# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECTS IN IRAN

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© Ontario International Development Agency. ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html

Abstract: This article analyses the effectiveness and outcomes of people's participation (PP) in natural resource management projects in Iran. Two projects were selected as case studies on the subjects of watershed management and range management.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to collect necessary data. The participants in the studied projects, as respondents in both cases, stated their economic and social well-being have not improved because of their participation in the projects as much as they expected. Their participation could not substantially benefit them and increase their income because of certain environmental problems and lack of management capacity among the directors.

In conclusion, participation had given some opportunity to rural people to decide who should be involved in the project, and provided shared influence in making ongoing decisions about what activities should be implemented; and what each individual had to contribute. However, decision-making power is still concentrated on the directors or local leaders. Furthermore, both projects are experiencing financial difficulties and suffering from some managerial weaknesses which undermined PP and have reduced its outcomes. It could be stated that PP is a necessary approach but not sufficient for promoting sustained rural development. Adequate attention should be paid to both the managerial and the technical dimension of projects.

*Keywords:* Rural development, participation, people's participation, natural resource projects

# Introduction

any factors may affect the level of success of any rural development (RD) project, PP in the project, and its outcomes and results. Not only the characteristics of the project may promote PP and influence the effectiveness of the project but also the characteristics of the environment in relation to the project can affect the success of the

project in meeting its goals. This study does not attempt to identify factors that might affect the effectiveness of the selected projects but as an evaluation aiming at the identification of the effectiveness of PP in these projects and its outcomes. The study analyses the findings obtained from the study area related to the issue of 'advantage of PP' in the selected projects. Case studies could help gain a deeper identification of the process of PP and allow clarification of the appropriate information on the results of PP as well. In this research, a case study is a detailed description and analysis of a single project and it was thought to be a suitable strategy to evaluate the selected projects.

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the study is to identify the effectiveness of PP in the RD projects in Iran. This paper analyses the findings obtained from the study area related to the issue of 'advantages of PP' in the selected projects. As Oakley *et al.* (1991) believe where there is a direct link between participation and the achieving tangible project objectives, people (members of the project becomes beneficiaries. In this respect, the outcomes of PP are fairly similar to the outcomes of the project. On the other words, participation is seen as an end and/or both as a means and end in the project.

#### THE STUDY AREA AND SELECTED CASE STUDIES

Paveh district which is located in the west of Kermanshah province in Iran was selected as the area of the study. The district comprises 3 sub districts, 4 cities, and 107 villages. Map 1 shows the position of Kermashah province in Iran. Several participatory projects have been carried out under local government organizations support, during the past decade in this area. For the purpose of this study, from several conducted participatory projects in the district, two projects were selected as case studies. The selected projects were: Mazidi range management project and Taze-Abad watershed management project.

Kermanshah province

| Caspian Sea | Caspian

Map 1- The location of Kermanshah province in Iran

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings related to the advantages or outcomes of PP in each project are separately presented as follows.

Case study (1): Mazidi range management project

# POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES OR OUTCOMES OF PP IN $\mbox{THE PROJECT}$

Evaluating such projects requires base-line and monitoring data. There seems to have been an almost total lack of base-line monitoring information for the comparison of conditions in the project area before and after the project. Therefore, a variety of evaluation techniques were used to capture different dimensions of the project's impact on people and

their environment. Inevitably there are weaknesses in the data that limit the study's analytical power. Because of the nature of this project, the researcher decided to investigate the socio-economic outcomes of the project.

# **ECONOMIC OUTCOMES**

In this study, firstly the possible economic changes, in terms of family income and the income from the project, were discussed in the course of the PRA exercises. From discussions it can be concluded that the people in the village are, generally, living with a low income and livelihood. Despite the low level of income, the measures of central tendency for the variable of the number of members in the participating families i.e. family size is quite high. A summary of the results of the applied survey is presented in the following table.

