

'Participatory' Water Management: Towards a New Horizon

by Mohammed Anisuzzaman

"Water management in Bangladesh cannot be separated from the principle of shared participation ... management. And if the appropriate institutions and trust between officials and local people does not exist, then it has to be created as part of the water management process than seen as an inconvenience..."

In his inimitable way, he referred to it as the "musical key-note address — *Allah magh de, pani de, chhaya dere tu*" a folk song which underscored the paramountcy of water in Bangladesh and by implication its use or management. In the same vein, he concluded his discourse by translating into English a Nazrul song, "*Padma r dheure...*" Bengalee love for the Padma, the river that symbolizes life in Bangladesh again, by implication, stressing the cruciality of water management. The editor of *The Daily Star* Mahfuz Anam was acting as the moderator of the one-day "National Conference on 'Participatory Water Management'" at the BRAC Centre on December 18, 1997 organised jointly by the government of Bangladesh (Ministry of Water Resources) and the Netherlands.

As a participant, I took part in the deliberations and observed the methodologies employed in the conference. This article seeks to highlight the objectives and issues and their probable impact on government management of water use (including flood control, drainage and irrigation) via participation of the people.

The programme identified four objectives for the conference:

i) To develop a better understanding of water management practices

ii) To learn about the capacity of people to manage their water resources

iii) To discuss and reach a common understanding on the implications of the nature of water management in Flood Control, Drainage System for the guidelines for participatory water management.

iv) To clarify the future roles of the conference participants in making participatory water management happen.

It is thus crystal clear that the conference was not just for water management *per se*, but "participatory" water management as a special method. From the conference objectives, the point to note is the adjective "participatory" before the noun "water management". The conference organisers, therefore, appear to be specially concerned about the participation of the people who are affected by the projects for water management. So, participation is the hinge word. Let me try to clarify the concept of participation at this stage and proceed to assess its impact on government management.

Although the Background Information, Programme and other Conference materials have popularized the term "participatory" it seems to me that the term still baffles leaving us with unclear, and nonspecific attributes — somewhat around the focus and yet far from it in terms of who participates, why, and how. It may be useful to examine the key word — participation in such components. The dictionary meaning of participation includes the following: 1. to possess something of the nature of a person, thing or quality; 2. the state being related to a large whole; 3. to take part in something or to have a share in something.

The modern meaning of participation is related to voting and other public or political acts in which people take part — i.e., participate in decision-making. Of course the phenomenon is a very recent one — of the twentieth century — almost of our own time. The classical political thinkers — Plato and Aristotle — did not specifically consider the matter.

With the passage of time, as the number grew, new relationship arose. The discovery of the unknown land and resultant commerce with them, money economy, capitalism, bureaucracy, nationalism, political economy, and spread of education, and many other factors produced — in their combination — representative government — or democracy in popular parlance.

The institutions through which democracy operates include voting, parliament, cabinet, bureaucracy, and the courts. The basic idea is that government — or a group of people elected to run the administration — must be invested with necessary powers. As power corrupts, so the government must be kept in checks and balances — thus making it accountable to the people or their elected representatives.

The routes to democracy have taken three distinct positions: 1) Implementation of consensus (Rousseau); 2) majority determination (Locke); and 3) satisfying differences in kind, quality, intensity, and quantity of interest (Herring). I.e. policy is made by balancing claims of interest and mediating among them. Democratic values rest on three concepts: individual realization, equality of men in their claims for attention, and participation — either directly or through control of leaders. Such values "leave many quandaries in the practical world of policymaking.... Responsiveness is the central theme of democratic morality, but wisdom and tranquillity and order, are competing claims of political purpose" (Redford, *Democracy in the Administrative State*).

