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Contributions on issues of accountability and transparency

Who decides to whom and for whom citizen jury processes are accountable? How can such participatory processes be used to hold government departments, donor agencies, and other actors more accountable, and make policies and policy processes more responsive to the needs and priorities of poor people?

The jury deliberating during an evening question and answer session

Contributions to this area of the discussion were received from the registrants listed below:

- **Peter Newell**, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK
- **Chengal Reddy Peddireddy**, Honorary Chairman, Federation of Farmers' Association, India
- **Anne Marie Goetz**, Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK
- **Brian Wynne**, Centre for the Study of Environmental Change and Chair of the Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, UK
- **Biksham Gujja**, Coordinator, Freshwater Programme, WWF International, Switzerland
- **Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend**, Chair IUCN CEESP Collaborative Management Working Group, Co-chair CEESP/WCPA Theme on Communities, Equity, and Protected Areas, Switzerland



A contribution from Peter Newell

Before making my contribution, I should say at the outset I am neither a specialist in participation nor someone who has followed the controversy surrounding the *Prajateerpu* report in sufficient detail to comment directly on this particular exercise. It is my sense nevertheless, and this is confirmed by talking to participation practitioners, that the whole area of

Matrix ranking of trees for community plans, Trans Nzoia, Kenya. Courtesy of Jules Pretty



quality control of such exercises is both contested and under-developed. My aim, therefore, is to raise questions about how the credibility of such exercises can be defended against attack by those seeking to suppress dissident voices and avoid the uncomfortable conclusions that juries and other processes reach about the impact of development programmes. Is there for instance a role for some form of accreditation of facilitators, rather like that which exists for social development certifiers in areas such as forest certification? In this case people have to attend regular training on how to conduct assessments of community involvement in forest management in a sensitive, ethical, and participatory fashion. Questions have of course been asked about how adequate the training is and the nature of the certification process that then takes place. But there is scope, in these arrangements, for accrediting organisations to drop in on evaluation exercises to check that agreed practice is being followed. Such monitoring and the requirement for regular re-training may prevent a situation in which someone becomes a qualified participation facilitator and is not expected to keep learning and refining facilitation techniques. One-off accreditations would of course be inadequate.

The question is: would this sort of approach help to protect, from accusations of lack of professionalism and lack of legitimacy, the important role of juries and other processes aimed at involving social groups that are often deliberately left out of formal policy processes? It may be an overly bureaucratic and resource-intensive solution. It may also play into the hands of the powerful whose agendas such processes are meant to challenge, as issues of who determines best practice immediately arise. But it may also, if managed carefully, help to establish guidelines for best practice, which would have to be adapted to the different situations in which they are to be applied and tailored to the

overall aim of an exercise. If this were to happen, such an approach might help to advance our understanding of the conditions in which, and the purposes for which, juries are appropriate participatory and deliberative mechanisms and thereby serve to show that they can play an important complimentary role to state-organised 'consultations'.

A contribution from Chengal Reddy Peddireddy

I wish to contribute to the debate emerging from the *Prajateerpu* report and process on behalf of the Federation of Farmers' Association (FFA), a non-profit, independent organisation representing some two million members from 500 farmers' organisations in the State of Andhra Pradesh, India. Farmers in India and many other nations have, for many years, been exploited by unscrupulous elements, including corrupt government officials, lazy extension officers, crooked businessmen, and untrustworthy local elites. The actions of these self-serving and deceitful characters have hindered progress in rural development in many places. In recent years, we farmers have been confronted by a new threat: unelected and unaccountable local and foreign NGOs who, despite claiming to promote agricultural innovation and rural development, actually hold it back by advocating their own agendas under the guise of 'environmental protection' or 'sustainable development'. All too often, these self-appointed 'guardians' of the public interest work against the real interests of farmers and rural communities by asking us to forego the very benefits that they themselves enjoy, including the fruits of modern science and technology.

I write this message as a plea to developed nations, international development agencies, and others who are seeking to provide the financial assistance to involve farmers' organisations and other grassroots groups in the preparation and implementation of agriculture and rural development schemes. Over the past few decades, international organisations, such as the World Bank, the IMF, DFID, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and large numbers of European and North American countries and Japan, have come forward to provide funding to developing nations for various agriculture and rural development programmes. Many of these development programmes have benefited poor people in urban and particularly rural areas. Furthermore, most of the programmes pertaining to agriculture, irrigation, rural development, health, and education have helped enormously by increasing agricultural productivity, creating rural employment, and providing health and education services.