Table 1- The effect of the income	from the project on	the respondents' lives
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	si	onomic tuation ore and		anging family	Cł	nanging family saving		ention to cation	f	oving amily tional	Investment in agriculture		
	after		meome		Saving		Cadadanon			status			
_	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
Very little	6	22.2	4	14.8	6	22.2	12	44.4	5	18.5	4	14.8	
Little	18	66.7	10	37.0	13	48.1	11	40.7	4	14.8	2	7.4	
Medium	3	11.1	10	37.0	7	25.9	3	11.1	8	29.6	9	33.3	
Great	0	0	3	11.1	1	3.7	1	3.7	9	33.3	10	37.0	
Very great	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3.7	2	7.4	
Total	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	

It appears that the income from the project still had no very significant effect in improving members' livelihood. There have been challenges to face in achieving the economic goals in practice. The income from the project has been mainly from the forage products and animal husbandry. They believed that forage production from the project was considerable and it facilitated keeping more animals and there has been a significant decrease in importing necessary forage from other areas. The participants also stated that trees planted would yield in the next few years.

#### SOCIAL OUTCOMES

In this study, the focus is mainly on the 'educational effects' and changes in 'self-reliance' among the members of the project.

# a) Educational effect of the project

From the debates of PRA exercises it was realized that the members were relatively satisfied with the way the meetings were organized and held. They indicated that they have learned many useful lessons from the experts about the appropriate way to renew and maintain natural resources, and the importance of participatory approach for NRM. From PRA exercises, it was verified that the meetings have indeed had some effect on the participants. The main

discussions were on the issues like: participants' abilities to identify their needs and problems; increasing self-esteem and awareness of their abilities; and increasing their knowledge and skills. Then, by means of the survey, the respondents were asked to express their views about these issues. The results are as in the table 2.

It seems clear that the effect of the meetings on the specific abilities and skills to manage and mobilize local resources were scored most highly by the respondents; however, the impact on issues such as general skills and awareness levels were scored less highly, but are clearly well-regarded.

#### b) Capacity building and self-reliance

In the study, first, the participants in PRA exercises were asked to express their views on the possible changes in their self-reliance resulting from participation. The most important issues which were discussed include: changes in the spirit of collective decision-making, knowledge about local issues, the ability to solve local problems, and motivation to take part in new projects. In the next step, the survey sample was asked to express possible changes in their behaviour related to these issues which resulted particularly from their participation. A summary of results is presented in the following table 3.

	nee	eds and oblems	aware	esteem and eness of abilities	kno	creasing owledge ad skills		nmental vareness		esource agement	Mobilizing local resources		
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
Very low	3	11.1	3	11.1	3	11.1	4	14.8	3	11.1	3	11.1	
Low	9	33.3	9	33.3	8	29.6	5	18.5	2	7.4	5	18.5	
Medium	11	40.7	8	29.6	9	33.3	11	40.7	11	40.7	9	33.3	
High	2	7.4	6	22.2	7	25.9	5	18.5	10	37.0	5	18.5	
Very high	2	7.4	1	3.7	0	0	2	7.4	1	3.7	5	18.5	
Total	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	

Table 2- The influence of the meetings in changing respondents' abilities

Table 3- The effect of project in changing respondents' behaviour and ability

	Collective decision- making		decision- of lo		Problem- solving ability		Participation in new projects		Willing to leadership		Relationship with others		Have a say in meetings		Perception of the ownership		conflicts		Growing solidarity	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	
V. low	0	0	1	3.7	3	11.1	2	7.4	3	11.1	3	11.1	2	7.4	2	7.4	0	0	0	0
Low	5	18.5	8	29.6	6	22.2	2	7.4	8	29.6	6	22.2	6	22.2	4	14.8	5	18.5	5	18.5
Medium	10	37.0	10	37.0	12	44.4	10	37.0	6	22.2	9	33.3	11	40.7	6	22.2	7	25.9	8	29.6
High	10	37.0	8	29.6	6	22.2	13	48.1	7	25.9	7	25.9	7	25.9	11	40.7	12	44.4	7	25.9
V. high	2	7.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	11.1	2	7.4	1	3.7	4	14.8	3	11.1	7	25.9
	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100	27	100
Total																				

Although the socio-economic outcomes of the project are considerable, it has been faced with difficulties which have affected its success. Problems such as a drought lasting for several years, existing conflicts with external users from other villages, and insufficient management capacity within the project seem to have had a great effect. Drought lasting for several years in the project area has clearly affected the level of economic changes.