To say in response, responsible, and orderly explication of participation as a working form of democracy or representative government, some American Scholars and international agencies like the World Bank and USAID have added a few refinements, [like the role of popular participation in development activities like implementation of title IX of the Foreign Assistance Act, 1968]. A conference held at MIT in 1968 identified and emphasized three kinds of participation: 1) participation in decision-making; 2) participation in implementation; 3) participation in benefits. To these, the Cornell University Rural Development Committee added a fourth dimension, 4) participation in evaluation.

These can be exemplified in case of a project under consideration. The affected people can participate in deciding if they are willing to have it. Once this is done, they may share the various elements of work. If the goal is achieved, the people will enjoy the benefits deriving from project. They themselves have some say in designing it and carrying it out. The fourth participation relates to assessing its usefulness or its disadvantages with efforts at correcting those. Of course, such planning and activity presuppose considerable support from bureaucrats, engineers, technicians, apprenticeship, trial and error, and above all, an willingness to learn from errors. Such additions and explanations have served to elaborate a real life meaning and significance of the term participation. As it is applied to project management, particularly water management issues in Bangladesh, more specifications could be worked out in day-to-day experience.

Existing Organisation

The existing water management system may be said to consist of — beginning with the

Ministry of Water Resources (MOWR) at the top and Project Council (PC) at the bottom (a top-down bureaucratic organisation). The Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) just appears somewhat in between the MOWR and the special organization set up for specific purposes — Systems Rehabilitation Project (SRP), Flood Project Coordination Organization (FPCO), Water Users' Group (WUG), Water Users' Committee (WUC), Water Users' Association (WUA), and Project Council (PC). One has to assume that the various officers like Chief Engineers, Superintending Engineers, Executive Engineers (SDE) or Assistant Engineers and many others must have something to do with water management projects / systems whether directly or indirectly associated with special bodies mentioned. Such associations or relationships may not be based on 'participatory' management as these are basically bureaucratically organized.

Why is Participatory Management Needed?

A one-sentence reply may be that water use or management affects everybody — big or small, high or low — so everybody must be involved. What touches all must be decided by us. Fine, but what is the structure suitable to involve everybody in water management? The conference organisers view is that "water management

systems are not affecting agriculture alone. All people, regardless of their gender, occupation, and socio-economic status are legitimate stakeholders" of Flood Control, Drainage (FCD) systems. Organising all these stakeholders in one or several organizations is not effective. 'The word stakeholder may create confusion as all don't have stakes, some do, as these people hold stake in various measures — high, medium, low. So the interest of such so-called stakeholders varies according to their interest, share, and risk. They are not a homogeneous group; some are better-off, while some are worse-off. How to strike an optimum balance between the two is a crucial question. Justifiably, Mahfuz Anam called attention to use simpler terms with more clarity.

The Implications

Obviously, many people, many groups, interests associations, and even special circumstances are involved. So the situation demands several structures and flexible arrangement. The conference focused on such matters or issues.

These could be discussed under three heads, viz. 1) Socio-economic issues; 2) Institutional issues; and 3) Water Management issues.

Socio-economic Issues

Locally elected bodies — such as the Union Parishads

(UP) are legal bodies, have legitimacy and represent the needs, interests and problems of the local people. The Gram Parishad (GP) passed by Parliament and now in the process of formation through UP elections — will be more directly involved. As at present UPs have very little to do with water management. They may be authorised to include water management functions in their official list of duties and a framework worked out to enlist the willing cooperation of the common man needed so much in such matters.

There are informal structures in the rural areas — the *salish, mabror, imams*, who could exert their influence in securing the needed cooperation in a major task that affects local and woe of everybody. The government resources are generally shared between stakeholders and the Water Management (WM). Agency which tends to work in favour of the rich, middle class farmers and against the small, landless, and the poor. Given the objective situation in Bangladesh, the benefits of government programmes or projects are enjoyed by the rich. The poor have neither the time, interest and the stake. They might not care — they suffer anyway. So, how to develop a system that is at once representative and useful? These issues must be sorted out by trials and tribulations. My limited experience in the rural areas suggests that all project — whether sponsored by

GO or NGO — have tended to by-pass the locally elected bodies take the UP.