No doubt, there are cases where local stakeholders, such as farmers, were not actively involved in the preparation, implementation, or management of the programmes. Our

federation has observed that this defect is frequently due to the unwillingness of corrupt or authoritarian local government officials to involve local stakeholders to the full extent. However, the biggest problem confronting most rural people, including farmers, is the hue and cry of many NGOs who totally oppose many of these development schemes. All too often they set themselves in opposition to modernisation, mechanisation, and the latest technologies, such as providing new irrigation facilities. These NGOs, who claim to be the saviours of poor, small, and marginal farmers, want no change in India's development. They don't take into consideration the practical needs and aspirations of many rural people, especially in terms of having access to quality education and health facilities, and improving the productivity of their agricultural systems through the use of hybrid seeds, fertilisers, and mechanisation. They don't answer the question as to how social integration and poverty reduction can be achieved without scientific education, modernisation of agriculture, excellent infrastructure, or economic development. In the name of sustainable development, they are advocating usage of native seeds whose productivity levels are not even sufficient to meet the food requirements of the farmers who use them. They oppose farmers' access to modernisation, whereas they themselves use modern technologies and facilities in their day-to-day personal living, as well as in their organisations.

One such case is that of *Prajateerpu* (citizens' jury), which was supposed to be a 'farmers' jury' deciding on the methods to be adopted by Indian agriculture in the State of Andhra Pradesh in the future. The final decision emerging from that event is so perverse that it actually advocated leaving 70% of rural people dependent on subsistence agriculture. It also expressed strong opposition to agricultural modernisation and mechanisation and recommended the banning of modern sciences from rural people's houses. This is a verdict that members of the Federation of Farmers' Associations find incomprehensible, as we seek to embrace modern science and technology and wish to apply them in our own homes, fields, and communities.

As one of the participants in the *Prajateerpu*, I feel sorry for the ignorance and innocence displayed by the organisers of that event. They failed to realise the harsh realities of Indian farming systems, where more than 70% of the farmers depend on erratic and insufficient rainfall and the majority have no access to quality inputs, credit, extension services, crop insurance, or social security. However, every one of these 700 million rural people has basic needs that must be met, such as adequate food and nutrition, appropriate personal hygiene facilities, proper shelter, and gainful

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employment, if they are to prosper. In addition, they want their children to receive a modern, science-based education in order to make a better living and become competitive in agriculture. Without science and technology, rich countries could never have achieved the economic growth and prosperity they enjoy today. Their failure to invest in science and technology research and development in developing countries is undermining our efforts to fight poverty, disease, and environmental degradation. Yet today's debate on sustainable development, put forward by many NGOs, focuses overwhelmingly on politics. They attribute extreme poverty in India and elsewhere almost entirely to poor policies and corruption, rather than the lack of appropriate technologies for the tropical ecologies of the impoverished countries. Poor countries are poor, in their view, because the poor do not behave like them. The battle against poverty thus becomes a battle against corruption, wrong ideas, and incompetence, and little more. Yet serious analysis reveals starkly and powerfully that poor governance is just one of many factors that trap millions of people in India in extreme poverty.

The great bulk of economic growth in developed countries over the past 50 years was the result of technological progress rather than the accumulation of capital. Modern economic growth has depended, to a large extent, on science-based technologies that have enabled the rich countries to enjoy bountiful food harvests, an escape from early deaths from infectious diseases, and dramatic increases in the mobilisation of energy. Markets, to be sure, played a hand in this, but so too did huge investments in public education and infrastructure, and in the diffusion of technologies. By underestimating the role of public investments in science and technology in their own development, many NGOs and donor countries have neglected the importance of supporting science and technology in poor countries to address distinctive problems such as tropical agriculture and tropical disease.

We are sending this note to you, with a request that it will be read by all those concerned with agriculture and rural development programmes in developing countries. We appeal to donor nations and organisations to actively involve grassroots farmers' organisations in the preparation, implementation, and management of those programmes. We also ask that they invest much more in research and development that will bring new technologies and ecologically appropriate solutions, based on sound science, to the complex and persistent agricultural problems faced by our farmers.

