

THE PARADOX OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN FORCED  
DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT CAUSED BY THE  
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS <sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

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This article is an investigation of the theoretical and empirical concept of local participation, as it is used in the field of development-induced forced displacement and relocation (in short, DFDR). Local participation has repeatedly proved to be relevant with respect to the decrease of the negative impacts caused by DFDR on the people involved. Paradoxically, people who contribute to this process with their very culture and means of existence – including their land – often end up in chronic poverty, despite their participation in local decision-making. It appears that this concept, which was developed precisely in order to protect persons affected by poverty and supporting them in their attempt to overcome this poverty, contributes nevertheless to the destruction of their local culture, which shows signs of “inside cracking”.

Hence the necessity to answer two questions: is the concept of local participation deceitful or is it used erroneously? Do we need to reinterpret and rethink the way the project is conceived, planned and executed, taking into account its crucial elements with respect to risks and compensations? This approach seems to me to constitute a way to overcome blockages and avoid considering negotiations as an inflexible, univocal, hierarchical relation between two parties blocked into an asymmetrical power game without any possibility to escape from it.

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I have used the example of the hydroelectric dam project in Zimapán, Mexico, as a starting point for an ethnographic discussion of local participation<sup>2</sup>.

**Key words:** local participation, development-induced forced displacement and resettlement (DFDR), chronic poverty, local culture.

### PARTICIPATION – WHAT IS IT REALLY ABOUT?

Local participation has repeatedly proved its relevance for dealing with the negative impacts of DFDR projects caused by larger infrastructure development constructions. Although I in this article will use the case of dam building to exemplify my reasoning, the conceptual discussion is valid for different kinds of projects, such as mines, building of highways and recreation and resorts parks that have a displacement and resettlement component. The concept of local participation, despite its verified strengths, I will argue cannot in its present form reconcile the contradictions between the negotiations, participation and the *fait accompli* decisions leading up to the building of the dam. To come to a deeper understanding of what is happening on the ground in such projects with the purpose of refining the methodologies governing participation and negotiations it is necessary to study the interaction between the main parties during the implementation phase<sup>3</sup>.

The contradiction between the concepts “involuntary” and “participation” has been recognized by Horowitz, Koenig, Grimm and Konate (1993) whose statement is still valid for many DFDR projects:

It is perhaps oxymoronic to speak of ‘participation’ in reservoir-driven relocation, since the move is inherently involuntary. Yet successful resettlement depends in very large part on an active participation of those forced to move (1993, p. 242).

Local participation, thus, is in DFDR projects a conceptual contradiction. Nevertheless, this is the best concept we have.

Apart from its oxymoronic characteristics, “participation” in its present form together with the expert knowledge that has been developed to mitigate the pain of displacement also seems to contribute to the undermining of the culture. It is possible that insufficient attention is being paid to the identification and reconstruction of more intangible sociocultural assets that could be labeled the ‘glue’ of society. It would be a mistake to reduce these intangible assets to

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<sup>2</sup> Aronsson 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Local participation, also known as beneficiary participation or informed participation is a concept that is highly used and appreciated in development-caused forced displacement and resettlement and in the field of humanitarian action. In this article, I will use “local participation” or only “participation” for the sake of convenience, although I am very much aware of the refinement of the concept expressed in the different forms of the word as mentioned above.

something esoteric and irrelevant for the economic compensation. Instead, the intangible assets are interwoven and sometimes interchangeable with the economic assets of the society and it would be difficult to correctly estimate the economic assets without considering the symbolic meanings associated with them. For example, the people of Zimapán called the fruit trees, which were their main economic asset, for “our children”. Hence, they lived *from* the trees but also *for* the trees with all its implications. One of the objectives with local participation is to comprehend, intellectually and emotionally, another person’s life world and then facilitate and convert this knowledge *together with the affected people* (not necessarily as a communicator) into efficient compensations.

Much critical scrutiny has been directed toward the implementing party’s modes of power, to how they have justified themselves and their acts at the expense of the affected people. And rightly so, it has been necessary to focus a spot-light on the unequal power relationships between the main actors: on the one hand, the implementing party with its extensive human, technical, economic and political resources, and on the other hand, the affected local people with their less extensive resources of all kinds in addition to their lack of experience. In contrast to the implementing party, the locals are doing this for the first time. They have no “lessons learned” to fall back on – until it is too late and the displacement is executed. An apt choice of words were made by one of the resettled in Zimapán in the new village some years after “Now they should have resettled us. Now we have the experience to negotiate” (April, 1997). He was right. In a dam project with a resettlement component there is no way of turning back the clock, of undoing decisions. The original village is physically gone for ever covered with water. This makes the negotiations with its local participation to the engine of the entire project. The locals will have to live with the consequences of the negotiations and the decisions made during the implementation. The implementing agency, on the other hand, will write a final report and move on. It is a question of life contra lessons learned. Considering what is at stake, it is an almost inhuman responsibility that is put on the shoulders of the locals, but also on the implementers. There is no project manager in her/his right mind who will not consider moral and ethical values related to human rights and “just” compensation when the negotiations begin with the local people.

