

Jan Sarvaes, Thomas L. Jacobson and Shirley A. White (eds).
Participatory Communication for Social Change. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
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Changing needs and aspirations of society is the fundamental element of the development process. The state's failure to cope with this galvanises people to make collective decisions. In development projects, participation is very important to decision-making, as it involves the sharing of information, knowledge, commitment, and the right attitude.

Participation, like sustainable development, has become one of those catchwords whose message is advocated by everyone, but with their own definition. In development, it is broadly understood as the active involvement of people in making decisions about the implementation of processes, programmes, and projects which affect them. It involves the equitable distribution of political and economic powers between different groups in a society, leading often to a decrease in the advantages of the élites. However, the term covers a wide variety of activities.

This volume revolves round the notion of participatory communication and research. It deals with the theory and practice of participation in development through communication in a meaningful and culturally specific way. It is an excellent, comprehensive, and authoritative overview, of the key issues in participatory communication; each chapter is complete in itself and has important points to make, the volume being a collection of 15 contributions which have earlier had public appearance in some form or the other. The introduction and the conclusion attempt quite successfully to tie them together. Thus, the remaining 13 chapters are divided into three parts.

Part I consists of two chapters, which deal with general theoretical perspectives. The main idea here is to involve people in the development process. In the first chapter, three alternative paradigms of development—modernisation, dependency, and multiplicity are discussed. Identifying the weaknesses in the first two, the author proposes the third paradigm, which means two-way communication (interactive and participatory) at all levels. A similar approach to communication and development but with a different name is suggested in the next chapter as 'communitarian'. This part, in general, links the 'multiplicity' and the 'communitarian' approach to political ideologies and suggests the practical application of these in policy issues.

Several methodological issues concerning participatory communication are covered in Part II. Among these are different approaches to participatory research which emphasise more qualitative, humane, and participatory methods for social research. Development communication theory is discussed with reference to the works of philosophers of science who affirm non-positivistic justifications for

empirical research. Some current debates in the social sciences are also reviewed. For instance, the integration of scientific research with the indigenous knowledge of the farmer to augment sustainable development and thereby benefit the poor. Similarly, there is discussion on the concepts of animation and leadership in community development, i.e., learning effective leadership—to teach others before empowering them. The impact of social movements in channelling society's interest is also among the various issues examined.

After reviewing competing (theoretical as well as methodological) conceptions of participatory communication, this volume pulls together the findings of five original case studies in Part III, thus establishing a link between theory and practice. With the aid of these specific experiences in the Third World in participatory communication for social change, new theoretical insights are provided. And based on the successful experiences, several recommendations are made. These recommendations include a formal and institutionalised network for communicative action; the interdependence of decentralisation, participation, and empowerment; and, finally, several ways of facilitating community mobilisation for participation and empowerment.

In conclusion, the importance of the participatory communication process is emphasised. It is argued to develop a new theory of participatory communication for social change that will support development processes.

The volume combines historical context, theoretical perspective, and sociological examination of a wide variety of actual cases and explores the main theme in the changed world of the 1990s. The aim declared in the introduction seems to have been achieved. Each article is significant and helps to understand participation and participatory processes from an unconventional perspective. There is some repetition from chapter to chapter.

Further, this book is not the first attempt in this direction, yet it is a good attempt in the selection of articles and their systematic presentation. In fact, the strength of this book lies in its systematic analysis. Pages numbering 209–224 are missing, which is a pity.

In summary, the overall effect is of an interesting and valuable mix of academic and practitioner perspectives on key issues in participation and communication. The book will be of interest both to students of social science and development practitioners, and may also be helpful for future research on the topic.

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