Institutional Issues

As we have just noted, UPs have little or no role in WM at the moment, new roles may be assigned to UPs or GPs now in the offing. Ideally located, such bodies as UPs or GPs can address the institutional issues by undertaking care or management of FCD-systems. Their installations may be left to MOWR or BWDB, of their day-to-day management — repair, care, supervision, etc. — may be left to WUCs, WUCs, WUA, or PCs — as at present, in that case, what will be the appropriate relationship between UP/GP on the one hand, and WUG/WUC/WUA/PC on the other? It appears from the (Programme p.2) that the WM-system committee counts of all the UP chairmen. Whether the UP chairman have the line and interest to give to water management will be another question.

The Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC) is a coordinating agency consisting of thana level officers and UP chairman. It has not been known to be very effective as it lacks effective leadership. It has replaced the Thana Parishad. The present government is known to have said in favour of reverting back to the Thana Parishad. In case of TP revived and allowed to operate with necessary powers and resources, it might be useful to

take charge of WM projects with technicians and representatives of the people performing assigned functions. Pending the expected thing to happen, TDCC may be recast with greater representation of the people — project-wise. This might require special administrative arrangements and their accountability to an appropriate forum. As of today, TDCC is not accountable to any elected body.

Water Management Issues

Water management has been a perennial matter in Bangladesh and predates any government intervention FCD-systems now in operation — is required to ensure the people's participation during the phases of the project cycle. FCD (Flood Control Drainage)-systems are different from irrigation (I) system. They are public good infrastructures. The government manages the FCD-system which precludes handing these over to the so-called stakeholders. A division of responsibilities and tasks is necessary. How can this be structured into functional relationships? Flood Control and Drainage (water conveyance) are two different components of the FCD-systems. The so-called stakeholders are responsible for the water conveyance. Indeed, they are the ones who need water to be conveyed or carried to their land. So, their stake is clear. What is the stake of the common man on this? Most of them have no land — so that there is no question of carrying water to their lands.

Of course, flood control is a democratic task which affects the poor and the rich equally. Here, the roles of both groups are clear — cooperation at all costs. They willingly join efforts at controlling floods providing necessary goods and series to the government effort.

So, WM issues are multifaceted and require different approaches. Though trials and errors, these approaches need to be perfected.

Other Issues

Many efforts of the government require legal frameworks — Acts, Laws, and Rules framed thereunder — within which the proposed WM bodies are required to be functioning. Experience in this field does not appear to be happy one. A Bill to provide for people's participation in FCD/I projects was worked out to be placed in the Parliament. For reasons unknown, it was later retracted (Background Information) although the 'Guidelines for People's participation in Water Development Project' (GPP) was endorsed by the MOWR in 1995. To make the WM projects effective and useful to the people, a legal framework will be necessary, but yet it is still far from coming.

Farmers who pay Tk. 700 per acre to the Pump Manager/Collector. The latter are not passing the monies so collected to the BWDB. He is also not responsible to Water Users' Group (WUG). If this is true, there is a privatisation of a public good in irrigated water. Most probably, the big farmers monopolise whatever this is to do in all projects — public or private. These can be no effective role for the people in such an objective situation.

The Ideation

Yet, the aspect of people's participation in projects that affects people is most welcome and in keeping with the democratic urges of the people and the promises and practices of

the government. Now, it is the Ministry of Water Resources (MOWR) which is endeavouring to involve people in WM projects. Indeed, MOWR has been making such attempts since 1994. The Foreign Minister claims that "the present government has taken steps to strengthen the local government bodies with UP as the focal point of development... the government is pledge-bound to ensure the participation of rural people in development activities..." (The Bangladesh Observer 17-12-97). Slogans like "Education/Health/Housing/Food for All, etc.", if converted into programmes/projects would require the participation of the people to make them a success. The Prime Minister has been on record to reiterate the concepts of 'accountability' and 'transparency' of administration. All these attempts, slogans and concepts point up the participating management case. An idea today is tomorrow's project.