Of course, the local people must be taken seriously and they should be equipped with the necessary negotiation skills and knowledge about how DFDR projects works in order for them, as independent agents, to respond to the implementing party’s arguments at the negotiation table. This is known as empowerment, a concept that is widely used in policy documents and discussions on poverty reduction (Tamondong, 2008; Cernea, 2008; Fernandes, 2008). Empowerment and local participation are nevertheless based on that the local people are aware, or made aware, that their own choices and socio-economic, political and cultural priorities may have weaknesses in the context of

displacement, resettlement and compensation. They have to be critical of their own thinking and understand that their choices will have real consequences. On the other hand, the experts/implementers have the responsibility and accountability to inform about potential pitfalls in the locals' reasoning and choices. But this does not eliminate the tricky situation that came up in Zimapán when the local people and the experts arrived to diametrical opposite solutions to the central compensation issue of replacement land. The experts opposed the peasants' claim to cash payment based on their lessons learned from other similar projects around the world. I will return to this.

If we consider that most DFDR projects are implemented during a very short and intensive period lasting a few years (Zimapán four years), it is easy to realize that the local people, as mentioned, are almost put in an impossible position. To be able to participate as equals at the negotiation table, they have to objectify their lives and social relations, culture and economic livelihood. They have to take a step back and evaluate their present life and formulate priorities what they would like to save and change; what they identify as good and bad traditions. They have to verbalize matters that they have taken for granted in their cultural and natural landscape of heritage and they have to come to terms with feelings of loss and confusion. Theoretically three time dimensions come into play simultaneously: past, present and future (Aronsson, 2002; Downing, 1996).

The implementing agency in the negotiations has its own agenda, logic, preconceptions and symbolic language that govern its objectives and interaction with the local people. It would be a simplification, however, to reduce this interaction to the binary oppositions "the donors in total control and power" and "the receivers in total lack of control and power".

Local participation is a heavy responsibility for both parties.<sup>4</sup> But in reality it might be so that an interest in shared responsibility exists only as long as the project runs, because as soon as the people are out of the reservoir area they have lost one of their main means for putting pressure on the implementers in the negotiations. Project delays cost. Hence, for each negotiation step agreed upon they come closer to their physical move and powerlessness. In an ideal world this would not be a problem because the implementing partner would continue its responsibility and keep to its word. Unfortunately, the case studies of DFDR projects present another picture and that is of betrayal, corruption, lack of transparency and weak bureaucracies.

We know that this is the case in many DFDR projects, but nevertheless I would like to stress that if local participation is practiced, then a social field of interaction is created between the parties consisting of intersubjective relations, expressed as a struggle for Being. This field of interaction could not satisfactory be reduced to a one-way-communication, an asymmetrical power relationship or a

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<sup>4</sup> My starting point is that local participation is practiced. If the locals are reduced to passive receivers of external aid that means that participation is simply not working.

paternalistic approach or local empowerment. Our present terminology and understanding are insufficient because the process was much too complex to be reduced to the problem of the power position of the implementing party, or to the assumed powerlessness of the local people, or to insufficient planning, or to a non-interested and badly trained expert group, or to lack of funding. I am not saying that an asymmetrical power relationship did not exist. I am only trying to show, through an ethnographic case study, that it would be a simplification to reduce a complex course of events to one single concept such as “power” or put the “blame” on one single party. I found that something new was created between the parties that could help us understand both the outcome of the negotiations and some of the ground rules in play during the implementation phase. This new field was a highly dynamic field that fluctuated with time and space and when I tried to grasp it, it slipped away and took on a new shape.

But what are the problems with local participation in DFDR projects? When do they occur in the project cycle? Who is a problem? In the extensive literature on participation and development, useful concepts have been identified, such as: ‘institutional partnership’, ‘joint control’, ‘shared benefits’, ‘joint decision-making’, ‘consultation with’, ‘consultation on’, ‘local participation’, ‘informed participation’, ‘popular participation’ and many more (e.g. Amparo, 2000, Bliss & Neumann, 2008). There is, however, always a risk that a good concept becomes a buzzword, as Messer and Shipton with accuracy of aim describe:

“Participation” is sometimes honored more in lip-service than in practice, for it always sounds nice – and at worst it can be just an empty development buzzword or a smokescreen for authoritarian planning. Nor is it so easy to achieve: rare is the case where all people whose lives are to be affected by a program of policy can realistically be actively involved in its planning, even if they wish to be (something not to be assumed) (Messer & Shipton 2002, p.238).

Consequently, the concepts are thrown into all kinds of reports and texts, sometimes with no consideration for their importance and meaning. Lip-service or not, I prefer to see the refinement of the original concept as an expression of seriousness and the will to do good and no harm. But there is a tendency for the concept to become explicatory *per se*; it is as if we think that if we put a name and a label on the problem the solution will come by itself. This is actually a kind of magical thinking and in this way, it can even obstruct our understanding of what is happening on the ground because the problem is hidden behind the concept that once was developed to identify and solve a particular issue.

The problems, or challenges, with local participation begin when the decision is made to build a dam and the legal rights to expropriate land for the common good are used. The decision is most of the time already *fait accompli* when the local people are asked to participate. Here we can thus chose to stop the imaginary discussion of local participation and from the position of power say to the local people: You are going to be forced to move no matter what you say. The dam will

be built because we have made the decision that a dam is necessary for the development of the country. But if you participate, your chances to rebuild your society will increase dramatically because you will help us understand what is important in your culture and identify the economic framework necessary for you to rebuild your society. Otherwise we, the outsiders, will have to try to make these decisions for you. It's your choice.