A further problem is related to the management of the project. Although most of the managers have had the experience of working in government departments, they have still no specific knowledge of resource and conflict management. On the other hand, the outcomes of such projects fail to provide tangible demonstrations of the effects and the benefits achieved. Successful results come to light only in the long term, whereas rural people expect immediate results. Such problems and difficulties, together with the accompanying limitations of NRM, explain why the project has had less successful outcomes than hoped.

Case study(2): Taze-Abad watershed management project

#### POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF PP IN THE PROJECT

There seems to have been an almost total lack of documenting and monitoring information relating to this project. Evaluation of outcomes of such projects requires base-line data from both 'pre-project' and 'in-project' evaluation for the purpose of the comparison of conditions in the project area before and after the project, but unfortunately no such

information was available. Having this problem, a variety of evaluation techniques were used to identify different aspects of the project's impact on people's lives. The process of evaluation of this case was similar to the previous cases. The results are presented as follows.

#### **ECONOMIC OUTCOMES**

Similar to previous case, in order to better understand the outcomes of participation, the respondents were asked to express their views on these outcomes. The results are summarized in table 4.

It is clear from the results acquired that participation in the project had no significant effect on the respondents' economic situation before and after the project. The results also reveal that the income from the project had no very significant effect in changing the income of the majority of respondents' families as well as in the family saving. Perhaps an explanation for these results can be that the income from the project has not been very significant and/or the standard of living of the community is currently so low that the project could not bring the members to a position where they were able to save any money in their new position. In such projects the benefits may be achieved in longer-term. The statistics show that the income had also no very significant effect on their attention to the education of family. It, however, reveal that the effect of the income from the project in improving respondents' family nutritional status is fairly considerable. Finally, as the project is related to agriculture, they had spent their income from the project mainly in the improving this sector.

Table 4- The effect of the income from the project on the respondents' lives

	situ befo	nomic ation re and fter	fai	nging mily ome		nging saving	1	ention to cation	fa nut	oroving amily ritional tatus	Investment in agriculture		
•	F P		F	F P		P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
Very little	3	7.5	2	5.0	10	25.0	18	45.0	2	5.0	0	0.0	
Little	15	37.5	20	50.0	20	50.0	12	30.0	3	7.5	4	10.0	
Medium	18	45.0	9	22.5	9	22.5	7	17.5	20	50.0	15	37.5	
Great	4	10.0	8	20.0	1	2.5	3	7.5	13	32.5	17	42.5	
Very great	0	0.0	1	2.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.0	4	10.0	
Total	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	

#### **Social outcomes**

As with the previous cases, here, the focus is mainly on the 'educational effects' and changes in 'selfreliance' among the members of the project.

#### a) Educational effect of the project

As like case one, the main social outcomes of this project summarized in table 5 and 6.

In summary, the most important changes(based on the participation indicating 'medium' to 'very high' influence) resulting from their participation in the meetings are: (1) increasing respondents' knowledge and skills: 50.0 percent, (2) identifying local needs and problems: 60.0 percent, (3) the respondents' environmental awareness: 67.5 percent, (4) their ability in the mobilization of local resources: 72.5 percent, (5) the respondents' self-esteem and awareness of abilities: 80.0 percent, (6) their ability in local resource management: 82.5 percent.

It seems clear that the respondents assessed the effect of the meetings on the specific abilities and skills to manage resources most highly. They also evaluated the effect of meetings on improving their self-esteem at a high level. Moreover, the effect on changing respondents' abilities in the mobilization of local resources seems to be significant. Although knowledge is often seen as a significant precondition for the development process, the impact of the meetings on issues such as general knowledge and skills levels were scored less highly, but are clearly well-regarded. Through the PRA the participants emphasized that they still needed to improve their knowledge on the issues related to NRM to become skilled and experts in the self-management of their own land.