Paolo Freire's idea of 'conscientization' in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Education for Critical Consciousness* has helped to enlarge the horizon of the people in terms of changing their life style. So have the ideas of empowerment of the poor and women and constructing programmes for effective development (Cerna); rural development participation (Uphoff, Cohen, Goldsmith); Panchayat Raj in West Bengal (Webster); people's participation, Local Government, and Rural Development (Westergaard) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers), and Project with people (Oakley); so, participation is no more in the 'ivory tower' of imagination, it seems to have started a descending or landing process, however remote. The Participatory Water Management conference may go down as a stepping stone in the history of democratic administration in Bangladesh. Let's go to the people and learn from them: their needs and requirements, potentialities and limitations, cooperation and constraint.

Conclusion

Finally, word of caution. Participation is indeed democracy at work. And democracy — a lifestyle of sharing sunshine and shower together — is a matter of cultivation. One must not expect to work wonders overnight. Rather, slow, systematic and sustained care in preparing the people: working together, sharing and suffering, and eventually learning by doing. Geoff Wood's cautious optimism deserves a consideration: "Bangladesh does not enjoy such condition. [...] long established democratic conditions and strong civil institutions... and this underpins the anxieties (shared by many) regarding the participation of affected groups of people in the decision-making which will have a profound impact upon their livelihoods. Water management in Bangladesh cannot be separated from the principle of shared participation... management. And if the appropriate institutions and trust between officials and local people does not exist, then it has to be created as part of the water management process than seen as an inconvenience..."

Let's give it a try. The writer is a teacher. This article has been written as a humble response to the challenge of Mahfuz Anam who reminded the conference that the participants tend to forget its message or follow-up after the conference is over.

Netaji: A Reminiscence

by Khan Saheb Muhammed Afzal

TODAY, January 23, is the anniversary of birth of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

I met Subhas Chandra Bose at the Calcutta Presidency College in 1917. We had both philosophy as one of the subjects for BA examination and as such I had an opportunity to be familiar with him both in the class and particularly in the seminar on philosophy. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, being the son of Rai Bahadur Janaki Nath Bose, government pleader of Cuttack. He was the younger brother of Sarat Bose, an eminent barrister at law and a very prominent figure in Calcutta in those days. Subhas Bose inspite of being a scion of an aristocratic family was simple in nature and habits and also in dress and often would enquire of us — those had joined the Presidency College from far flung areas. He was found to be distressed whenever there was any calamity anywhere in the country and would collect donations from the students for helping the affected persons.

Subhas Bose would not brook any insult to Bengalis in any manner. It was then the hey day of British regime. It is reported that Mr Oaten IES professor of history of the college had passed some uncharitable remarks against the Bengali students about their manners. I do not exactly remember at this distant date the occasion for such remarks. But Mr Oaten had to pay the penalty for his virtually pithy remarks and was virtually pushed down the grand stair case of the college building. Next all students of the college were fined Rs. 10 each and Subhas Bose was expelled from

the college and the university for taking a leading part in the incident. Mr Wordsworth was probably the Principal at that time. He was a man of strong principle and he resigned his post for a difference of opinion with the Statesman as its Editor. Subhas Bose, however, for the intervention of some prominent people was allowed to join the Scottish Church College wherefrom he passed his BA examination with honours in Philosophy. Soon after he sailed for England to qualify for the Indian Civil Service and passed the very stiff examination within a year securing second place.

Indian Civil Service was in those days the most coveted service with unlimited power, prestige and a very fat salary. But Subhas Bose was a born freedom fighter with reservations against the British and therefore refused to serve under them. He created a history as no one ever did so. He submitted his resignation on board the Bombay before he embarked on the shore of India.

