Promoting participation as a means to build inclusive societies

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While the session is entitled "Society for All" and the reference is to goals 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels), the concept of popular participation is applicable to almost all of the goals and their component targets. Popular participation is less a goal than a social development means, without which other goals cannot be achieved. While most targets for the SDGs are expressed in terms of policies or systemic changes, means from the top down, popular participation says that goals cannot be achieved without movements that are bottom up.

Popular participation was a concern of the UN in the 1960's and 1970's, since it was believed that development needed to engage people, especially the poor, as a means of achieving democracy and effective programs. The UN produced a study, in 1974, entitled Popular Participation in Decision-Making for Development and in 1978 organized an expert group meeting on Popular participation as a strategy for promoting community-level action and national development. Popular participation was a major element of the 1968 Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

There were two dimensions to popular participation. First, programs would be more effective (and more acceptable) if people felt that they had participated in their establishment. The participation could be direct, through local institutions, or mediated through organizations like unions or associations. Second, and perhaps more important, if people participated in the solution to a problem, they would be more likely to change their behavior to be consistent with the solution. This was an insight developed most publicly by the Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire, especially in his classic study, O Pedagogia do Oprimido (the Pedagogy of the Oppressed).

While the concept fell from favor as the focus of development thinking became increasingly economic and social development took on an increasing group focus, it is becoming important again. Two examples from 2015 can be cited. The first, Pope Francis' encyclical Laudamos Si states:

> 144. A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity. Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions

can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community.

And, in a section entitled Dialogue and Transparency in Decision-Making, he states:

> 183. Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or programme. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure. It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people's physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety. Economic returns can thus be forecast more realistically, taking into account potential scenarios and the eventual need for further investment to correct possible undesired effects. A consensus should always be reached between the different stakeholders, who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions and alternatives. The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest. We need to stop thinking in terms of "interventions" to save the environment in favour of policies developed and debated by all interested parties. The participation of the latter also entails being fully informed about such projects and their different risks and possibilities; this includes not just preliminary decisions but also various follow-up activities and continued monitoring. Honesty and truth are needed in scientific and political discussions; these should not be limited to the issue of whether or not a particular project is permitted by law.

The second example is that in 2015, the Nobel Peace Prize has been given to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet

> for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011. The Quartet was formed in the summer of 2013 when the democratization process was in danger of collapsing as a result of political assassinations and widespread social unrest. It established an alternative, peaceful political process at a time when the country was on the brink of civil war. It was thus instrumental in enabling Tunisia, in the space of a few years, to establish a constitutional system of government guaranteeing fundamental rights for the entire population, irrespective of gender, political conviction or religious belief.

Participation as a social development means can be found to address many of the targets set for goals. This is in two different ways. Some of the targets call for popular participation in decision-making. Others require a significant change in behavior at the individual level that will not happen unless people are motivated to do so. Based on this analysis, Table 1 shows the targets that imply a popular participation means.

Table 1. Popular participation in SDG Targets
2.4   By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality
5.5   Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
6.4   By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcitynincluding implement integrated water resource management, including implement integrated water resource management, including appropriate trans -boundary co -operation
6.b   Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management
7.3   By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency
10.2   By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
11.3   By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries
12.3   By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses
12.5   By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
13.2   Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
13.b   Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities
15.2   By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and increase afforestation and reforestation by [x] per cent globally
16.6   Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, build- ing on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

Two issues emerge immediately from the application of popular participation to the SDGs.

The first is what actions need to be taken to increase popular participation in decision-making. While there is considerable research on element of this, there has been no recent effort to determine the "how" of the social means. A recent step in this direction was the work of the Commission for Social Development on its priority theme of "empowerment" which had several preparatory expert group meetings, including one on the use of information and communication technologies to increase participation. Less work has been done on how using participation as a means can affect such issues as reduction of waste and food losses, or increasing energy efficiency or reducing use of carbon-based fuels.

The second is how should popular participation be measured in the SDG review process. The problem is illustrated by a list of indicators of the SDGs and targets that have been agreed by governments and the UN system. Almost all of the indicators in the first list are already being collected by national governments in cooperation with Specialized Agencies. [1] There was one exception. In Goal 6 on water, one target (6b) does not have an indicator. The target is:

> Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

In a subsequent list,[2] provided by different UN System agencies, no one suggested an indicator for this.

There are, in fact, no agreed indicators of levels or effectiveness of popular participation and no statistical offices collect data on these.

Indicators of other social means are also underdeveloped. For example, the suggested indicator for target 12.8 "By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature" is at best partial ("Number of countries reporting inclusion of sustainable development and lifestyles topics in formal education curricula"). This would only suggest that students would have some information, not that people more generally have access to information and use it. That would require a different indicator. As the IAEG itself noted on the indicator as now suggested "Data availability is poor."

The problem of finding effective indicators is illustrated by the suggested indicator for target 16.7 "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels" which is "Proportions of positions (by age, sex, disability and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions." The indicator suggests that participatory decision-making only takes place at the

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[1] First Proposed Indicator List, May 2015
[2] List of Proposals (July 7, 2015), July 2015

government level and only by government officials. Clearly, more is meant by the target.

This is part of a broader problem with indicators: many of the social means that have been noted do not have standard indicators. This does not mean that data is not collected, merely that it is not collected quantitatively in the context of the Statistical Commission. It does mean that some agreements need to be reached on what are qualitative indicators of popular participation, use of information and social coherence. For this, new social research may be required and an effort made by the Commission to define them.