of the project, which can also be one of the objectives of including community participation in development projects (Hamdi, Action 67). Charles Abrams gives a good example of the sense of community in the case of people living in a squatter settlement. These squatters, living within the confines of the same settlement, have common objectives and work together to protect and legalize their dwellings. Their survival against the authorities rests upon

## Box 2. Nick Wates



Born in 1951, Nick Wates is one of the world’s leading consultants of community planning and architecture. He received his professional training in architecture and planning from University College London in 1975 and has been involved in research, writing, consultancy and the practice of community planning for a good 25 years. His major literary contributions include, The Battle for Tolmers Square (1976), Squatting, the Real Story (1980), Community Architecture (with Charles Knevitt 1987), Action Planning (1996) and The Community Planning Handbook (2000). His firm ‘Nick Wates Associates’ offers various design, training and research services at both the national and international levels. He currently resides in Hastings, England (Nick).

Photo from Nick Wates, 2000: 230.

cooperation among them and hence, the sense of community is strengthened by their common goals. Compare this with the generally non-existent sense of community among the residents of a posh neighborhood with the best physical form of housing (Abrams, Language 203).

The word participation can be defined as the “[a]ct of being involved in something” (Wates, Handbook 194). According to N.J Habraken, participation has two definitions with opposite meanings. Participation can either represent assigning certain decisive roles to the users, where they share the decision-making responsibility with the professionals. The other type of participation is where there is no shift of responsibilities between the users and professionals but instead only the opinion of the user is considered while making decisions (Habraken, “Towards” 139).

Community participation means some form of involvement of people, with similar needs and goals, in decisions affecting their lives. Charles Abrams defines community

### Box 3: Nabeel Hamdi



Trained as an architect, Nabeel Hamdi has been involved in several research and consultancy projects in both the developing and the developed countries of the world. He was the architect of 1970s widely acclaimed, community-based PSSHAK housing projects in London and is the recipient of several awards for his contributions. Hamdi also held a teaching position for 10 years at MIT, US and is currently the Co-Director of the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice and the Director of Housing and Urban Development at Oxford Brookes University, UK. He has authored 4 books which include: Making Micro Plans: A Community Based Process in Programme Making and Development (1988); Housing Without Houses: Participation, Flexibility, Enablement (1991); Educating for Real: The Training of Professionals for Development Practices (1996), Action Planning for Cities: A Guide to Community Practice (with Reinhard Goethert 1997) (Centre for Development).

Photo from DFID, Removing.

participation as, “[t]he theory that the local community should be given an active role in programs and improvements directly affecting it” (63). It is only rational to give control of affairs and decisions to people most affected by them. Besides, since no government or authority has the means to solve all the public problems adequately, it is necessary to involve people in matters that affect them (Abrams, Language 63). However, delegating powers to people is not an easy task and involves great inquiry into the change in the attitudes of the authorities and professionals, which is addressed in the next section. Nabeel Hamdi defines community participation as a powerful idea which “refers to the process by which professionals, families, community groups, government officials, and others get together to work something out, preferably in a formal or informal partnership” (Hamdi, Housing 75). He explains that community participation was initially an outcome of the public pressure demanding “environmental justice” (Hamdi, Housing 76).

The advocates of community participation believe that it brings many lasting benefits to people instead of only a means of getting things done. Sherry R. Arnstein associates citizen participation with citizen power and control as, “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (216). Christopher Alexander explains that participation is “inherently good” and that it brings people together in creating and making decisions about their environment (Oregon 40). Since people are actively involved in the process, Alexander argues that participation helps promote sense of ownership and control among the people (Oregon 41).

## 2.2. Stages And Levels

In order to expand the discussion of community participation further, it is important to develop an understanding of the different phases or stages of the housing process. John F.C. Turner divides the process into three basic components; planning, construction and management (Housing 28). Nabeel Hamdi adds two more stages to the overall process; initiation, planning, design, implementation and maintenance. Initiation is the first stage of the process where the project goals and scope are defined. The planning stage involves working out the project details, budgeting and resource identification. In the design stage, the details are further developed, with the actual execution of the project in the implementation or construction phase. The maintenance or management stage is a long-term process and involves the upkeep of the project (Hamdi, Housing 72). The involvement of communities at different stages of the project determines the level of participation in projects.

