

Beneficiary Participation Defined - A South Africa perspective

Beneficiaries' participation is a rich concept that varies with its application and definition. The way participation is defined, depends on the context in which it occurs. For some scholars, it is a matter of principle; for others, a matter of practice; for even more it is an end in itself. Hence, in this paper a South Africa perspective on the definition of participation will be discussed in relation to subsidised low-income housing beneficiaries. The data used in this research were derived from secondary sources only; through a detailed review of related literature on the subject in order to meet the research objectives. The study is a South Africa perspective on the definition of participation. From the review of the extant literature, it was found that participation is a stereotyped word like children use Lego pieces. Like Lego pieces, the words fit arbitrarily together and support the most fanciful constructions. They have no content but do serve a function. As these words are separate from any context, they are ideal for manipulative purposes. Hence, it was found that 'Participation' belongs to this category of word. Therefore, because involvements in projects and other ventures gives people a better understanding of their interests and the interests of others, and, in some cases, brings them to see what would be best for the entire group, this study thus contribute to the body of knowledge in the conceptualisation of subsidised low-income beneficiary participation in South Africa.

Keywords: Beneficiary participation, Housing, Housing policy, Low-income, Low-income Housing,

INTRODUCTION

Theories of beneficiary participation have received considerable academic attention particularly since the early 1900's, but have been a source of debate since at least the early 1960s. However, the influential theoretical work on the subject of participation was done by Arnstein (1969). The precise importance of Arnstein's work comes from the obvious recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy of citizens; through to consultation, and to what we now view as genuine participation, that is the levels of partnership and citizen control. The fundamental point in Arnstein's model (is) that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit, thus maintaining the status quo" (Arnstein, 1969).

Beneficiary's participation in a housing process for instance, offers an opportunity to engage those who are affected by housing issues in a dialogue; defining problems and creating solutions. The inclusion of community stakeholders in a housing development process helps ensure appropriate housing strategies and policies are developed through more efficiently evaluation, development and implementation to guarantee the satisfaction of the beneficiaries'. Inadequate beneficiaries' participation in the process can lead to community conflict or as a worst case scenario, anti-development initiatives and ultimately housing dissatisfaction, which impacts on the quality of life of the final beneficiaries. Successful beneficiaries' participation is

important because a mixed cross section of the population that has a housing need can be involved in defining the housing problem and in crafting community sensitive solutions. However, there is disagreement among planners and professionals about the contribution of beneficiaries' participation in improving the lives of the people, particularly the poor and disadvantaged (Rifkin & Kangere, 2002). Some completely dismiss its value altogether, while others believe that it is the "magic bullet", (Rifkin & Kangere, 2002), that will ensure improvements especially in the context of poverty alleviation, and community ownership. Hence, the objective of this paper is to present a South Africa perspective on the definition of participation in relation to subsidised low-income housing beneficiaries. Too frequently, development initiatives have been designed by those who have no real knowledgeable understanding of the real needs of a specific community. Most times, the produced 'housing plan' is based on the different stakeholders' perceived needs of the low-income groups instead of the beneficiaries' true needs (Davy, 2006). Kotze and Kellerman (1997) attribute this to the fact that the idea that development consists of a transfer of skills or information creates a role for the expert as the only person capable of facilitating the transfer of these skills from them to the community or society. In order to create developmental efforts that echo the real needs and expectations of specific groups, inclusive of development that will satisfy the people, a paradigm shift is needed in the current conceptualization of participation in housing development studies. This is a shift from the so-called blue-print approach to development toward a more process and people-centered development that should produce beneficiaries' participation. According to Oakley (1991) the role of beneficiaries' participation in South Africa cannot be undermined or may not override economic, personal or technological aspirations in the South Africa public sector as the country's past governance situation should compel the government to correct injustices by actively involving the affected in policy development. The data used in this research were derived from secondary sources only; through a detailed review of related literature on the subject in order to meet the research objectives.

