

Process of Community Consultation in Development Programs

Evolution of Ideas, Emergence of Structures and Enculturation of Models

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Abstract: *Consulting the primary stakeholders of a development program on the design, deployment and outcomes of a program should be de rigueur in development organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, public or private. The movement to involve people in development began in the 1980s and has grown strong roots ever since. The social development sector has made several changes in its frame of reference to engage and empower communities. In this changing landscape the recipients of development action have staked claim to be treated as ‘consumers’ rather than as ‘beneficiaries’. As consumers any individual or group has rights that are not normatively available to beneficiaries. The emergence of the idea of community participation in the development process into the light of sustainable development thought sometime in the decade of 1980s coincided with demographic changes in India in favor of the young. To truly reap the benefits of the demographic dividend it enjoyed, India had to prime its public policy and governance systems to involve the youth. But, community participation extends to the entire community, not just the youth. This has a special bearing on the skill development sector since the sector delivers most of its value to trainees through private sector Skill Training Providers (STP). STPs work for profit but they have the potential for multiplying their impact if they embrace the idea of community consultation in their program-designing and deploying skill programs that are demanded by communities. Community consultation makes communities feel empowered as the researcher has pointed out in his article. Community participation norms must apply to skill development programs in India to make such programs REAL-Relevant, Enterprising, Accessible and Localized - for sustainable impact which would include regular incomes, reduction of distress migration, strengthening of human dignity and promoting familial cohesion and support.*

Keywords: skill development, community participation, governance, human resources, participative development, impact, impact measurement, relevant, enterprising, accessible, localized, sustainability

Globally, the 1980s decade sparked the movement for aligning social development with people’s aspirations and laid the foundations of sustainable development thinking that has gained ground ever since. Much of it has settled into the narrower confines of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and, of late, Impact, while avoiding the consultative approach to designing and deploying social development programs, skill development included. At the scale at which India is approaching skill development, skilling hundreds of millions in a very short time frame, the consultative, design thinking approach will require sustained focus and effort to achieve. This approach is an imperative, as this article points out, for livelihoods to be sustainable within the framework that has been developed in this document.

1. Perspectives on Communities in Social Development

This is made clear in development practitioner and entrepreneur Rubayat Khan’s article in ‘The Guardian’ (1). The ideas began to transform around the start of this millennium and the development aid sector made several changes in its frame of reference to engage and empower communities. In her article in May 2015 Khan put many things in perspective in this changing landscape. The article put forth the view that recipients of aid must be treated as ‘consumers’ rather than as ‘beneficiaries’. As consumers any individual or group has rights that are not normatively available to beneficiaries. “During the colonial period, the ‘white man’s burden’ mindset, which deemed it a responsibility of western colonisers to help ‘backward’ and ‘uncultured’ people of Africa, Asia and the Americas, was well-established and even morally respectable. While the development sector has long moved past that mindset, what has survived in the world of global development is the treatment of clients as ‘beneficiaries’, not consumers. There seems to be an expectation that if

one does not pay for a service in cash, one owes ‘unquestioning gratitude’ to the service provider, the article says. As many of those nations in Africa, Asia and the Americas gained freedom from colonizers and moved to craft their own governance paradigms, the ‘white man’s burden’ mindset was replaced by the ‘coloured nation’s burden’ and newly minted governments in these countries started to behave like the colonial lords that they had removed, handing out doles and gifts to their then largely uneducated masses. The governments acted secure in the belief that they were acting in the best interests of their subjects and saw no need, of course, to hold a dialogue with the largely impoverished and illiterate masses regarding their aspirations. The latter were, after all, ‘beneficiaries’.

In her article, Khan, of Bangladesh origin, further writes, “When you design something for a ‘beneficiary’, it may seem okay not to involve (the beneficiary) centrally in the process. You may do a few token interviews, spend a week in the field, and already pretend to know enough about their lives and problems to allow you to carefully

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craft a \$50m set of products or services to ‘help them’...As a development practitioner and consultant, I have helped design and implement numerous NGO and donor-funded programmes where the involvement of the beneficiaries, or customers, was minimal at best. And there was rarely any regular feedback mechanism to track whether the end-users were satisfied with what they were getting.”