Probably the best way to explain different levels of participation in terms of community involvement in various stages of the projects is by understanding what Sherry R. Arnstein calls “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” which she introduced in an article published in 1969 in the Journal of the American Planning Association. Arnstein explains that this classification is necessary to unveil the manipulation of people in the garb of community participation projects by professionals and policyholders. The ladder has eight rungs each corresponding to a different level of participation, that is, manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control as shown in fig. 2.1. The rungs at the

bottom of the ladder are the ones with least citizen participation or “non-participation” and include Manipulation and Therapy. Informing, consultation and placation occupy the middle rungs of the ladder and border between manipulation at the bottom and citizen control at the top and is termed as “tokenism” where the people are allowed to participate only to the extent of expressing their views but have no real say that matters. The last three rungs, partnership, delegated power and finally citizen control at the top of the ladder, are termed equivalent to “citizen power” and this is where true and meaningful participation takes place. This categorization of the various types of people involvement is extremely crucial in clarifying the confusion between “non-participation” and true “citizen power” and to identify the real motives behind participatory projects, which are often used by critics as shortcomings of the concept of community participation.

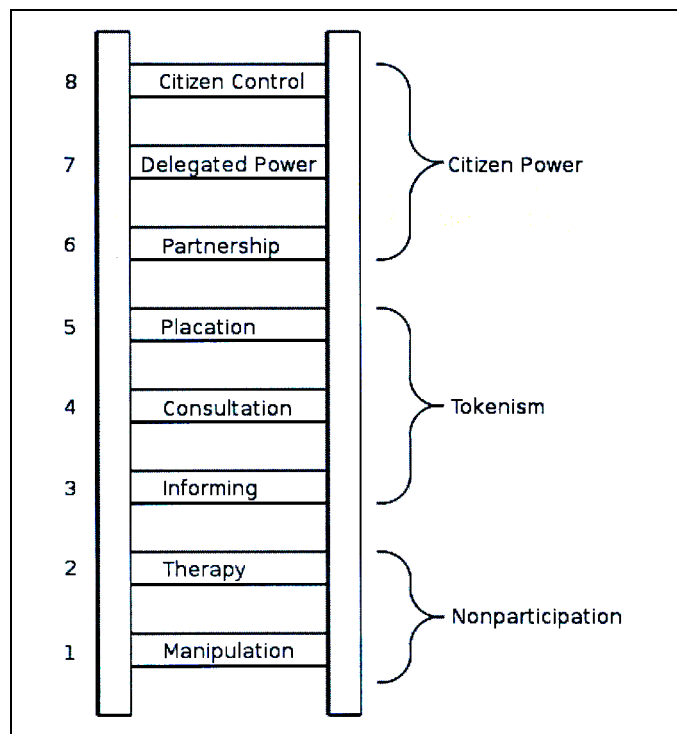


Fig. 2.1. Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Citizen Participation, illustration from Sherry R. Arnstein, 1969: 217.

### 2.3. Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Approaches

Broadly speaking, community participation can be of two types; in the form of top-down programs or bottom-up initiatives (Moser, Community 91). These two processes are the exact opposites of each other and differ on the basis of whether governments/implementing agencies or the communities have the overall control of the program. John F.C. Turner elaborates the top-down and bottom-up approaches by comparing them with the ‘heteronomous housing systems’ and the ‘autonomous housing systems’ respectively (Housing 27). He explains his concept by using the diagrams as shown in fig. 2.2, where the difference between the two systems is in the decision-making power of different actors at different stages of the housing process.