ORIGIN OF BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION

Beneficiary participation in the public sector organisation has undergone a significant change. Prior to this, people were more tolerant of poor service deliveries; more patient in long queues and enduring inefficient public administration than they are now (Olivier, 2003). Nowadays, people are expecting quality delivery of public services and are beginning to hold elected representatives increasingly accountable, when their expectations are not met. Hence, the origin of beneficiary participation can probably be traced to three root sources, which are: participation as good development project practice (Abbot, 1996); participation as good governance (Kooima, 1993) and participation as political empowerment (Freire, 2000; Bond, 2001). These concepts are discussed below in detail.

Participation as Good Development Project Practice

According to Rahnema (1992), participation was first used in the early 1950's by social activists and project field workers, as a necessary facet of development. Also, the World Bank, and other international agencies, as well as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) have since taken the notion of participation as a requirement for successful project implementation in the society. Hence, it has become a common

practice to include some or other form of public participation in the implementation of infrastructure projects within development initiatives. A large amount of development work case studies tend to focus on project specific participation and it is arguably the most well-known participation framework of reference (Olivier, 2003).

Participation as Good Governance

The United Nations Development Programme (1998) defines governance as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels and the means by which states promote social cohesion and integration, to ensure the well-being of their population. This entails all methods used to distribute power and manage public resources, and the organizations that shape government and the execution of policy. Governance also encompasses the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and resolve their differences. According to this definition, good governance therefore depends on public participation to ensure that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad collective agreement and that the poorest and most vulnerable populations can directly influence political decision making, particularly with respect to the allocation of development resources. Good governance is also effective and equitable, and promotes the rule of law and the transparency of institutions, officials, and transactions (UNDP, 1998). Participation by the citizens of a state is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. However, it should be noted that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making, but it does create a platform for participation with the vulnerable in the society. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. Good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It guarantees that corruption is curtailed, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making process. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

Lastly, participation as good governance refers to a high quality of processes by which decisions affecting public affairs are reached and implemented. This process ensures that all, including the poor and other disadvantaged groups, are included and have the means to influence the direction of development in particular as far as it affects their lives. Also, to make contributions to development and have these recognised and to share in the benefits of development and to improve their lives and livelihood. Participation as good governance helps to ensure that all people have adequate access to basic services.

Participation as Political Empowerment

The empowerment approach to participation is located within the radical paradigm of alternative development and is manifested in the mobilization of popular political power. This originated from the economic development theory and theories of development. This approach positions participation within a broader political struggle that links the condition of under-development with access to political power (Freire, 2000). Originally, this tradition found expression in popular resistance movements within South America, Asia and South Africa (Bond, 2001).

These three approaches to participation sometimes intermingle and sometimes are confusing in practical engagement between the government and communities. From the above, it should be noted that there is no single universally applicable or perfect model of participation. It is important to recognize different circumstances require a different style of participation from authorities. However, the responsibility is to understand the context within which communities are engaged, so as to design the most appropriate participative mechanism and process. Participation in the current study is positioned on the good governance approach because good governance depends on public participation to ensure that civil, societal and cost-effective priorities are based on a broad collective agreement and that the poorest and most vulnerable populations can directly influence political decision making, particularly with respect to the allocation of development resources. Also, since the current study is based on South Africa, where public participation is considered to be one of the key tenets of democratic governance, the concept of participation as used, in this study, inclines towards this approach.

BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION DEFINED

Participation is a rich concept that varies with its application and definition. The way participation is defined, depends on the context in which it occurs. For some scholars, it is a matter of principle; for others, a matter of practice; for even more it is an end in itself as described above. However, Rahnema (1992) informs that participation is a stereotyped word, like children use Lego pieces. Like Lego pieces, the words fit arbitrarily together and support the most fanciful constructions. They have no content, but do serve a function. As these words are separate from any context, they are ideal for manipulative purposes. 'Participation' belongs to this category of word.