2. Evolution of Idea of Community Participation in Practice

The idea of community participation in the development process emerged into the light of sustainable development thought sometime in the decade of 1980s, coincidentally around the time India’s demographic changes in favour of the young was coming to notice. The concept was developed by a set of economists in the largest social development lender, The World Bank, led by Michael M Cernea who published the definitive document on the theme, ‘Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development’ (2) published in 1985. The idea of participatory development found strong articulation in this and the subsequent edition in 1991. Published by The World Bank, the Bank’s commentary in the book’s introduction sums up the existential reason for the publication of the book: “Their (the contributors) chapters seek to capture the newly emerging trends in the development thinking and practice that are likely to characterize the 1990s. This edition highlights the issues related to: a) natural resources management (particularly water, forests, and fisheries); b) the environmental implications of development programs; and c) the development of human capital through investments in forming grassroots organizations and promoting participation. The contributors also draw attention to certain adverse consequences of development, such as the risk of greater impoverishment of some marginal groups, the forced displacement and involuntary resettlement of populations, and deterioration and dissipation of common property income-generating assets. All of the authors are concerned with understanding the conditions for long-term sustainability of development investments.”

In the chapter in the book called ‘When People Don’t Come First’ by American Anthropologist Conrad Phillip Kottak, the scholar makes this point: “Development teams that lack social expertise often perceive project participants as no more than a collection of people-potential beneficiaries, to be sure - rather than as structured groups of active individuals with their own strategies, organizational patterns, beliefs, perceptions of needs, motivations, and desires to help plan and implement changes that will affect their own lives and those of ensuing generations... To the extent possible, each project must have a socially informed and culturally appropriate design and implementation strategy. Social engineering is as important as technical or financial or economic considerations. Too many local needs call out for solutions to waste money funding projects that are inappropriate in one place, but needed in another or are unnecessary anywhere.” If this was, and still is in many parts, the commentary on development teams, which are supposed to have a social sensitivity stemming from the

nature of their work, the one on government and corporate teams that set out to design social solutions cannot be more charitable. If anything, even less.

One can see how this prescription for development was radical, coming as it did in the mid-1980s, melding social sciences, social engineering and people’s participation in a complete overhaul of the development process that was followed till then. The seeds of participatory development were now well and truly planted, but even more importantly, one saw the idea of design thinking emerge on the development scenario. “Putting people first in development interventions means eliciting the needs for change that they perceive; identifying culturally compatible goals and strategies for change; developing socially appropriate, workable, and efficient designs for innovation; using, rather than opposing, existing groups and organizations; drawing on participants’ informal monitoring and evaluation of projects during implementation; and gathering detailed information before and after implementation so that socioeconomic impact can be accurately assessed”, Kottak further writes. The seminal ideas presented by Kottak and others in the referenced book - eliciting needs from the community, enabling culturally compatible skill development programs, gathering feedback through community institutions and dealing with sensitivity with community aspirations-have been the cornerstones of community action in development practice ever since. Much of this research in the book, however, was based on agro-forestry, irrigation and agriculture settings in Latin America and Africa. Despite the passage of more than a decade in mass-skilling in India, no academic study of this nature in skill development, studying people’s participation, has been found.

In his chapter in the same book, titled ‘Fitting Projects to People’, social scientist and Cornell University academic Norman Uphoff makes a pertinent point, writing that “putting people first in development projects comes down to tailoring the design and implementation of projects to the needs and capabilities of people who are supposed to benefit from them. No longer should people be identified as ‘target groups’. Rather, if we must speak of them abstractly, we should consider them as ‘intended beneficiaries’. They are to be benefited, rather than ‘impacted’.” It can be seen how the narrative was shifting from targets to beneficiaries to impact in the development context, with each word connoting vastly different ecologies in the development universe. An allowance must be made for the fact that this was being written 30 years before Rubayat Khan’s article calling for program participants to be treated as ‘consumers’ (of the development goods and processes) rather than as ‘beneficiaries’. In that chapter Professor Norman Uphoff, also laid down the first of the frameworks for community consultation in design and implementation of projects. The framework encompasses the following five steps:

- i. Degree of participation required must be made clear at the outset, and in a way acceptable to all concerned parties;
- ii. There should be realistic objectives for participation with allowances made for the fact that

some steps of planning such as design consultation will be relatively protracted while others such as transfer of assets will be shorter;

- iii. Specific provisions for introducing and supporting participation by using existing organizations based on local patterns of social organization or by facilitating setting up of new organization congruent with local culture;
- iv. Adequate financial commitment to popular participation; and
- v. Plan to share responsibilities in all stages of project cycle.