In the above paragraph, the problems with DFDR projects and local participation are purposely nakedly and naively described. The local people face the option of accepting the decision made above their heads and turn to negotiations, or they can resist. But what the above paragraph also implicitly describes is the problem of the implementing party. In DFDR projects there are social scientists hired to consult with the local people. They do all kinds of different studies, including powerful and in-depth economic evaluations, or at least the methodology is there to do it, as Cernea states, although it might in practice not be fully used (2008, p. 33). To participate as a social scientist/resettlement expert in these kinds of projects implies that one is very well aware of the unequal power positions that exist between the main parties, at least at project start. But power positions can change in the course of the project cycle, as was the case in Zimapán, where the main stakeholders (the power company CFE and the peasants) alternated power positions depending upon negotiation issue, strategy and plain luck. Nevertheless, the social scientist knows that at the regular meetings with the head engineer of the technical division she will always be asked – When are the people out of the reservoir area (Downing, 1998: PC). This is what the social scientist/resettlement expert carries with her when she initiates, educates and tries to rouse enthusiasm for local participation. Social scientists/resettlement experts are squeezed in-between the local people and the project's technical/management staff. Many social scientists, NGOs and human rights organizations take the position that local participation is an illusion in the context of DFDR projects.

Are there any alternatives to the incompatible concepts of participation and forced displacement? Yes, one option is to discuss the building of a dam with the affected people. This is a solution that the World Commission on Dams suggested already in the year of 2000. The commission's members consisted of representatives of the dam industry, researchers and NGOs. They wanted to ensure that the people were compensated adequately and that only dams that truly benefit the locals would be built in the future (Thayer Scudder, 1998. PC; World Commission on Dams, 2000). What is the implication of this statement for local participation? First of all it would require a meeting with the locals and questions had to be asked? What is your opinion of building a dam at this site? It would mean that you have to resettle. It would mean that your animals (in a rural project) would not be able to graze here. It would mean that your house would be destroyed. In what way would a dam contribute to your quality of living? Only people in great need of water and energy would support the construction. And they would

probably only agree to a smaller dam with less impact on the natural and cultural landscape. A person of a more strategic turn of mind would say, of course, people are not thrilled, but the information and the questions have to be formulated in an attractive manner. Issues like better health care, better schooling, a modern life style and compensation should be emphasized. But wouldn't that be a way of manipulating people? And how does that correspond to the concept of informed participation? It not only seems to me that we are moving dangerously close to the fine line between 'information' and 'manipulation', but also it becomes evident that each DFDR project is context dependent and the consequences of that is to find a balance between blue print implementation and a widening of what we mean with participatory space.

A second option is to limit the legal right to expropriate land for the common good, that is, for developmental purposes. For example, in India, since more than 10 years there are pressures to change the right of eminent domain. Legal theorists explore the possibility that land may be viewed in terms of limited "use rights" (Ramanathan, 1996, cited in Downing & Garcia, 2002, p. 20; Ramanathan, 2008). The limitation of the right to expropriate land for developmental purposes is a radical approach. It is a politically explosive question that will have deep consequences for the nation as a whole, if realized, and for many aspiring fourth world nations.

The role of eminent domain in DFDR projects has become central for questions of compensation in both private and public projects (Ramanathan, 2008; Fernandes, 2008; Price, 2008; Cernea & Mathur, 2008). Cernea, for example, argues that eminent domain should not be an instrument for land acquisition for private project purposes. Instead, such deals should be a business deal based on willing buyer and seller negotiations without state interference (2008, p. 73). This should always be the case, but the idea of a willing buyer and seller negotiation is the ideal world; in some cases the original project is not suitable to be launched and it is good that it is stopped, and in other cases it is a valid project, but some people refuse to participate and move regardless of compensation and purpose of the project. These cases are individually tragic and every time it happens it is a failure for the project implementers. But I am of the opinion that from a broader point of view, the society must have legal instruments to deal with these cases, although I recognize that the problems are always in the details and that the legal instruments can be misused.

The mass expropriation of land for developmental purposes in DFDR projects is, however, another issue and totally unacceptable is if compensation is insufficient and not well integrated with development aspects and local participation is not practiced.

Regardless of solution, local participation is still on the agenda. Participation is developed to involve people in the project, but participation might also have the unexpected (?) consequence that people who participate do not resist the

dam/development project. If people are too busy participating, it might obstruct them from thinking about resistance, as was noted in the Zimapán case<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, as in all dam projects, a gradual destruction of the natural and cultural landscape occurred that seemed to have undermined the peoples' trust in their *Umwelt* that resulted in a feeling of being lost in the world without any other option than to participate. Consequently, the very tool participation that was developed to protect the people had in the hands of the implementers become a tool to support their own interest.

Over and over again we have to keep in mind that there is an asymmetrical power relationship between the actors that cannot be ignored. But, if we are going to take participation seriously and go beyond the obvious in order to bridge that inequality, we have to focus on the social field that is created between the actors in the negotiations during the implementation. As participation is practiced today, it cannot bridge the gap between peoples' needs, wishes and hopes for the future, and the reality of the DFDR project. We seem to encounter a paradox; the present form of local participation does not fully mitigate and compensate the hardship of the resettlement, but it also appears to contribute to the undermining of the local culture.