Next I met him at Santahar Railway junction where he was in charge of North Bengal Flood Relief Organisation. There was a devastating flood practically all over North Bengal in 1919-20. Bogra and Rajshahi districts were very badly affected and people of these areas had shifted to railway tracks even on tree tops for shelter. Adamdighi station went under neck-deep water. Hundreds of people died and a very large number of cattlehead were lost.



I came to Santahar by Up Darjeeling Mail to visit my family at Ratinagar in Naogaon subdivision. Early in the morning I saw Subhas Bose sitting on a mat at the Santahar platform looking over a map of the flooded area. The sun was just rising and the red glow of the morning sun gave him a halo of a Rishi. It was a fascinating scene. I did not like to disturb him for some minutes but he saw me and greeted me warmly with a beaming smile. I was with him for about an hour discussing flood relief measures. I

found Subhas Bose riding in a small dinghy boat in the flooded area to the great risk of his life as the boat might be overturned at any moment by torrents of flood water.

Sir PC Ray who was the founder-president of the Relief Committee had spoken highly of the commendable relief rendered to the affected poor people. The name of Subhas Bose became a household word in those days in every family of North Bengal.

He was destined to be a great man and the estimation of the public proved correct. He became President of the Indian National Congress at a very early stage of his life. It was a great achievement in his life. From his early life Netaji Subhas Bose fought an uncompromising battle against the British to free India. He opined for a society that would not distinguish between caste, creed and colour. He declared that independence could only be achieved through armed struggle for which he formed the Indian National Army (INA). Though Subhas Bose could not drive away the British, his activity, however, accelerated the movement for freedom of India, and the British rulers after a reign of about 200 years, finally had to quit India in 1947.

Netaji is no more with us but his inspiration that he left behind for the cause of freedom served as a stimuli in the hearts of Bengali youths to fight for the freedom of Bangladesh. I recall with pride my association with so great a man and pay my humble homage to his memory.

The writer was a member of erstwhile BCS. Before his death in 1975, at Naogaon, he wrote this article.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 45th Prosecution Witness

Continued from yesterday

Cross examination of PW 45 in Bangabandhu murder case Major General (retd) KM Shafullah was completed at the trial court on Wednesday.

Following are the excerpts from his examination by advocate Khan Saifur Rahman, defence lawyer for principal accused Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooq Rahman:

Q: You were promoted to Colonel from Lieutenant Colonel and made Chief of Army Staff from August, 1971 to April 7, 1972.

A: Yes.

Q: You were promoted to the first Brigadier and later Major General by the period from April, 1972 to September, 1973.

A: Yes, but I don't know why you are raising the questions. At that time, many deputy secretaries were promoted to secretaries.

Q: You got promotion very fast as the overall situation was in favour of you.

A: This is not correct. The favour was not only to me. My friend Ziaur Rahman was also promoted in the same way. The rapid promotions were made to fill up the vacancies as Bangladesh was a new-born country at that time.

Q: Was any vacuum created in the government following the incident of August 15, 1975?

A: Not only me, the entire country was astonished because of suddenness of the incident. The situation was result of the vacuum created following the assassination of Bangabandhu.

Q: Did you tell the IO that an unwanted incident occurred between the wife of Major Dalim and son of Awami League leader Gazi Gohar Mostafa at a club in Dhaka?

A: The issue on Dalim's wife was exaggerated.

Q: And before that, Sheikh Kamal, son of Bangabandhu, received bullet wounds in Motiheel one night.

A: This is not known to me.

Q: Was the article written by Lt Col Ziauddin in Holiday objective?

A: I can't recall the subject of the article. But it was against the government which was an anti-disciplinary act.

Q: Was your intelligence unit active?

A: There was shortage of manpower in the intelligence unit. But it was active.

Q: Did you ask the troops to be ready as artillery and armour could be resisted by three battalions of infantry?

A: I asked them to get ready and resist as the resistance was needed by the force which we had.

Q: Was the helicopter of Air Force capable of landing on the rooftop of Bangabandhu's house to rescue him?

A: There was no such helicopter at that time.