International financial and development institutions had started articulating the necessity of community consultation in the development framework with rigour and researched studies, as can be seen in the Uphoff prescription.

3. Emergence of the First Framework for Community Consultation

Also significant is a 1999 South African study, 'Implementation of Health and Safety on Construction Sites' (3), which studies involvement of participants in designing health and safety measures in a South African context. Figure 1 illustrates the many prongs of consultation with all stakeholders that go into creating a safety plan for construction workers. The book, edited by Amarjit Singh, quotes extensively from South African scholar Jan Coetzee's book on the same theme, 'Development is for People', published in 1988, that is also referred to in this paper as a building block especially for the *Covernance* concept. The introduction to the book, 'Implementation of Health and Safety on Construction Sites', carries this quote from Prof. Coetzee: "The record of human history is full of macabre experiments on human life, conducted, unwittingly or with forethought, by people in power, who were utterly convinced of the rectitude of their course." For political leaders and influential people in government in the developing world, it was a given that they could do no wrong. This belief held ground until the 1980s, when the idea of community consultation and participation began to rise with books like 'Putting People First'

In the context of the construction industry and its stakeholders in South Africa, a model of community consultation has been provided in "Implementation of Health and Safety on Construction Sites" (Figure 1). The construction industry has, like most other industries, a unique set of stakeholders and investors. The book says: "According to (Jan) Coetzee development is about people who experience the implications and practical functioning of the realities in which they constantly and unavoidably find themselves...The objective of community development projects should go beyond the mere provision of a physical facility and be able to raise the standard and quality of living of community people. They should additionally be given the opportunity to develop their own potential optimally. However before this can become a reality it will be necessary to develop a local understanding with local participation of the social realities within which communities live.

"...In fact the improvement of conditions within a community may only be regarded as such if the community itself has agreed to the changes to be effected. Since all people value, respect and the desire to be treated as worthy individuals it is necessary that they participate in making fundamental choices especially in respect of issues which will impact on them both directly and indirectly. These choices are made as a result of the way in which they define their own position."

The framework for community consultation in 'Implementation of Health and Safety on Construction Sites' is a framework of stakeholder consultation for safety in construction sites that prominently includes the community. This is a comprehensive framework that can apply to consultations in every social development project. To take inputs from all stakeholders in designing, and implementing, a social development project can only enhance the reliability of the design, further enabling the application of the REAL-Relevant, Enterprising, Accessible and Localized-paradigm in social design. The book also quotes a Development Bank of South Africa ideal that was spelled out in 1993, "...community development can be defined as being where local people, working in their local environment, not only have the right, but also the responsibility, of choosing their own development objectives and making their own decisions." This is where the essence of community engagement and development lies, in all fields of social action.



Figure 1

It has taken close to four decades of development practice in communities to reach the watershed ideas Khan presents in the Guardian article with these words, "Contrast this (the perfunctory manner in which social development proposals treat communities) with how a business-even a business exclusively catering to the same poor people-would design its products. It would spend countless hours doing market research, identify real problems, develop prototype solutions and market test them through several iterations, then continuously examine data on everything from sales volume to customer satisfaction. The company would even make minor tweaks to the product's scent or packaging to appeal to the rural consumer's tastes." The contrast between this market-oriented approach and in designing social programs with a 'beneficiary' mindset, with perfunctory consultation and dialoguing with the 'beneficiaries', is stark and does little justice to the real needs of the people a project/program is designed to serve. From target to customer/partner, through the prism of beneficiary and participant, the character of those who are

to benefit from social development action has undergone many changes over a period of four decades.

4.The Evolving Community Consultation Framework

The framework for this research has developed over a decade of actual field work in profits and non-profits and, of course, relates to community engagement and action in the field of social development with special focus on skill development programs. Government action in social development, as indeed of all aid-related action in developing countries, has been seen as patronage, which demands gratitude. Communities are expected to be silently thankful recipients of the action that the authorities in all sectors deem appropriate to be given, or granted. The power skew in this form of relationship is all too obvious, compounding the social and economic skew that already exists. Development action is seen as a benefit that is being given to communities and, as has been noted earlier, for a long period of time the community members were regarded and treated as 'beneficiaries'.