#### THE WORLD BANK AND PARTICIPATION

According to the most recent World Bank operational policies on involuntary resettlement "Displaced persons should be meaningfully consulted and should have opportunities to participate in planning and implementing resettlement programs (OP 4.12 & 2b Dec 2001). This is a highly important statement. The World Bank guidelines on involuntary resettlement go back to Michael Cernea's groundbreaking work from the early 1980s (OMS 2.33 from 1980 & OPN 10.08 from 1986). It was published in 1988 as *Involuntary Resettlement in Development Projects* and in this version Cernea formulates the participation concept as "it is incumbent upon the agencies involved in this planning to seek the participation of the resettlers" (Cernea, 1988, p. 14). And further that "affected populations be consulted – directly or through their formal and informal leaders (...) Dissemination of information about the impending relocation, about resettlers' rights, compensation procedures, available choices, etc is an indispensable premise for participation (Cernea, 1988, p. 14–15).

These already two-decades old formulations are still valid and used in DFDR projects, but equally true is "the need to reform resettlement as it is currently conducted and financed", as Cernea concludes in his article (2008:1). Why? The researchers in the book *Can Compensation Prevent Impoverishment?* (Cernea & Mathur, 2008 [eds]) highlight cases and conceptual ideas showing that in the majority of the DFDR projects the resettlers become impoverished and do not

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<sup>5</sup> T. E. Downing. Personal communication, 1998.



benefit from the development project *per se*. A major reason for these failures, and one might even say betrayal towards the resettlers, is that the compensations are insufficient and badly managed. One solution would be to make sure that the people who contributed with their main asset, their land, become recognized as shareholders and investors in the project under construction through different benefit-sharing mechanisms (Cernea & Mathur 2008 [eds], Égré & Roquet & Durocher 2008, Nakayama & Furuyashiki 2008, Trembath 2008).

Compensation, negotiations and participation go hand in hand and one cannot be without the other. Consequently, this complicates the picture and as Scott Guggenheim said “Negotiations with villagers can be quite protracted “(1993, p. 218). Guggenheim was the World Bank’s resettlement expert in charge of Zimapán. Guggenheim identified two main problems that complicated the process of participation. One problem was the socio-economic stratification of the villages and the second problem was the top-down governed institution that was not used to participatory approaches (1993, p. 217). In regard of the stratification a clarification is necessary. Social stratification *per se* is not the problem. The problem is to identify and incorporate the stratifications into the negotiations with the use of the participatory model.

Guggenheim touched implicitly on a third problem when he after watching a raging argument between company officials and several hundred angry peasants established that “This was not the way to begin a participatory project” (1996, p. 1). He was right. The turmoil was an expression of the fact that the World Bank and the power company (CFE) had underestimated the requirements for the implementation of the participatory aspects in regard of time, methods and ethnographic base-line data in combination with an overestimation of the effects of high level institutional changes as regards time, distance and political and organizational will to let the changes trickle down to the local level. The most important aspect from the peasants’ perspective was that the project had put in motion deep socio-economic and political changes within their society long before any official meetings took place<sup>6</sup>. The expressions of turmoil before a project even has reached the implementation stage, raises serious questions about our theoretical understanding of a linear and teleological project process with a starting and ending point well demarcated in time and space. It seems there is a dissonance between format and content, or between the resettlers’ life rhythm and expectations and the imaginary project cycle, which the present form of participation has difficulties to overcome. Consequently, despite elaborated and viable project plans many projects have proven themselves not viable especially in regard of the re-establishment of the economic production base.

The World Bank report, *Resettlement and Development. The Bankwide Review of Projects Involving Involuntary Resettlement 1986–1994*, states that the

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<sup>6</sup> We have to remember that projects of this magnitude are planned and talked about for decades before the actual negotiations with the affected people take place.

involuntary resettlement operation, despite its size, is treated as a subsidiary component (1994, p. 2/7). Further, it is argued that “Too often their feasibility studies display an ‘engineering bias’ and underestimation of social-cultural variables, an approach that backfires later during project execution (1994, p. 3/9). The problem, as I see it, is less a problem of “underestimation” of the local social-cultural variables than a lack of understanding of the dynamic field of interaction that is created between the parties during the implementation phase. This constructed in-between-space is filled with socio-cultural expressions, but foremost it is a space where power and economic muscles are flexed and estimated. If we take local participation seriously (as we should), we cannot exclude the most powerful actor, the implementer, in the project because that would give us a skewed view of a dynamic relationship – a view that often divides the main actors in two groups: the “bad guys”, who are the implementers, and the “good guys”, who are the resettled people. This is a simplification of reality.

#### PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations in DFDR projects can be protracted, complicated and confusing. The parties get exhausted, meetings escalate in number and can take almost ritualized forms, whereby the actors take on their respective roles and fulfill their obligations towards their audiences. This is valid for both the implementers and the resettled peoples’ representatives. This is the front stage. There is, however, also often a back stage where negotiations take place with a few selected members. This influences the transparency of the project and can create problems on the ground, because the local resettlement team, who are not part of these high level negotiations, can be put in awkward positions vis-à-vis the local people who are dependent upon information from either their representatives or the local resettlement team. Rumors are abundant in these kinds of projects and they often create tensions between the resettlers and the implementers. An argument in favor of transparency would be that it might diminish the spread of rumors and corruption from both sides. A further argument is that transparency foster empowerment because people are faced with facts and consequences. I believe we must strive towards transparency, but sensitive information must also be guarded in these kinds of overwhelming projects that otherwise could hurt the project and the resettlers. We must find, hence, either a balance between transparency, integrity and information or if we demand total transparency, we must also demand total responsibility from all parties involved. More research is needed because there is not sufficient empirical research on the concepts of ‘transparency’ and ‘trust’ in DFDR projects with documented participatory methods.

