

# **THE LEARNING AND TEACHING FOR TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE: HELPING HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTES PARTICIPATE**

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International development has not been served well by the ‘transfer of technology’, ‘top-down’ and centralised planning strategies of the past. These have largely resulted in programmes, projects and technologies that have neither been responsive to, nor addressed the needs of, those they intend to serve and the communities in which they are located. Consequently, ownership by community members of many such interventions has been weak or absent and commonly characterised by the fundamental flaw of a lack of communal participation.

Although participation is often referred to in policy statements and project outlines, it rarely extends beyond initial consultation into planning and technology validation or into genuine engagement in decision making about resource access and allocation. This omission has led to inappropriate outcomes, often perpetuating the poverty, inequality and power structures that hinder the realisation of sustainable development. On the basis of lessons learnt from the past, participation is now regarded as fundamental to the attainment of the economic, social and environmental objectives that underpin sustainable development. Effective participation supports improved analysis and problem identification, better project planning and design, and more efficient implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Development programmes that provide more opportunities and spaces for participation are more relevant and appropriate to the local context and, ultimately, become more sustainable.

## **The ambiguity of participation**

Participation is an ambiguous term and by no means confined to international development. Participation-related strategies and projects can be found in rural and urban development programmes in the more economically advanced countries, and have become integral to the language in many fields of mainstream management. This ambiguity means that participation is open to interpretation and variability in practice. Many typologies of participation have been devised as a way of categorising levels of, or commitment to, participation (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty et al, 1995) with the recognition that

participation by default is not necessarily a good thing.

Some forms of involvement undermine rather than support effective participation (Bass et al, 1995), leading to manipulation or at best a degree of tokenism (Arnstein, 1969). In its most extreme form the practice of participation might be dangerous, open to abuse and could possibly reinforce unfair and dishonest power structures. This irresponsible use of participatory development has been extensively critiqued in academic circles (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). However such criticisms have been countered and challenged by the many participatory practitioners in the field who continue to enrich development dialogue with examples of participatory development that is relevant, ethical and responsible, but above all, effective (Hickey & Mohan, 2005). As Taylor and Fransman (2003) suggest 'In order to promote and increase participation effectively and ethically, there is a growing need for experienced and well-trained people who are active and open to its meaning, methods and practice'.

## **Building capacity through Higher Learning Institutions**

A major challenge for education in a globalising world is to discover forms of learning and teaching that promote the emergence of civil societies which are particular to their own social and cultural contexts, but which are also underpinned by good governance and human rights, with the ultimate goal of social justice for all members of society (Taylor et al, 2006). Capacity building is key to supporting the effective and ethical participation needed to achieve this goal. Universities and colleges that offer formal courses, as well as other institutions offering non-formal programmes, are best placed to meet this need for quality support for participatory development. Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs), through teaching, training and research, can play a pivotal role in the social, political and economic change necessary for sustainable development, but only if they are responsive to the needs of the wider community. HLIs are well placed to bridge the global with the local through participatory and collaborative learning partnerships that ensure capacity building and research are relevant to the wider community.

However, the integration of effective participatory teaching programmes into HLIs has not happened as quickly as desired and consequently, opportunities for training and research are still limited. Many higher and adult education systems lack the systemic capacity required to address the learning needs of professionals and practitioners of community and social change, particularly in an era when the world for which learners are preparing themselves is becoming ever more complex. The idea that educational institutions can serve as repositories of the knowledge

and models required for professionalism and problem-solving is in ever greater doubt. Instead, we are challenged to create more effective learning environments in which teachers and learners can develop our capacities to access, create and share knowledge, drawing both upon what is already known and recorded, but also discovering what it means to adapt, innovate, and apply our knowledge and skills within specific and rapidly changing contexts. There is much we need to know and learn, but just as importantly, we need to develop the critical skills, values and attitudes necessary to apply our knowledge effectively (Taylor et al, 2006).

## **Learning and Teaching for Transformation**

Despite the systemic limitations in higher education, initiatives are underway to support a process of transformation within HLIs. These initiatives are creating opportunities for teachers to become facilitators in *learning collaborations* with other professional colleagues, students and community members. This, in turn, is contributing to the need for experienced and well-trained practitioners in the field who ensure effective and ethical participation (Taylor and Fransman, 2003). The Learning and Teaching for Transformation (LTT) is one such initiative which commenced in 2002 and is hosted by the Participation Group of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The LTT aims to:

“enhance the capacity of institutions of higher learning to develop and deliver effective education programs that contribute to a wider transformation of individuals, institutions and society. The initiative is of interest to those involved directly in education as collaborators in a mutual learning process. It is especially relevant to those involved in the preparation of individuals for engagement in fields such as development, governance and citizenship, and within sectors that aim to bring about personal and social change. It advocates forms of learning that are grounded in the principles and practices of participatory development and action research, and seeks to encourage these forms through the sharing and generation of both theory and practice” (Learning and Teaching for Transformation: [www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/guides/ltt/index.htm](http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/guides/ltt/index.htm)).

The LTT is a global initiative providing a space for practitioners, scholars, teachers, learners and communities to share, debate and discuss initiatives which support learning and teaching for participatory and sustainable development. Its aims are to explore further the relationships

between education, participation and sustainable development by:

- disseminating experiences and stories related to learning and teaching for participation and transformation;
- strengthening the network of professionals and practitioners engaging in related activities;
- encouraging regional/national dialogues and exchanges;
- compiling innovations, materials and approaches;
- supporting the scaling up of processes, methods and strategies;
- developing a strong, proactive and responsive research agenda through collaboration and partnership.

Such collaborations and partnerships between HLIs and the wider community and the resultant networking and sharing have many benefits for the teaching of participatory development:

- **Researchers** gain a better understanding and awareness of problems and needs, ensuring they can respond more effectively with appropriate and sustainable solutions;
- **Communities** in turn benefit from the more relevant, realistic and accessible research and support this can provide;
- **Students** are exposed to experiential learning in practical settings and gain new skills, abilities and insights contributing to the enhanced linking of theory and practice. They gain strong insights to team working, leadership, negotiation, mediation and facilitating consensus. In turn, they become confident in communicating, analysis, synthesis and representational skills;
- Participatory and collaborative learning can help **teachers** move away from reliance on linear models of learning and knowledge transmission to facilitating processes that allow students to construct their own theories and bodies of knowledge in a more relevant and demanding context than anything that can be achieved in the classroom;
- Ultimately, through processes of critical reflection **all individuals** involved in development become more aware of how attitudes and behaviours influence the participatory process and the ethics of participation, thus becoming more effective agents of social change and sustainable development.

The LTT initiative contains an interesting selection of global case studies that describe innovative HLI-based collaborations and partnerships

which support learning and teaching of participation for sustainable development. The LTT encourages other practitioners and organisations to join the initiative to maintain the momentum of this enriching dialogue.

## **Further Information**

For more information on the Learning and Teaching for Transformation (LTT) initiative, the thematic areas, case studies and resources visit: [www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/guides/ltt/index.htm](http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/guides/ltt/index.htm).

As a result of the ideas and practice emerging from this dialogue, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, now offers a new Masters of Arts in Participation, Power and Social Change. This programme aims to deepen knowledge, innovation and practice of participatory approaches for engaging people in decision-making and citizenship in diverse contexts. For further information visit: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/teach/mapart.html>.

## **References**

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