# b) Capacity building and self-reliance

The process of evaluation of the effect of the project on changing people's capacity and self-reliance was similar to the Mazidi case. In the next step, the respondents of the survey were asked to assess possible changes related to these issues which resulted particularly from participation in the project. Summary of results is presented in table 6

						C	Ü						
	Identifying needs and problems		and awareness of			easing vledge skills	Enviror awar			ource gement	Mobilizing local resources		
	F	P	F	P	$\mathbf{F}$	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
Very low	5	12.5	2	5.0	6	15.0	3	7.5	3	7.5	2	5.0	
Low	11	27.5	6	15.0	14	35.0	10	25.0	4	10.0	9	22.5	
Medium	15	37.5	21	52.5	12	30.0	14	35.0	19	47.5	15	37.5	
High	8	20.0	9	22.5	8	20.0	12	30.0	12	30.0	12	30.0	
Very high	1	2.5	2	5.0	0	0.0	1	2.5	2	5.0	2	5.0	
Total	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	

Table 5- The influence of the meetings in changing respondents' abilities

Table 6- The effect of project in changing respondents' behavior and ability

	Collective decision- making		decision-		decision- of local		Problem Participation -solving in new ability projects				0	ionship others		Iave a say in etings	Perception of the ownership		Resolving conflicts		Growing solidarity	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
V. low	2	5.0	0	0.0	1	2.5	0	0.0	2	5.0	0	0.0	2	5.0	1	2.5	4	10.0	2	5.0
Low	9	22.5	9	22.5	16	40.0	6	15.0	15	37.5	10	25.0	13	32.5	4	10.0	14	35.0	11	27.5
Medium	12	30.0	14	35.0	10	25.0	13	32.5	10	25.0	19	47.5	17	42.5	16	40.0	9	22.5	15	37.5
High	12	30.0	13	32.5	13	32.5	20	50.0	13	32.5	10	25.0	5	12.5	15	37.5	11	27.5	12	30.0
V. high	5	12.5	4	10.0	0	0.0	1	2.5	0	0.0	1	2.5	3	7.5	4	10.0	2	5.0	0	0.0
Total	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100

It appears that the project has been faced with difficulties which have affected its success and socio-economic outcomes. Shortage of rainfall for several years in Paveh district has clearly affected the level of agricultural production and economic outcomes of the project. The arguments in the PRA discussions exposed another problem which has strongly affected the project's success and has undermined the people's spirit of collective decision-making and cooperation. Their discussions reflect that there has been a resurgence of natural resource conflicts in the project area. Differential access and control, changes in access patterns and especially inequitable access frequently caused conflict among the members particularly with the managers of the project.

Existing conflicts have mainly risen due to some shortcomings of the management system of the project and their insufficient management capacity. Although most of the managers were local leaders and have had the experience of working with people, they have still no specific knowledge of NRM and conflict management. Furthermore, the participants also believed in a form of discrimination and inequity in the manager's behaviour, though the managers strongly rejected this in the interviews. Ownership and property right issues also appear to be another concern in conflict over NR.

Similar to the Mazidi case, lack of monitoring and documenting project activities is obvious. The outcomes of the project itself fail to provide tangible demonstrations of the effects and benefits. Rural people usually have short-term aspirations and expectations and they would not continue to take part in participatory activities eagerly as the outputs of these activities are intangible for them. These problems and difficulties, together with the accompanying limitations of NRM, explain why the project has had less successful outcomes than hoped.

#### CONCLUSION

An overall conclusion of all two cases is presented based on the main research question which is what are the outcomes of people's participation?