The implementer has a history and an agenda that influence the negotiations and its trustworthiness. The history could be, for example, that the company is

known for its previous badly managed resettlement projects. The agenda is often clear and that is to complete the project and present practical results within defined economical and temporal frames. The people and the participatory aspects are elements in the bigger scheme of the project. They are elements who during a certain delimited period of the project must be in focus, because the people have to be resettled in order to make room for the reservoir area. This is the reason why the resettlers never are “irrelevant” for the implementer. On the contrary, the implementer is very well aware of the power position of the people, because any project delays are highly costly. In a participatory project, the people should also be aware of this power position and make use of it.

The implementer, as an institution, is anchored in a national and global reality with an objectified view of people and nature. Such a view is necessary, because as an institution it cannot operate with a localized, emotional and subjective world-view. But every institution consists of real people and social groups and I believe many of the professionals in these organizations that execute DFDR projects experience a conflict between their professional and personal roles. Professionally, they are forced to adhere to a global view of men and nature as replaceable. Otherwise, they could not justify their own life and work. At the same time, many of them could relate and connect to the local people through their own life experiences – a piece of land or homestead or fruit garden. As human beings they meet and connect and communicate. But on a structural level this connection seldom becomes internalized, which strongly influences the texts, reports and documents produced to enhance the quality of the project resulting in difficulties to grasp the resettlers’ world with the purpose to understand what they need to rebuild their society. Hence, there is a gap between what the local resettlement staff knows in their “heads” and what comes out in print. This might be an epistemological problem, but I prefer to see it as a methodological problem. If we could find methods and words for closing this gap and transfer the knowledge and feelings that the local resettlement staff has acquired into the documents and the negotiations and connect them to the economic units of analysis, much would be won. How can we extend our language to cover and make understandable the subtleties of Being-in-the World and transform these into comprehensible terms usable for the negotiations and the economic recovery?

The participatory model would gain if negotiation rules were formulated. I believe that such rules, thoroughly worked-out together with the negotiation parties might facilitate the negotiations. Such rules would not prevent problems and conflicts, but it would be something real to refer to, paragraphs to point to and recommendations of behavior instead of ending up accusing each other of all kinds of things. I am not sure if these rules must be formulated as a legal contract with possibilities of sanctions, or if a moral contract would be sufficient. A legal contract has the advantage of the possibility of suing the other party, but would that lead to an improved environment for negotiations? Trust, on the other hand, is a

concept that is basic for all social interactions and crucial for getting results in the negotiations. What are the elements of trust? On an individual level it is a psychological reaction to verbal and non-verbal communication. Although I reject a total relativistic position, the signs and interpretations are culturally and socially conditioned. When we talk about trust we enter into moral and ethical domains and if trust should be made operational in the negotiations, both parties have to identify and verbalize their domains and not assume that they share the same – although they might be surprised when they discover that they share more than they thought.

If the model of reality for the implementer is necessarily based on ideas of an objective world with replaceable places, the model of reality for the resettlers' is the opposite. Their land and place is imbued with emotions, cultural symbols, social memories and economy. It is not thought of as replaceable, but it might become replaceable. It is not only a romantic illusion, but also a pejorative approach, that some people are unable to move and change their lives. People have always migrated, travelled, raised children and lived far from their native countries and birth places, either voluntary or involuntary. Resettlement is not impossible, it is the way it is being done that makes the difference.

The concept of 'denial' is sometimes used when describing the reactions of a resettled people-to-be. It is argued that the people experience such a multidimensional stress that they deny the facts of the coming displacement. They not only deny, but they also continue their life under the motto of "business as usual" (Scudder & Colson, 1982, p. 269–270). There are certainly cases of this kind, but equally there are other reasons for this "business as usual" and "denial". One practical reason is that there is no other choice than to continue life, because the project cycle is so long. The people can also make a rational economic calculation based on available information about the possibility for the project to be a reality. In Mexico, the Zimapán peasants made the correct assumption that the Mexican government would not be able to raise enough money for the project. What they did not know, however, was that the World Bank was prepared to fund it.

My point is that one should never underestimate peoples' intellectual capacity and reduce them to victims. Victimization has nothing to do with participation. On the contrary, I see it as a dangerous degradation of the affected people that inhibits local initiatives, local knowledge and complicate the creative communication process between the parties in the negotiations.

Agenda is another issue in negotiations based on participation. To have a carefully prepared agenda is essential for the resettlers' ability to participate and meet the demands at the negotiation table. An agenda is the foundation for a well functioning participation, and the other way round, informed participation is the basis for a well prepared agenda. To develop an agenda is difficult for the local people because of their non-experience with DFDR projects. They simply do not know what is expected from them and what they will encounter. In Zimapán the agenda was defined nine years after the technical start of the project and this lagging behind was never caught up in the negotiations.