The 'beneficiary' vs. 'consumer' paradigm in social development action: Consulting with communities about their development plans and aspirations was, as an idea and as an ideal, alien to governments as well as organizations committed to development action. To be balanced, it was not possible to converse with communities on every aspect of their development, simply because of their size and spread. Of the estimated 7.5 billion world population today, less developed countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America now account for 80 percent, according to the think-tank Population Reference Bureau statistics. This is a very large number to consult with on all aspects, though technology, data-science and modern data-gathering tools are making it easier with every new technological advance. Also, it is assumed that since politicians and bureaucrats know the pulse of the nation they have the correct grip on policy making. Social development action, which emerged as the single most important policy action in newly independent nations after the ebbing of colonialism, brought communities centre-stage. Impoverished, illiterate and, often, socially backward, they were initially treated as 'targets' for development action. The label then shifted to 'beneficiaries', then to (program) 'participants' and, now, to 'partners'.

The Relevant Enterprising Accessible Localized (REAL) Framework for Community Action: Bringing communities into the development dialogue is a process that can foster Relevant Enterprising Accessible and Localized (REAL) development action in every community, but has not yet found significant traction in the government sector. Conversations with communities regarding their development aspirations at the design and planning stage make action:

- Relevant, to the prevailing socio-economic conditions, capturing the aspirations people may harbour and inputs about how those aspirations can be met;
- Enterprising, bringing to the fore plans and actions that people may take independently, to meet their

aspirations, including the unleashing of entrepreneurial potential;

- Accessible, since the process of connecting with communities itself would surface the latent needs and values of the community, bringing the people and the program closer through greater awareness and respect; and
- Localized, solutions that are rooted in local circumstances or local enhancements to global solutions that serve people while remaining in their communities and further calibrates the transition that the community goes through.

While the comparison and contrast with market and marketing processes might appear stringent and culturally askew simply because of the current process gap between social development and market development, especially in the private sector, it still provides the compelling reason for making communities a partner in social development, reasons that have existed in academic and professional literature for nearly three decades now.

The Community-Government-Corporation Triad in Partnership: The framework has a pivotal role for communities in all social development, as partners. It envisages community participation in expressing need, designing programs and evaluating performance. It makes the exercise empowering for all concerned. It might require structural elements, like community-led organizations, and processes, like community-led dialogue and response mechanism, to be meaningful for all stakeholders. The investment in such structures and processes makes for higher impact and gains from social engineering programs, like the skill development initiative, more sustainable.

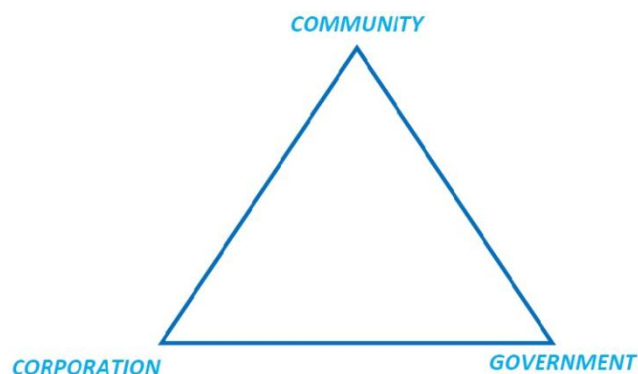


Figure-2

This triad was first articulated in the paper written by this research scholar in the context of corporate social responsibility engagement with communities by the pharmaceutical company, Dr. Reddy's Lab, in Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh. The paper (4) is titled, 'Architecture of Community Engagement for Workplace Harmony' and it was published by the National HRD Network of India (NHRDN) in their 2013 publication, "Inclusiveness, Sustainability and Human Resource Development". The architecture (Fig.1) the paper refers to is the arrangement of this triad, which maps onto the sustainability triad of the Brundtland Commission (Fig.2). The Brundtland Commission made a seminal contribution

to sustainability thought by placing economic, social and environmental gains from all human activity on an equal footing, with equal focus. This triple-bottomline approach to sustainable industrial and commercial activity is the cornerstone of literature on the subject. Although the partnership triad at Fig.1 was developed in the CSR context, it will apply in all contexts where partnerships are established. The major thrust of the Government of India and other state governments in skill development is on the PPP model in one form or the other. The Community and Government vertices in the diagram are self-explanatory. The Corporation vertex represents any third party-service provider that may be engaged in delivering a social development service for the community. This third vertex is important in the skill development space, especially, because many of the programs are being delivered by Skill Training Providers (STP) which are generally for-profit agencies that possess the facilities, equipment and personnel to carry out large scale training.