Q: Do you know that Shah Moazzem Hossain and KM Obaidur Rahman are not accused in this case?

A: No, I don't know it.

Q: Did you hear the movement of tank on August 14 night?

A: No.

Q: Was the government before BKSAL democratic one?

A: At this stage, Shafullah felt chest pain and the court was adjourned. Khan Saifur completed his examination without knowing answer of the question when the court resumed after about one hour.

Examination by advocate TM Akbar, defence lawyer for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhiuddin:

Q: From when you were interested to be involved in politics?

A: I had no intention to involve myself in politics. I had to join politics to meet the demand of the situation.

Q: There was discontent among the army officers after dismissal of Major Dalim and Major Noor?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you try to remove the discontent?

A: Yes, I tried to convince the officers that there is no scope of indiscipline in army.

Q: Did you recommend not to dismiss them as the reason for what they were dismissed was incorrect?

A: Not that. I tried to return them on the correct way.

Q: Was your opinion sought before formation of Rakkhi Bahini?

A: No.

Q: Did Shafat Jamil carry out your order to tame the incident on August 15?

A: It was not seen in my eyes.

Q: Did you ask him for it?

A: I didn't get the scope.

Examination by advocate Sharfuddin Mukul, defence lawyer for accused Taheruddin Thakur, state minister of both Bangabandhu and Khandaker Mushtaque governments:

Q: Was Taheruddin Thakur State Minister for Information from August 15 to 24 when you were Chief of Army Staff?

A: Yes.

Q: A civil administration was at that time.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see Taheruddin Thakur Saheb before August 15?

A: Yes.

Q: How? As a minister or MP or journalist?

A: I saw him as a freedom fighter during the Liberation War.

Q: Was he a state minister of Bangabandhu cabinet before August 15?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see him on various occasions?

A: Yes, I saw him.

Q: Was he an MP of Awami League?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you witness any oath taking ceremony of President or cabinet earlier?

A: Yes, I was present as Chief of Army Staff when the cabinet took oath after independence.

Q: Did you also witness oath taking ceremony of the President?

A: Yes.

Q: Did the civil and military administrations run together without any conflict?

A: Yes.

Q: According to you, you came to the radio station in an unusual situation and returned to the cantonment around 11 am on August 15?

A: I was taken to my office from the radio station. Later, I was also taken to Bangabhaban.

Q: But you gave different statement in "Facts and Documents".

A: The newspapers and books did not publish as exactly I told them.

Q: At the radio station, did Mushtaque tell you: I want my generals in my oath taking ceremony at Bangabhaban?

A: He told me that the oath taking ceremony will take place before. Jumma and he wanted to see all the chiefs.

Q: Accordingly you attended the ceremony.

A: I was present at the ceremony.

Q: Did it take place before or

after Jumma prayer?

A: The oath taking ceremony of the President took place before Jumma while of the cabinet in the afternoon.

Q: There was a good gathering.

A: There was a small gathering.

Q: Did you see Major General Manzur (then a Lieutenant Colonel) at Bangabhaban?

A: I saw him in the afternoon.

Q: Was he posted in India at that time?

A: In Delhi.

Q: What was his job?

A: Military Advisor at Bangladesh High Commission there.

Q: Did you see General Nasim or General Nooruddin at Bangabhaban?

A: I can't recall.

Q: Any other officers?

A: Those who violated the army discipline, of whose names I mentioned earlier.

Q: Did you go to Savar from Bangabhaban?

A: I was taken to Savar.

Q: Where?

A: At the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini Headquarters.

Q: Did you meet Rakkhis there?

A: I met the Rakkhi officers.

Q: The news of oath taking ceremony was published in newspapers along with your pictures.

A: I saw it.

Q: Former Presidents Abu Syeed Chowdhury and Mohammadullah were among the cabinet members who took oath on August 15.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you know Prof Mozaffar Ahmed Chowdhury who was known as Prof MAC?

A: No.