In sum, the resettlers and the implementer are guided in the negotiations by decidedly different points of departure. The implementer is always negotiating as a unit, while the resettlers struggle with social stratification originating in the access to resources, which in turn is deeply embedded in the history of the place. Literally, families fall apart due to the negotiations, because of complicated webs of socio-economic relations and structures, whereas concurrently the land that always had been a “moral and spiritual entity” (Croll & Parkin, 1992, p. 18) physically changes in front of their eyes and becomes de-spiritualized. The local people always negotiate about cultural key symbols (e.g. land, river and trees) that are encapsulated in social times. The implementer negotiates about an objective piece of land that can be replaced. To be able to negotiate, the resettlers have to take part in the objectification of their natural and cultural landscape and they are forced to take a step back and observe their culture, which in the process is emptied of its meaning carrying elements. Their way of life must be quantified and deconstructed to fit the present form of negotiations. This is nothing mystical, but essential for everything related to compensation. The key is to be able to quantify, but keep and improve the qualitative “essence” of the objects under negotiation. In my opinion, local participation is successful if the parties with joint efforts manage to mediate and operationalize the qualitative aspects of the material asserts to be compensated. An interesting question, however, emerges when looking into the recent discussion on benefit-sharing and investment for resettlers (Cernea & Mathur 2008 [eds]). Does benefit-sharing and investment make the above discussion obsolete, because the resettlers will hopefully get enough financial muscles to decide what matters are qualitatively worth keeping?

#### RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Does shared responsibility mean shared accountability in a well-functioning participatory project? Most resettlement experts are of the opinion that accountability could never be equally shared because of the present unequal positions of the parties in DFDR projects. Responsibility, on the other hand, could be shared. Downing & Garcia (2002) strongly argue for the need of a clearer defined accountability (risk-liability) on the part of the implementer. They would like to have a system that enables the resettlers to not only be paid in case of injuries but also retain the right to sue. “The resulting system regularizes obligations and transforms an uncertainty into fixed cost” (2002, p. 18). – A system of regularized obligations on the part of the implementer would most highly influence the negative behavior of certain implementing agencies.

But let me despite the above statement continue to elaborate on what participation should be about. Participation means discussing matters in a democratic way with all the cards on the table, with all stakeholders participating.

Decisions are arrived at by vote or consensus and the consequences are understood by all involved who declare that they are ready to take on this responsibility.

It is therefore a contradiction in a participatory project to blame one of the agents, regardless if it is the implementer or the representatives of the resettlers. If the implementing agency is to carry the entire accountability, which is argued by the resettlement experts, it is not a participatory project and should therefore be called something else. Let me return to the ethnographic case of the Zimapán dam. The peasants' made the decision not to accept the restitution land offered by the implementing agency (CFE). Instead they wanted cash payment. (The general standpoint among resettlement experts is to advise against cash compensation). What could the CFE have done? Should they have refused to follow the will of the local people? It was a majority decision made in a democratic way, according to the peasants that I interviewed. If the CFE would have refused to follow the will of the peasants, they would have been accused of hegemony by the international community. If the World Bank (who was not informed but later) would have objected, they also would have been accused of not respecting the people. In the end a large cash payment was paid to the community. Some times later I was informed by the peasants that the money in the bank was not for everyone in the villages, but only for the landowners, which in reality meant a new socio-economic stratification of the community based on money.

A major risk with the present form of participation is that if something goes wrong one can always put the blame on the local people, who thus become victims of the participatory model that was developed to protect them. Again, in the Zimapán project, I heard how exhausted and frustrated the local resettlement team was (CFE), when they had to face decisions by the peasants' that they thought were wrong. Over and over again they ended up saying "It is their decision, their choice, they wanted this". The scary thing was that it was their decision and the CFE could not do anything about it.

If only the implementer is accountable in a participatory project, they will never be able to meet the resettlers on equal terms in the negotiations. The agency in charge will guard its position and the progress with iron hand. Dialog will never occur, because the agency will not risk anything, and most probably the local people will either be reduced to passive receivers, beneficiaries or become very angry people. And, when things get out of hands, we are back to blaming the victims because they are said not to make responsible decisions or are unable to understand information, or to blaming the implementers who are accused of not taking people seriously enough, or do not practice informed participation or are in general crocks.

From the field of humanitarian action with a similar complex of problems with local participation and responsibility, I would like to quote Jan Egeland<sup>7</sup> who writes a personal account from the war in Iraq and the bombing of UN staff in Bagdad.

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<sup>7</sup> Former UN undersecretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs and Former UN Emergency Relief Chief.

A bad process leads to individual colleagues paying the price. The system must learn from this. However, now we see managers so afraid of not being careful enough that they retreat into risk aversion in conflict situations where you cannot assist and protect civilians without some degree of risk. Retreating to bunkers, evacuating staff, and avoiding contact with the people in the crossfire is not the way we should work. (2008, p. 20–30).

We have to decide how we would like to work with local participation in DFDR projects. In all projects someone has to make the final decisions and in DFDR projects with participation that someone has to base the decisions on the most appropriate knowledge available. It should not matter if this knowledge is local knowledge or expert knowledge. The only criterion valid is its functionality. Knowledgeable decisions are dependent on an existing creative dialog between the main parties based on local, informed participation in a trustworthy environment.

#### IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

Regulating responsibilities and accountabilities are important, but we have to work on several levels simultaneously with participatory projects. It is necessary to raise the negotiation skills of the resettlers in order for them to be able to meet the level of skills of the implementer. The skills involve, as Downing & Garcia (2002, p. 25) lift forward among others, training, support, legal advises and knowledge about DFDR projects. Both parties must also be supported through out the project cycle. Coaching and de-briefing are pedagogical methods used in other fields of society and which can easily be adapted to fit DFDR projects.