Most times, the term participation is modified with adjectives, resulting in terms such as community participation, citizen participation, people's participation, public participation, popular participation or even beneficiary participation as used in the current study. However, the Macmillan English Dictionary (2002:1032) defines participation as "to have a share in" or "to take part in," thereby emphasising the rights of individuals and the choices that they make in order to participate. Whilst, Arnstein (1969) claims that the idea of citizen participation is a "little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you". But there has been little analysis of the content of citizen participation, its definition, and its relationship to social imperatives such as social structure, social interaction, and the social context where it takes place. Bearing this in mind, the present study hopes to

advance the concept further by incorporating it into the definition and object of beneficiary satisfaction with their housing unit. However, it can also be a method to co-opt dissent, a mechanism for ensuring the receptivity, sensitivity, and even accountability of social services to the users, as is the case of satisfaction with publicly provided houses by the South African government to the poor and low-income groups.

Mathbor (2008) defined citizen participation as a process by which citizens' act in response to public concerns, voice their opinions about decisions that affect them, and take responsibility for changes to the community. Likewise, citizens' participation may also be referred to as a response to the traditional sense of powerlessness felt by the general public when it comes to influencing government decisions. This is because citizens often feel that housing development issues are beyond their control because the decisions are made outside their community by unknown bureaucrats and technocrats. Hence, Westergaard (1986) defined participation as "collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control". This definition points towards a mechanism for ensuring community participation. Williams (2006) further informs that beneficiary participation is the direct involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of planning, governance and overall development programmes at local or grass roots level. Likewise, Davidson et al. (2007) inform that it involves how and why members of a community are brought into these affairs. Likewise, Meyer and Theron (2000) inform that participation is a social learning process linking the building blocks of development. A vivid definition of participation programmes would indicate the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions that enhance their well-being, for example, their housing, income, security, or self-esteem (Chowdhury, 1996). Chowdhury further states that the ideal conditions contributing towards meaningful participation can be discussed from three aspects which are: What kind of participation is under consideration? Who participates in it? How does participation occur? Mathbor (2008) also points out the importance of the following issues in order to assess the extent of community participation: Who participates? What do people participate in? Why do people participate? There are: a) Cultural explanations (values, norms, and roles, etc.); b) Cognitive explanations (verbal skills and knowledge about the organizations); and c) Structural explanations (alternatives, resources available, and the nature of benefit sought) Implications (how the benefit contributes to the ends or principles they value).

The significance of beneficiary participation is said to draw from three main factors. Primarily, it is alleged to allow for cost reduction through the utilization of local labour and expertise (Davidson et al., 2007). Secondly, it potentially leads to the implementation of appropriate responses through the involvement of locals in collective decision-making, through the assessment of their needs and expectations, (Davidson et al., 2007) thus guaranteeing housing satisfaction. Thirdly, it helps in directing scarce resources towards the more needy, identified by fellow locals (Mayavo, 2002; Davidson et al., 2007). Beneficiary participation is perceived as an undertaking that results in the empowerment of the local population. However, it also has numerous non-benevolent political significances. It is referred to as a curious element in the democratic decision-making process. While the roots of beneficiary participation can be traced to ancient Greece and colonial New England, its significance reflects a contemporary recognition that societies are simply too remote

to be truly “of, by and for the people” without their involvement in the development that affects them. Nevertheless, in principle, beneficiary participation requires the involvement of local actors in the conceptualization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. In practice it sometimes tends to be confined to specific activities (Mafukidze & Hoosen, 2009). As such, beneficiary participation can further be referred to as local involvement within a continuum of possibilities where locals may participate only as providers of labour, in decision-making or at all levels (Davidson et al., 2006; Mafukidze & Hoosen, 2009). The level of local involvement is most times conditional since there are no rules that prescribe the levels of involvement (Lizarralde & Massyn, 2008). In some development, beneficiary participation could be confined to the discussion of a proposed idea of building low-income houses. For instance, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) capital subsidy low income housing under consideration in this present study considers a minimal involvement from the local population as most participatory process is simply aimed at bringing them together to endorse an idea rather than to achieve empowerment, contribution of ideas and capacity building. Beneficiary participation in housing delivery, and as used in this study, agrees with the aforementioned definitions and can be summarized as a localized collective learning process. This is where all stakeholders acquire and share information and learn to accept responsibility for decisions, whilst working towards achieving the shared objective of improving housing delivery. The definition acknowledges and tolerates the interest of different knowledge, pursuit of cooperation and deliberate minimization of clashes along interest, knowledge and power lines, which reinforces beneficiary participation. Thus, enabling the eventual satisfaction of the beneficiaries with the subsidised houses being constructed and allocated to them by the government.