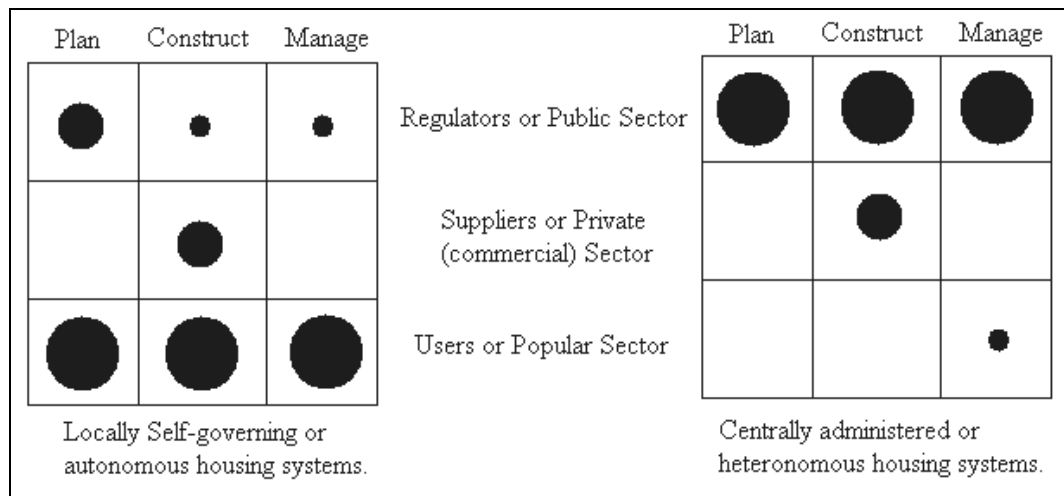


Fig. 2.2. Autonomous Housing Systems versus Heteronomous Housing Systems, illustration from John F.C. Turner, 1977: 27.

In the case of the heteronomous system, John F.C. Turner explains that the government decides and provides housing for the people in a top-down process while

the autonomous system follows a bottom-up approach and has different networks of actors working alongside in different relationships.

B.L.C. Johnson in his book, Development in South Asia, explains the top-down and bottom-up developmental approaches using a simple example of the construction of a dam and the improved agricultural production as a result (15). In most cases, the dam construction is a top-down development process where all the decisions are made by the government or other agencies without seeking the consent of the people. Johnson explains that there can be a bottom-up development as well where the people may decide to adopt modern agricultural technologies to improve the overall production. Now these are two different kinds of developments, one is imposed while the other is self-chosen by the people. Johnson points out that there can sometimes be an overlap between top-down and bottom-up development, in this case, the government's decision to improve the water supply system overlaps with the people's decision to adopt new technology.

## **2.4. The Partnership Approach**

C.O.N. Moser explains in Community Participation in Urban Projects in the Third World, that by the end of the 1960s, bottom-up community participation initiatives started to surface along with top-down participation programs in the form of squatter settlements around the world. These bottom-up initiatives of the community in order to house themselves resulted after the failures of top-down housing projects in different cities of the world and were initially met with resistance

by governments. However, Moser explains that by the 1970s, many Third World governments and donor agencies realized the potential of these community-based initiatives which resulted in a major change of approach in housing in the form of upgrading and sites and services projects.

G. Narayana Reddy in his book Empowering Communities through Participatory Methods, explains that in the top-down model of participation, the governments decide and provide for the communities which develops a sense of dependency and lethargy among the people as shown in the fig. 2.3. He presents an alternative to the top-down model in the form of a “partnership model” where the governments and communities work together in planning and decision-making with long-lasting results as shown in fig. 2.4 (Reddy 5-6).

This discussion gives rise to the question related to the objective that community participation is meant to achieve. C.O.N. Moser explains the concept of participation as a ‘means’ and as an ‘end’ in development projects,

Where participation is interpreted as a means it generally becomes a form of mobilization to get things done . . . . Where participation is identified as an end the objective is not a fixed quantifiable development goal but a process whose outcome is an increasingly ‘meaningful’ participation in the development process. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C. Moser, “The problem of evaluating community participation in urban development projects,” Evaluating Community Participation in Urban Development Projects, Development Planning Unit Working Paper No. 14 (1983): 3 qtd. in Moser, Community 84.

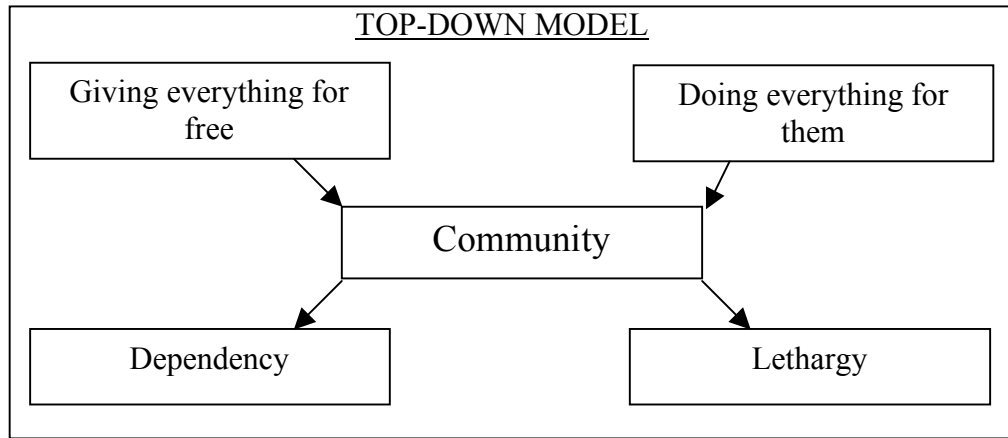


Fig. 2.3. Top-down Model, illustration by G. Narayana Reddy, 2002: 6.