During the implementation phase many complex relations, issues and matters entangle and disentangle within the field of interaction between the main parties. Some of these have been identified as multifaceted risks by Cernea (1997 & 2000) and are used for deconstructing and reversing the risks of impoverishment in resettlement projects. The risk model has been discussed and tested by several resettlement researchers (*e.g.* Downing, 1996; Thangaraj, 1996; Pandey, 1998; Nayak, 1996 and 2000), and is now an integrated part of DFDR project planning. The model is used as a preventive tool by both the implementing party and the affected people and underlies the recent discussion on reforming resettlement by focusing on the economic and financial foundations of planning DFDR projects (Cernea, 2008). These risks, according to de Wet (2006), are part of the “inherent complexity” of resettlement projects which would require a particular complex and risk-sensitive approach<sup>8</sup>. Cernea argues in the same vein that “The outcome of straitjacketing resettlement is a reductionist approach to resettlement’s intrinsic complexity, which backfires on strategies, limited inputs, and routine solutions” (2008, p. 29).

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<sup>8</sup> Inspired by Aronsson (2003). Chris de Wet, personal communication (Dec 2006).

From my experience it is a question of lack of appropriate methods to deal with unexpected problems that explain why both parties during the implementation phase approached problems in an *ad hoc* manner leaving the impression of a chaotic project similar to an impressionistic art installation (Aronsson, 1992, p. 2002). It seemed that both parties lacked understanding and methods to deal with complicated “chaotic” issues, not only the mentioned risks, but also such that were related to their own structures and cultures. Both parties groped in the dark when they faced unexpected results and problems which led to unexpected behavior and new turns in the negotiations. Sometimes the unexpected situations and results were not only constructive, but also “good to think with” and sometimes even fun revealing so much about the human being. My point is that we should not be afraid of these chaotic situations, but instead learn to work with them and incorporate them in our methodological toolkit.

The standard methodology in development project is, according to David Ellerman, that the “doers of development” deliver ready made answers and know-how to a passive group of receivers, a “pedagogy which sees the learners as essentially passive containers into which ‘knowledge’ is poured” (2000, p. 17). But this view on pedagogy “only reinforces the clients’ passivity and perceived lack of self-efficacy” (*ibid* 2000, p. 18). According to Ellerman this is a mechanical view of the learning process, one that creates dependency and disempowerment. Furthermore, the “doers of development” own the knowledge, it is an investment, and therefore there is little space for correcting mistakes (2000, p. 18–20). He seeks learning methods that help people to help themselves. Ellerman’s argument is similar to what Robert Chambers claimed in the book *The Volta Resettlement Experience* (1970). Chambers argued that self-help would have been a better solution than accepting aid from the government. He stated that the affected people would have gained by resettling themselves, rebuilt their houses and economic base on their own initiative, instead of being resettled by the government (1970, p. 15). (I have criticized this view in an earlier text, Aronsson 2002). Chambers’ argument is similar to David and Pat Turttons’ reasoning on spontaneous resettlement due to extended drought in Ethiopia. They argued that although relief actions could have saved lives in a short perspective, they might have destroyed a way of life (1984, p. 179). No one, of course is suggesting that aid should not be delivered to people in need. What is of interest here is how we look at the form, length and content of aid-development in order not to do harm, destroy or interrupt a functioning local subsistence system.

In the above discussion, I see similarities to the problems we face in DFDR projects. The disruption of local systems and their rebuilding are crucial in all these projects. Numerous resettlement researchers and practitioners are trying to understand why development-induced impoverishment persist (*e.g.* Cernea & Mathur, 2008; Cernea 2005, 1999, 1997; Downing, 2002; Scudder & Colson, 1982; Scudder, 2005; Aronsson 2003, 2007; Ribeiro, 1994; Barabas & Bartolomé, 1994;



Robinson, 1993 & 1994; McDowell, 1996; Nayak, 2000; Thangaraj, 1996, Pandey, 1998; Buil & Bergua, 1998; Nahmad & Mejía, 1994). I am not suggesting that we should turn away from DFDR projects, but I am seeking a methodology (and a theoretical frame) that forces us to use existing lesson learned but at the same time break with the tradition of trying to pin-point each single step in the project cycle that only prevent us from recognizing unexpected solutions and dealing with unexpected (chaotic) events. I suspect that in the few cases of successful DFDR project there are elements of chaos, but there were also people (resettlers and implementers) who could see and use these unexpected confused situations and turn them into something creative.

The model I am seeking is a model that can deal with unexpected things, both problems and solutions. Such a model must be open-ended, flexible, dynamic and sensible to the complexities and subtleties of life; a model that can deal with both humor and trust. I am ambivalent to a too rigid model. Sometimes I think that we are trying to plan something that cannot be planned. Maybe we should turn around, loosen up and work with frames instead of detailed schemes. Instead of seeing the chaotic, impressionistic happenings as threats and failures, we could use them to find tailor-made solutions for each particular project. Today we take for granted that blueprint planning is inadequate. I suggest the blueprint implementation is nothing to strive for.

However, the use of an open-ended methodology for the implementation will put great demands on all actors involved. Especially on the resettlement staff in charge of the implementation, because they have not only to master elaborated field methods, but as Michael Jackson writes:

Through inept questioning and endless guesswork you struggle to get your bearings, seeking an underlying pattern which will render everything comprehensible and clear. Understanding is a product less of your methodology than your mastery of basic social skills. And this demands time and perseverance (1995, p. 21).