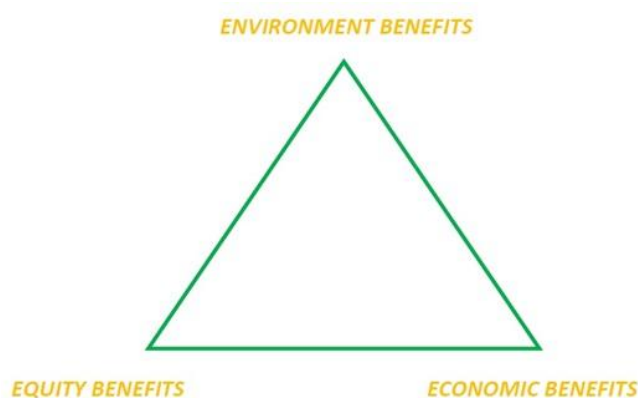


Figure 3

There are two scenarios, depending upon the source of the program, that are generally evident in social development programs and this framework holds true in both:

1. Government-origin programs: Programs originating in the government eco-system usually have a high level of public input since many policy makers stay in close touch with the people that the interventions are meant for. But, in the case of skill development programs, it has been more generic, while in reality the intervention demands specific drill-down to the very basic level of determining what program might suit a community. This helps engage the participants better in the skill programs and their delivery, identify the skills that are aligned with their aptitude and get the best commercial terms for their skills. This researcher has, during the course of the survey, met participants who refused employment because it was offered in far-off metropolitan cities at what would amount to subsistence wages in those cities. With the current generation of skilling programs, the prime focus should be on developing skills in participants that suit the local eco-system and help ground the participants firmly in their location.

Social schemes, in any case, originate in the government policy-making machinery and are enforced through

government executive machinery or through corporate entities. Since the government leverages the competence and resources of corporations (private service providers) to deliver programs to communities, a tripartite consultation among equals will ensure that the services so provided address the genuine needs of the community, are structured with relevance and usability in mind and also have the support of all stakeholders. Any compact for social and equity action is served well if it carries the imprint of the three key stakeholders, without exception. When the compact carries the substance of community consultation the depth and relevance of the schemes, too, will increase to a new, more impactful level. In a consultative scenario, the community oversight on programs is sharper and brings about better delivery. A consultative process makes for greater community ownership of the schemes and programs, one of the most desirable outcomes of any programmatic activity.

2. Corporation-Origin Programs: In the case of corporations, this triad is even more important as these entities keep rising as major players in the space of social interventions. Many corporations have worked through their Foundations in rural areas and with the urban poor for programs ranging from health to sanitation, water to education and skill development to disaster management. But, corporations and their staff are not trained to think in terms of community engagement and consultation. This was brought home to this researcher in Srikakulam with the Dr. Reddy's assignment. Despite work stoppages and shrill community voices demanding welfare and employment, the employees in the area, especially those vested with corporate affairs responsibility, had made no effort to initiate a dialogue with the community or pay a visit to the villages that harboured the community. From a human resources management perspective, the lack of contact was easy to explain-the staff did not have the training, sensitivity knowledge included, to make and nurture the approach to the community. Their competence lay in managing a limited job description that dealt with people within the organization and commercial affairs with which they were familiar. With the change in Corporate Social Responsibility norms arising from the changes to the Companies Act in 2013, Indian companies have been trying to build competence in social interventions either organically or through disaggregated measures like the establishment of foundations.

Section 135 of the Act now makes it mandatory for companies to commit to CSR spends and companies find themselves in unfamiliar territory that earlier used to be the domain of government agencies and non-governmental organizations-dealing with communities, especially those in rural areas and which are resource-scarce. It is all the more important that these CSR interventions carry community inputs, for corporations seem to select intervention areas based on top-management choices or convenience. This was very much in evidence again in the Srikakulam context. While the company was providing lanterns and reverse-osmosis water purifiers, the community just wanted a well that would be accessible to the lower castes. Dr. Reddy's had set up its foundation well before the CSR provisions came into force in 2013, but the expertise of the Dr. Reddy's Foundation had not

reached Srikakulam. They arrived only in 2013 and community engagement, professionally directed, then began in right earnest.