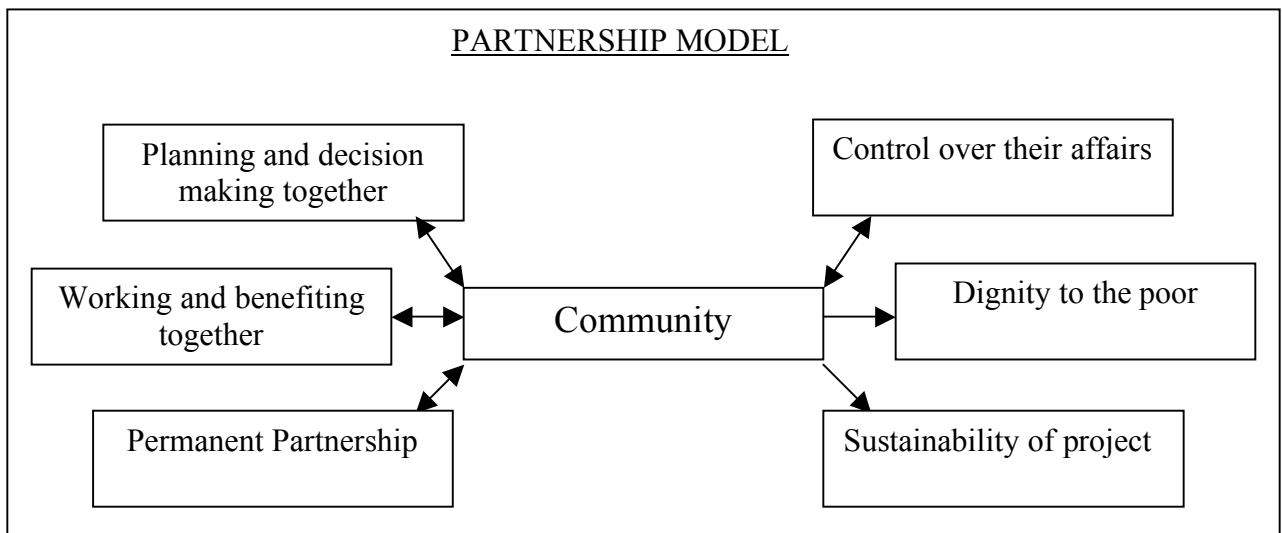


Fig. 2.4. Partnership Model from G. Narayana Reddy, 2002: 6.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that community participation can be used to achieve material benefits in the form of pointed development projects (sewerage, water supply delivery, etc) or can lead to the social development of the people (empowerment, independence, etc). In the current context of maximizing opportunities for community development, it is important that participation be used as a tool for achieving something more meaningful than mere physical benefits. C.O.N. Moser elaborates the need of “[i]dentification of the process whereby participation as

a means has the capacity to develop into participation as an end” (Moser, Community 84).

However, in addition to identifying the effectiveness of community participation, it is equally important to recognize some of the problems involved in participatory development approaches. Participation employed as an end in development projects is a time-consuming process and since time is directly proportional to money in such situations, it is quite difficult to justify such an approach due to high expenditures (UNDP). Besides, there is a fear among governments of uncontrolled empowerment of people and lack of trust in their ability to make sensible decisions, which prevents the governments to change their paternalistic approach in decision-making. The only way that such issues against participation can be resolved is by looking at participation from a broader perspective and by weighing its benefits versus limitations. It is true that it would take more time for a fully participatory project to accomplish its goals but the end result in the form of community empowerment will also go a long way. Social benefits are far superior to physical benefits and a realization has to be made on part of the implementing agencies that the empowerment of people is necessary for enabling people to become productive citizens. The authorities need to change their attitude towards people, on one hand while on the other hand; the people need to be guided for participation and making informed decisions. Professionals such as the architects and planners can perform a crucial role here and act as mediators and teachers in community-based projects. The role of the architect in community-based projects is discussed in detail in the next chapter. This discussion is also accompanied by an extensive literature

review of the views of pioneering theorists on community participation in architecture whose work contributed and guided the development of the Community Architecture Movement.