

'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, pant de, chhaya dere tut" 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 dherue...." 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 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 organises, 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 'participation' 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 tenets: 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 this responsive, responsible, and orderly exposition 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 of 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 projects 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 and Sub-Divisional Engineers (SDE) or Assistant Engineers and many others must have something to do with water management projects /systems whether directly or indirectly associated with specific 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 arrangements. The conference focused on such matters or issues.

These could be discussed under three heads, viz. 1) Socio-economic Issues; 2) Institution 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, matbor, tams*, 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 and 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 WUGs, 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/WVA/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 Co-ordination 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 big revised and allowed to operate with necessary powers and resources. It might be useful to

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 was in those days the most covetable 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 ship that was carrying him to Bombay before he embarked on the shore of India.

Next I met him at Santaher 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 Santaher by Up Darjeeling Mail to my family at Raninagar in Naogaon division. Early in the morning I saw Subhas Bose sitting on a mat at the Santaher 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 moments 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 work 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 the 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

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

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 : 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 active?

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 : Yes.

Q : A civil administration was at that time.

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

A : Yes.

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

Q : Did it take place before or

after Jumma prayer?

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

Q : There was a good gathering.

Q : There was a small gathering.

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

Q : 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 Bangabandhan?

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 Bangabandhan?

A : I was taken to Savar.

Q : Where?

A : At the Jatiya Rakhi Bahini Headquarters.

Q : Did you meet Rakhi Bahini?

A : No.

Q : According to you, you came to the radio station. Later, I was also taken to Bangabandhan.

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?

A : I told him.

Q : You, in the August 19 army conference, gave the explanation at what situation you had to take responsibility of the incident.

A : No, I explained the situation.

Q : And also your own position.

A : I didn't know it.

Q : Do you know former Jute

A : No, I couldn't do it.