

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS COMMITTEE

CHAIRPERSON'S SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE'S DISCUSSION ON 8 MARCH 2005 OF THE SPECIAL EVALUATION STUDY ON EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES:

Do the New Approaches Offer an Effective Solution to the Conventional Problems in Rural Development Projects?

1. The discussion at the Development Effectiveness Committee (DEC) meeting affirmed the continued importance of participatory approaches in managing for development results at project, sector, and country levels. However, it also brought out a potential for confusion or differences in perception when addressing the specific objectives of participation. The discussion reflected a variety and range of views among DEC members as to the nature, purpose, modalities, and desirable extent of implementing participatory approaches at various stages of a project.
2. Nevertheless, a consensus could be reached that ADB could, and should, do a better job of employing participatory approaches, starting at project conceptualization; that ADB staff needed better guidance on best practices in participation; and that beyond such guidance, there remained a need for a significant change in ADB's organization culture, incentives, and ways of doing business before participation could become a more meaningful norm in its operations.
3. The OED study confirmed that a thorough understanding of local realities is prerequisite to the successful design of project interventions and that participation should be used as a significant means to support the time and resource intensive process of achieving such local knowledge. At the same time, the study provoked a debate on structural and behavioral models of participation by which the process could graduate from bottom-up information flow to ownership and control by project beneficiaries. A DEC member emphasized that participation was not limited to a bottom-up process but involved a system of multidirectional partnerships among stakeholders.
4. Most DEC members endorsed the key conclusions and recommendations of the study. They would find it a useful reference when reviewing new loan proposals to the Board that involved participatory approaches. They agreed that a "one size fits all" template for "mechanically" carrying out participation in ADB projects would not be effective. While participation was expected to be an explicit activity in the project framework, its effectiveness depended on local on-the-ground conditions and the objectives, stages, and incentives for local participation. In this context, a DEC member emphasized that the study should be considered by Management and staff as an encouragement to use opportunities provided by projects to explore new or different participatory approaches, risk mistakes, evaluate successes, and promote proven best practices through staff guidelines. A key lesson was that use of a participatory approach needed to be well planned, with a well-defined, project-specific objective in mind. In this context, a participatory approach could be used to identify alternatives in project design.
5. However, one member of the DEC wished to disassociate himself from the study because he believed that the study's underlying premise about the nature and purpose of

participatory approaches did not adequately represent the fundamental role of participation in the development process.

6. The majority of DEC members urged ADB Management to consider the study as an important input to a planned revisit of the 1996 staff guidelines on mainstreaming participatory development processes. The purpose of such a review should be to improve the guidelines to help staff better understand the advantages and opportunities provided by participatory approaches in order to optimize the benefits of beneficiary participation in project conceptualization, design, preparation, and implementation. Management was encouraged to advise staff that in implementing the guidelines, flexibility to respond to local conditions, and a significant degree of common sense, should prevail. Management was advised that adequate staff training should accompany the guidelines lest lack of training result in application of a participatory approach that raised unrealistic expectations in beneficiaries. Finally, DEC members asked to be informed, through OED, of the timetable and progress of the review of the staff guidelines.

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Development Effectiveness Committee

15 March 2005