Since corporations, or service providers, will play an increasing role in reshaping social development processes in the country, it is urgent that they learn the value of consulting communities in the path of development. As was evident in the Srikakulam episode, solutions to the problems could be in the blind spot of the corporation for the simple reason that they are not familiar with the community's environment. The government is familiar with the environment, but it is not an empathy-oriented familiarity. It is a bureaucratic familiarity that usually does not reach the spirit of the people in the community. The consultative approach would help find pragmatic solutions useful to the community rather than perfunctory projects that possibly bring publicity for the corporation and little else. A graphical, labelled representation of this conceptual framework follows (Fig.3) and illustrates the quality of interventions. It is important to note that when corporations spend resources on social development, they look for returns through goodwill and publicity. "By engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, companies can not only generate favourable stakeholder attitudes and better support behaviours (e.g. purchase, seeking employment, investing in the company), but also, over the long run, build corporate image, strengthen stakeholder-company relationships, and enhance stakeholders' advocacy behaviours. However, stakeholders' low awareness of and unfavourable attributions towards companies' CSR activities remain critical impediments in companies' attempts to maximize business benefits from their CSR activities, highlighting a need for companies to communicate CSR more effectively to stakeholders." (5)

A process of consulting with the community is a powerful communication tool that helps achieve most of the pay back that a corporate may seek to derive from the CSR initiative. For others who are doing the intervention for profit, like the Skill Training Providers, the community consultation is a force-multiplier for greater impact. Community consultation makes communities feel empowered as the researcher has pointed out in his article. This applies to CSR activity as well as for-profit engagements by skill training providers.

This applies in equal measure to social enterprise operations as well. Social enterprises have emerged at the intersection of market enterprises and non-profits to provide goods and services to the poor and vulnerable in hitherto untapped market segments, especially in rural areas. These enterprises adhere to market norms of profitability and scalability, while enculturating a core value of sustainability in the interests of the vulnerable markets that they serve. In a paper (6) published in the European Journal of Development Research, authors Goyal, Sergi and Jaiswal point out that social enterprise is now seen as an important institution in the program of poverty alleviation all over the world. In India social enterprises like Aravind Eye Care, Amul, Kerberon Automations, National Innovation Foundation, Jaipur Foot, Narayana Hrudayalaya, Jaipur Rugs, and the Alive

and Thrive program are regarded as the torch-bearers of sustainable poverty alleviation movement. In providing market-based delivery, while eschewing greed, inequality and exploitative behaviours, social enterprises are an alternate model that requires more study. Some of these enterprises, like Amul, have emerged from within the community and most of them are very close to the community they serve. Yet, such enterprises too need to continuously consult with communities and keep reworking their agenda. Their market oriented delivery also needs the value of community inputs to remain relevant and saleable, apart from being scalable and sustainable.

The Processes That Emerge From the Interface of the Three Entities-Government, Corporations and Communities:

The interface between these three entities is graphically captured and labelled in the diagram. It is evident that the quality of the interface varies with the degree of consultation. In this, of course, there is one entity that can drive programs without any consultation and that is the Government, if it so chooses, though the quality of the programs and their impact will be compromised.

The various qualities of interaction are captured in the descriptions below:

- i. Enforcement: Government systems are backed by state power to enforce decisions, for welfare or for legal requirements. Enforcement is the quality of interaction with communities when obedience is demanded and outcomes are to be met with acceptance. It indicates reference points that are rooted in unilateral decisions and unquestioned policies, and flows from a place of power to powerless communities. Enforcement is a product of lack of awareness as much as exercise of power. It is also highly symptomatic of patronization and is deeply rooted in a feudal power structure and a patriarchal social structure. Enforcement has very low community consultation inputs, if at all any.
- ii. Inducement: This is the quality of interaction that exists between corporations and communities in the absence of the vision, insight and long-range calibration that governmental authorities can bring to the intervention. If corporations and communities interface in a policy vacuum then the measures, which flow one-way entirely, from the corporation to the community, are characterized by manipulative, short-term and blatantly self-serving inputs to make the community fall in line with the corporation's goals. Often, these serve the interests of the power-elites (like dominant castes in villages) and exclude the multitude so that the elites influence, often coerce, the community to toe the corporation's line. Such inducements work temporarily and are often designed to be low-cost and low quality. Corporations often blow out of proportion the impact of such inducements to appropriate popularity for these measures. It is easy to see that the government participation in such measures would highly

attenuate, if not totally eliminate, the nature of a bribe that these measures purport to be.