And more, both parties, in a participatory project have to learn to master one another's universe. Local knowledge has to interact with general knowledge and vice versa. This is a didactic perspective that demands active learning methodologies. But local participation should never be reduced to a pedagogic problem, or as in actor analysis (Hermans & El-Masry & Sadek, 2002) to a "game" between more or less rational agents. The greatest disservice the local people and the experts alike can do to themselves is to underestimate the complexity of local participation and the interaction between the two of them, because not even the following statement is valid anymore; that the local people have not asked to become resettled. Tamondong (PC 2007) told me that people all the time ask to be resettled, which puts the resettlement team in a kind of complicated situation. Should they deny people to get resettled?

### LINKS BETWEEN RESETTLEMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION?

The World Bank (1980, 1986; Cernea 1988) was a forerunner, as already mentioned, in the formulation of guidelines focusing on resettlement and displacement. Today many international organizations and agencies have similar guidelines: IDB, AfDB, EBRD, IFC; OECD, ADB<sup>9</sup>. The main bulks of policy documents came in the 1990s and are similar in their formulations. I have commented twice on the World Bank's resettlement guidelines (in 1995 and 1997/98) and was a member of a resettlement group consisting of researchers interested in these issues. We made a joint statement to the World Bank, where we objected heavily to the formulation about the restoration of livelihood by stressing the importance of improvement, not only restoration. I believe Thayer Scudder spoke for many of us when he made the below sharp statement.

Their effectiveness is undercut by a single phrase pertaining to resettling households and communities that requires borrowers to "at the very least restore their former income-earning capacity and living standards". That phrase makes a mockery of any commitment to making resettlement projects development projects because, all too often, it allows borrowers to merely replicate pre-existing poverty (1999. Internet source).

I mention the above history because it shows the direct involvement of researchers in the painstaking formulations of word for word in the guidelines which have had an impact on the lives of thousands of resettlers. This work has continued with undiminished force and one of the latest contributions in the field of poverty reduction in DFDR projects is Cernea & Mathur (eds) book *Can Compensation Prevent Impoverishment?* (2008), as mentioned earlier. In this book, Susan Tamondong contributes with a paper called *Can Improved Resettlement Reduce Poverty?*<sup>10</sup> When this paper was presented for the first time in 2003 it was regarded as a provocative text because many organizations and researchers are of the opinion that it is impossible to resettle people in a way that gain them. Consequently, they make the conclusion that there is no way that resettlement can be linked to poverty reduction. Tamondong's main argument is that resettlement can reduce poverty and the poor could gain if policy recognizes the need to improve peoples' living standard by treating resettlement as a development program. Policy must avoid restoring poverty among the marginalized, poor and politically weak people because "Displaced people who are poor may become poorer and those who are not, could also be impoverished if compensation, mitigation and development programs are not properly implemented" (Tamondong,

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<sup>9</sup> Inter-American Development Bank; African Development Bank; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; International Finance Corporation; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Asian Development Bank. See respective web-pages.

<sup>10</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented in 2003.

2003, p. 10). In her later version (2008) she has sharpened the arguments stressing the need to create national legislations and the necessity to facilitate the connection between national policies and international standards. In this line of thought, the ADB has developed a poverty reduction partnership agreement that is meant to harmonize between the bank and the countries that have signed the agreement. In February 2004 twenty-four countries had signed on allowing a targeted poverty reduction procedure. But to achieve improvement it is absolutely necessary to provide financing mechanisms that do not only cover the replacement costs, but truly improves the living standards in DFDR projects, claims Tamondong (2008).

Somehow, hidden in the text, is an interesting discussion about “invisible” people who are landless poor occupying public land until the land is acquired for public purposes. These “invisible” people disperse and become visible again in the urban slums of the major cities. They are a large group and Walter Fernandes (2008) reports that in India 60 million people have been displaced between 1950 and 2000 and many of them (nobody knows how many) have never been resettled. That is, nobody knows where they have disappeared and how they survive and, of course, they have never been considered to have any compensation rights.

There are also “invisible people” in well-demarcated DFDR projects who can only with difficulties be identified and in the best cases be compensated. But the compensation in those cases are, to my knowledge, seldom sufficient, because in the informal economy many items are “borrowed” (or actually shared) within the community on a long-term basis, but after a displacement, when the informal economy is scattered, and the formal monetary economy has taken over, cash is never shared, and nobody lends anybody anything, because there is no way of paying back. Everybody knows. The social relational setup between the people is changed which has serious consequences for their possibilities to make a living. This is one of the components of the “falling-apart from within” which has to be addressed if resettlement is aimed at reducing poverty.

From my point of view, local participation is a very complex issue that involves the concept of change. I strongly believe that local knowledge should not be regarded as something that cannot, or should not be changed or contested. Change is inevitable if we accept the tool of informed participation. I think that internal change of the pre-resettled community, triggered by participation and negotiation, might be one of the elements that cause a society to disarticulate in the implementation phase, but also to survive and gain. The challenge is to identify and let these mechanisms work in favor of the people and their society. I am convinced that the link between DFDR projects and poverty reduction strategies goes through local participation, negotiations and this dynamic social field that is created between the main parties during the implementation phase. There is no way around it.

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