THE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1994, the South African government has put in place policy and legislative frameworks that seek to promote participatory governance. The notion of beneficiary participation is embedded in the South African Constitution. Recognizing the adverse impact of Apartheid on the settlement of the majority of South African citizens, the incoming democratic government in 1994, from the outset, placed emphasis on the provision of housing, as a basic human right. The 1994 Housing White Paper asserted that the government was under a duty to take steps and create conditions which will lead to an effective right to housing (Tapscott & Thompson, 2010) and other social benefits for all. It is alleged in South Africa that a person has a right to live in dignity, in habitable conditions, and that government will vigorously promote an effective right to housing for all, within the resources and other limitations applicable to it (Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996, Section 4.4.2). The principles of citizen participation was clearly articulated in the Housing White Paper and further advanced in the Development Facilitation Act of 1995, of which the policy goals were later given legal effect by the 1996 Constitution (Tapscott & Thompson, 2010). Enshrined in the Constitution’s Bill of Rights (Section 26) is the declaration that: “Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing. The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right”. Following this edict, was a new National Housing Act promulgated in 1997, committing the state, inter alia, to prioritize the needs of the poor in the design and delivery of housing development programmes.

In harmony with the Reconstruction and Development Policy emphasis on beneficiary consultation, the 1994 Housing White Paper committed the government “to a development process driven from within the communities” (Section 4.4.4.), which would promote “the participation of affected communities in the planning and implementation of new developments” (Section 4.5.1). This viewpoint was also advanced in the 1997 National Housing Act which emphasizes, in Section 2(1) that national, provincial and local spheres of government must: “give priority to the needs of the poor in respect of housing development; consult meaningfully with individual and communities affected by housing development; ensure that housing development ... is administered in a transparent and equitable manner, and upholds the practice of good governance”. The South Africa Government’s commitment to consultation, public participation transparency, and the adherence to agreed norms and standards is further evident in the 2008 Social Housing Act (Act No. 16 of 2008), which, in Section 2.1, states the need to: “consult with interested individuals, communities and financial institutions in all phases of social housing development. Facilitate the involvement of residents and key stakeholders through consultation, information sharing, education, training and skills transfer, thereby empowering residents;...” (Department of Human Settlement, 2009).

Moreover, the South Africa constitutional requirements for beneficiary participation is found in its mandate for local government, but more specifically in Chapter 10, Section 195, which states that: “public administration must be development-oriented; people’s need must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making and good human resource management and career development practices must be cultivated to maximize human potential”. Also, on a national level, the South Africa government introduced, what is commonly known as the Batho Pele Principles, which are found in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997 and embodies the evolution of public participation in South Africa. Batho Pele means ‘people first’. Through this principle, the government established the importance of the South African public (citizens) and their valued input through participatory means, and called “for a shift away from inward looking, bureaucratic systems, processes and attitudes, and a search for new ways of working which put the needs of the public first, better and sustainable development, which is faster, and more responsive to the citizen’s needs and expectations” as enshrined on the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997.

BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATORY PROCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the delivering of public housing projects and in giving effect to the rules of national policy in South Africa, a municipality is mandated to work with community representatives through what are called beneficiary committees (Tapscott & Thompson, 2010). Beneficiary committees are understood to be elected by communities, and it is evident that they are established in different ways by different municipalities and in some cases in different ways by the same municipal authority, depending on the community dynamic, or nature of the project. As such beneficiary committees cannot be expected to serve the communities they are purported to represent in similar ways. For instant, in the Department of Human Settlement capital subsidy projects, in which beneficiaries are selected from a general waiting list, this

differs substantially from a committee established in an, in situ, upgrade area (where shacks are replaced by houses on site) where a sense of community is likely to be stronger. The effectiveness and legitimacy of the beneficiary committees as seen by the representatives themselves is markedly different between the different types of projects, in spite of the signed agreement between beneficiary representatives, the municipality and the housing developer (Tapscott & Thompson, 2010).