A contribution from Anne Marie Goetz

My comments relate to issues of engagement and accountability. 'Consultations' with people affected by policy have become increasingly popular within the development 'establishment' (both donors and domestic policy makers) because of the aura of authenticity and legitimacy that they impart to public decision making. When conducted by policy makers (and the *Prajateerpu* case does not fall into this category) they are even presented as an accountability mechanism – as proof that 'ordinary people' have articulated their concerns, needs, and interests and have seen them reflected in new policy. I wonder, though, if there are any examples of policy makers actually changing policies as a result of these exercises. My impression is that there are few cases of policy makers changing their actions in response to citizens' juries, social audits (a local public review of the quality of government decision making), or forums for direct interactions between bureaucrats and people.

Janmabhoomi in Andhra Pradesh is an example of this – this campaign of meetings between service-delivery bureaucrats and people does not come with 'hard' accountability rights.¹ By this I mean that these meetings do not give participants concrete rights to pursue their concerns and to seek redress for poor-quality decision making. Do social audits come with 'hard' powers to demand formal investigations by authorities? Do citizens' juries come with opportunities to demand official information about the basis upon which decisions were made (for instance sensitive research or polling information) or information about how public money was actually spent? Do any of these forums come with the right to issue a dissenting report to the legislature? Or even with the right to pursue grievances in the courts and litigate against officials or government departments?

I would be interested in hearing of any cases in which

¹ *Janmabhoomi* is a people-centred development process launched in the State of Andhra Pradesh in January 1997, aimed at establishing an ideal society, which embodies the principles of people's participation, equality, transparency, and accountability leading to sustained economic development and enhanced quality of life.

A woman from a rural village. In what way is her government made accountable to her?
Courtesy of M. Taghi Farvar



forums for 'consultation' designed to elicit the 'voices of the poor' actually led to the prosecution of grievances expressed by participants. My concern about the proliferation of opportunities for 'participation' in decision making is that these are, at best, means for improving the awareness, and ideally, the receptivity, of officials towards the clients of public services. Probably *Janmabhoomi* at its best does this. But eliciting voice without accountability is surely a recipe for disenchantment.

A contribution from Brian Wynne Social science and politics

There are lots of important issues raised by this case, for social scientists and agencies working not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, to help make policies involving scientific and technical inputs, more democratically responsive, ethically sound, and ultimately more socially (and

The jury, observers, and coordinators gather following a press conference



For members of this jury, *Prajateerpu* was a unique opportunity to engage in debate with government officials



probably also technically) robust. I deal with only a few of these – mainly addressing what are the roles of social science and politics here, and how do we make both dimensions properly accountable. I take for granted that all social scientists operating in contexts like those involved here, recognise that they are operating in a strongly (and multiply) political context, and that their work will therefore have inevitable political implications even if they themselves as authors have no relevant political views whatever. In the [*Prajateerpu* report], for example, the [authors] clearly stated that, consistent with many official policy statements, their aim was to find ways of eliciting the voices of marginal farmers on the future of AP farming and food, and that as a population usually excluded from such public processes, these people deserved to be heard and taken account of in making policy and constructing visions of the future (which I take to mean something different from that having sovereignty over other voices and views, though the authors seem to differ from me on this).

The first important point which may be useful to remember therefore, is that all the parties involved in the *Prajateerpu* debate appear to agree on the key starting point: that this kind of work, attempting to understand and give a place to the previously ignored and excluded voices of marginal peoples suffering serious poverty and insecurity in development situations like that of Andhra Pradesh, is a valuable and necessary project. That hearing these voices with due respect and commitment, and responding to them (which is not the same as giving them unqualified sovereignty, since other legitimate voices and visions also exist) may produce more serious challenges to existing ways of thinking and visions of progress than we may have expected, should not itself come as a total shock. Given the surprisingly strong tendency of powerless and largely resourceless people tacitly to assume

no agency and no influence over the forces shaping their own lives and futures, it was a very positive aspect of the *Prajateerpu* report to find how active and articulate those marginal farmers and farm-workers were in expressing their own visions and needs in the face of no-doubt sincere alternative visions like *Vision 2020* which is under disputed interpretation here. For social scientists experienced in qualitative social research on public experiences of expert discourses and interventions, it is easy to understand how well-intentioned and in context laudably innovative attempts to 'consult' the public in order to 'validate' policy scenarios like *Vision 2020*, can result in quite misleading 'feedback' from the public.