- (a) Participants, in both cases, stated their economic and social well-being has not improved as much because of their participation in the projects as they expected. It was understood that their participation in the projects could not substantially increase their household incomes because of some environmental problems and incapable management capacity of the projects. The participants, generally, believed that they did not get the maximum benefit from their labour, especially in women's case.
- (b) From the point of employment opportunities, both cases have contributed to improve the current jobs of their members. The members of cases, on the whole,

believed that it was not effective as they expected.Both cases like many other participatory initiatives suffer from some administrative weaknesses and problems which have undermined PP. These cases are also experiencing financial and managerial difficulties so that conducted activities have not been at a high level. Certain physical and environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and historical factors in the projects area might, directly or indirectly, affect the level of the outcomes of participation. Local physical and environmental characteristics, history and background participation in the area, socio-economic system in which the projects have functioned, and cultural and religious beliefs might have a great influence on the way and pattern of PP. Possibility of making profits (benefits), sensibility of benefits and results, immediacy of outcomes, the way of offering services, methods of the distribution the benefits, ability and availability of the management of the project, the amount of government support (both technical and financial), and environmental conditions (e.g. rainfall) are perhaps some most important factors which might affect the outcomes of participation.

(c) Regarding the effect of the income from the project in the respondents' lives, the low impact on "saving" and "attention to education" is clear. This may indicate that the people had wants that had never been met before, and have therefore attempted to fulfil their wants and basic needs rather than save for the future. Concerning the influence of the 'meetings' of the projects in changing people's abilities, it appears that roughly at least 50 percent of the participants in the study believed that their skills and abilities had improved as a result of the project (scored from medium up to very high). Improvement in specific skills and abilities in two cases, the effect has been mainly on resource management and resource mobilisation. The findings showed that while the physical condition of the project area in the two NRM projects appears to have improved, there is not vet a substantial flow of benefits from the project to the community members.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult education: adult education and training is a high priority issue which leads to better achievements to real goals of RD. This is an effective way of overcoming some of the difficulties that inhibit rural participation in the study area. Moreover, local resources can never be managed well unless the users are well-educated and involved in NRM. Training in resource management and marketing must be undertaken particularly to improve people's abilities and confidence. There has to be an improvement in creative management on the part of project managers

so that the project's outcomes would be increased and can be 'scaled up' and continued effectively.

Increasing external funds and support: it should not be ignored that government as the central power is still the moving motor of PP in countries like Iran. It means local participation may not occur easily without government's support considering the dominant economic and cultural situation in rural communities. Evidences show that both cases are suffering from the lack of both financial and managerial sources. Developing rural areas through conducting participatory projects depends on economic and technical support beyond the control of the decisions of the projects.

Realistic expectations and accessible goals and objectives: participatory initiatives often suffer from some weaknesses that undermine the process and reduce their impact. Unrealistic expectations and long-term outcomes may be two important problems particularly in NRM projects that can create or increase disappointment among the members. Rural people usually have short-term aspiration and expectations so that they would take part in public activities which their output are visible for them shortly. The practitioners of participation must be aware not only to create real expectation among local people from their participation, but also to persuade them to accept and expect long-term outcomes.

Attention to monitoring and evaluation: the absence of monitoring and evaluation of participatory activities is obvious in the three cases. This has led to difficulties both in assessing the cost-effectiveness of operations and in improving plans and correcting mistakes. The project managers and beneficiaries had to be persuaded of the importance of monitoring and evaluation.

Sustainable through participation: RD Sustainability would be increased in NRM projects where a high degree of both co-management and selfmanagement is achieved through participation, organisation, education, and making visible the achievements, accompanied with the continued supports from government. More attention should be paid to both the managerial and the technical dimension of the lands. Participatory approach to NRM is necessary but not sufficient for promoting the sustained development of NR. Promoting both co-management and self-management are necessary. Finally, in summary, the following conclusions and recommendations are made for the achievement of sustainable RD: (a) PP is a necessary approach but not sufficient for promoting the sustained RD. Adequate attention should be paid to capacitybuilding and the managerial and technical dimensions of projects. (b) The management of NR to obtain maximum benefit will require more willingness, intensive, and cooperation of all people.

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