In giving influence to the idea of people-centered development, the South Africa Housing Code stresses the need for a structured agreement (also referred to as a 'social compact' or 'contract') between a municipality and the community in the delivery of housing projects. This agreement ensures that community members assume ownership of their own development and project. The involvement of the beneficiaries from the onset is of vital importance. Hence, beneficiary participation is undertaken within the context of a structured agreement between the municipality and the community.

Beneficiary participation is generally more successful when the community ('beneficiaries') takes on much of the responsibility, as compared to situations in which the government attempt to assess beneficiaries' preferences for housing through surveys or meetings. In order for beneficiary participation to work, projects must include special components that address it directly. Beneficiaries should be recruited to help in all phases of designing, implementing, maintaining, supervising, and evaluating a new housing construction, but only if the time, effort, and money are spent to do it correctly (Thwala, 2009). Despite these constraints, when the process is started early enough, this aspect will enhance the production of a housing product that would have been specifically designed to meet the needs of the community in all aspects. Also, special consideration must be given to the development of local committees and governance structures to adequately oversee local participation. These local committees and governing structures when developed will direct and execute development (housing) projects, rather than merely receiving a share of project benefits.

LESSON LEARNT

From extant review of literature, it was found that participation is a rich concept that varies with its application and definition. The way participation is defined, depends on the context in which it occurs. For some scholars, it is a matter of principle; for others, a matter of practice; for even more it is an end in itself. The literature reviewed further found that participation is a stereotyped word like children use Lego pieces. Like Lego pieces, the words fit arbitrarily together and support the most fanciful constructions. They have no content but do serve a function. As these words are separate from any context, they are ideal for manipulative purposes. Hence, it was found that 'Participation' belongs to this category of word.

Also, it was found that beneficiary participation can probably be traced to three root sources, which are: participation as good development project practice (Abbot, 1996); participation as good governance (Kooima, 1993) and participation as political empowerment (Freire, 2000; Bond, 2001).

Likewise, it was revealed that the South Africa Government's commitment to consultation, public participation transparency, and the adherence to agreed norms and standards is evident in the 2008 Social Housing Act (Act No. 16 of 2008), which, in Section 2.1, states the need for the State to: "consult with interested individuals, communities and financial institutions in all phases of social housing development. Moreover, the South Africa constitutional requirements for beneficiary participation is found in its mandate for local government, but more specifically in Chapter 10, Section 195, which states that: "public administration must be development-oriented; people's need must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making and good human resource management and career development practices must be cultivated to maximize human potential". Also, on a national level, the South Africa government introduced, what is commonly known as the Batho Pele Principles, which are found in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997) and embodies the evolution of public participation in South Africa. Hence, the study revealed that the involvements in projects and other ventures gives people a better understanding of their interests and the interests of others, and, in some cases, brings them to see what would be best for the entire group which is the totality of participation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has assessed a South Africa perspective on the definition of participation in relation to subsidised low-income housing beneficiaries. Findings from the study revealed that since 1994, the South African government has put in place policy and legislative frameworks that seek to promote participatory governance. The notion of beneficiary participation is embedded in the South African Constitution. Also, it was found that the principles of citizen participation is clearly articulated in the Housing White Paper and further advanced in the Development Facilitation Act of 1995, of which the policy goals were later given legal effect by the 1996. Likewise, enshrined in the Constitution's Bill of Rights (Section 26) is the declaration that: "Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing and that the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right". Overall, it was revealed that the South Africa Government's commitment to consultation, public participation transparency adheres to international norms and standards. While the roots of beneficiary participation can be traced to ancient Greece and colonial New England, its significance reflects a contemporary recognition that societies are simply too remote to be truly "of, by and for the people" without their involvement in the development that affects them.

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