Unless deliberate methodological instruments are used to overcome what are usually deeply entrenched but typically unspoken public senses of lack of agency, alienation, and neglect by powerful institutions, people often take a 'path of least resistance' in responding. They tend to bottle up discomforts with the very framing of the issues and questions on which they are invited to respond. They often also feel quite alone, with no peer group to create a sense of collective identity and solidarity which begins to create the conditions for articulation of more authentically grounded and autonomous views of their own. All this is familiar enough to academics and to many policy users too. I cannot comment on the methods of public involvement which were used in creating the *Vision 2020*; but I would just underline how all such methods require as a basic element of social science quality-assurance, to ensure that respondents are given the proper conditions to be able, if they feel it appropriate, to challenge the assumptions embedded within the framing of the 'consultation' or deliberation process being used. This usually requires, as a minimum necessary but not sufficient condition, adequate time for people to get familiar with each other as well as the issues being posed, and to work out how those

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framings relate to their own experiences, meanings, needs, and hopes. Experienced and culturally familiar facilitation is clearly another condition. Many official processes, sincerely pursued, do not meet these basic quality requirements. Whatever other failings it may have had (see comments under other sections of the e-forum contribution), the *Prajateerpu* process seems to have fulfilled these conditions.

When is 'not-policy' policy?

[T]here is one important issue where the complaints about *Prajateerpu* seem to expose something verging on the dishonest... This syndrome is not uncommon in government responses to critical appraisal of official policies and commitments.

[Some critics] assert that the [*Prajateerpu* report authors] have set up a straw man in the form of the so-called 'policy' for the future of food farming and governance in Andhra Pradesh in *Vision 2020*. [They deny] that this vision is anything like a policy commitment, and thus try to argue that the criticisms offered – not by the authors we should recall, but by the Indian farmers as citizen jurors – in the *Prajateerpu* report are utterly misconceived, since they are they say, focused on a fiction... [This] reflects a long and entirely dishonourable tradition of British (and probably wider) government, wherein commitments and aims which the government expects and intends to be fulfilled, if they become controversial, are explicitly denied to be official commitments, but every single act, nuance, and orientation of institutional body language is straining to make sure the 'non-commitment' is actually put in place... Of course, there are proper diplomatic protocols to be respected vis-à-vis another democratic government's autonomous policies, but to claim that this non-responsibility (of course) for the Andhra Pradesh *Vision 2020* 'policy statement' is the same as neutrality towards it, flies in the face of common sense...

I want to propose some debate about this particular element of this episode, because the syndrome of government insinuation of intentions and favoured commitments –

visions of the future – is so widespread, and maybe especially so where scientific and technological developments are concerned. The denials are a powerful form of protection of those commitments from debate and accountability, even whilst we are witnessing a plethora of government prescriptions, promises, and claims supposedly ensuring that, after the fiascos of Brent Spar, BSE, GM crops and foods, and radioactive waste disposal, to name but a few, policy procurement and use of scientific advice in policy making is properly transparent and accountable.

A contribution from Biksham Gujja

As long as people, particularly poor people, are not raising objections to the process and outcome then it should be okay... Frequently, participatory approaches are put in boxes to legitimise, regularise, properly orient the projects already conceived and designed elsewhere by governments and/or donors. The projects, and the policies underpinning them, are rarely open to truly deliberative and inclusive discussion and debate. *Prajateerpu* seems to have crossed that line – questioning the donors and the government. We need to ask different questions, some of which are:

- can donors, before deciding on what is good for the poor and who is the best government to work with, engage in some sort of deliberative and participatory process, such as citizens' juries (with proper representation, proper methodology, authenticated evidence, etc.) and see how that informs and influences their policies and programme?
- can governments and donors provide enough resources to citizen-jury type processes to allow broad and representative participation in an open debate on key policy issues? and,
- can governments and donors participate in citizens' juries, provide evidence, agree to be cross-examined, and accept the verdict of the people?

A contribution from Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

This is the kind of initiative that I was expecting from IIED and IDS... I have, however, a problem with the questions you listed, and I would ask you please to list this as part of your initial round of debates. The problem I have is that once again all the burden of the proof is put on the shoulders of the ones who are working for participatory, empowering processes. Other, much more relevant and ominous questions should be added to yours, such as:

- how to make sure that the powerful do not always come up on top by using their phenomenal capacity to 'create' public opinions through all sort of direct and subliminal means?

- how to make sure that opinions are indeed informed and 'intelligent' – coming from the full comprehension of the choices, alternatives, and consequences?
- what have we learned from the historical experience of populist movements all over the globe?
- what are we learning from the current fight for the domination of the media by political forces?
- if indeed the less privileged in society have the least capacity to receive information and make their voices heard, how can a movement of solidarity help them? and, last but not least,
- what should we think of government agencies that attempt to silence criticism from the very poor they are supposed to serve?

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