- iii. **Appeasement:** This is the last of the three perversions in the Community-Government-Corporation triage that can exist when the three do not interface in an attitude of mutual respect, equality and understanding while devising and implementing programs of social construction or reconstruction. Corporations often contribute to the government funds for social succour and development. The most recent example of this has been the contribution of companies to the Government of India's COVID-19 battle. Often, this is a tool to gain mileage with the government and to build relationship with power structures by the corporate entities. It does not help the corporations gain any vantage to the real problem that the community may be facing and for the alleviation of which they are contributing. An empathetic appreciation of the life of the community can be transforming for the corporate entity, bringing appreciation of the environment, people and social problems that they operate with and in. It can have a deeply humanizing impact on the employee base, the supply chain and customer service. None of these, however, surfaces if the contribution is only about writing a cheque to the government. It represents, once again, a self-serving resource transfer between two of the most powerful elements in the triage and excludes the least powerful element, the community, from any say in the manner in which these precious resources are utilized, which happens, ostensibly, for its welfare.

The government measures to battle the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate this idea of Appeasement. On March 28 2020 the Government of India announced the creation of the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) fund with the immediate mandate of raising resources for the coronavirus pandemic relief efforts. Many notable High Net-worth Individuals, mainly belonging to the show and sports businesses, immediately announced large sums in donation to the fund. The house of Tatas too announced a INR 500 crore sum to battle the virus, but left it unclear whether any part of that sum will be provided to PM CARES. The Tatas have a long and distinguished record of engaging in social service through their Trusts and other organizations, which has led them to build linkages at the community level as well as with service institutions. They can leverage these linkages to deliver aid in practically any emergency. In fact, the statement issued by Tata Trusts announcing the initiative sharply etched out the measures towards which the fund will be used, as is expected of organizations that have an ear to the ground and know the pulse of the problem:

- Personal Protective Equipment for the medical personnel on the frontlines
- Respiratory systems for treating increasing cases
- Testing kits to increase per capita testing
- Setting up modular treatment facilities for infected patients
- Knowledge management and training of health workers and the general public"

This is the kind of granular approach to grant making that experienced, grounded and involved donors have and it was not surprising that the Tata Trusts press release, also coming on 28 March 2020, emphasized that approach. In addition to the Tata Trusts commitment, the Tata Sons entity announced INR 1000 crore additional commitment to the battle with the virus, bringing the total commitment of the group to INR 1500. On 29 March 2020, the Finance Minister of India, Mrs. Nirmala Sitharaman sent out two tweets from her individual Twitter handle with the following text:

"CSR Funds can now donate to PM CARES Fund. Ministry of Corporate Affairs notifies details.

...any contribution made to the PM CARES Fund shall qualify as CSR expenditure..."

Such measures would only qualify as 'appeasement', encouraging corporations to write a cheque to the government and entering the government's radar as obedient corporate citizens while not even remotely discharging their obligation as corporate citizens. Action on the field, for communities as mentioned in the Tata statement quoted above, is a more robust indicator of corporate responsibility.

Convergence in the idea of Governance: Governance is the convergence of the interests and the action of the three major players in skill development and, indeed, in all of social development-community, corporation (read as private sector service provider in the context of this article, as well as social enterprises) and the government (at all levels of engagement-block, district, state, centre). Governance is a concept so powerful and innovative that it requires a new coinage. It also presupposes a set of actions that make community involvement at the very grassroots in the process of designing and deploying skill development programs:

- A community communication mechanism that makes communities aware of the changes that will emerge due to skill development of its members;
- A structure to capture and collate the requirements as articulated by members of the community with substantial participation of the primary participants (read: beneficiaries)
- A system to enable service providers to formulate and deploy skill development programs for community members, as captured through structural elements of local self-governance already at play here; and
- A process to capture the outcomes of the systemic intervention to be evaluated in terms of: learning outcomes, employment outcomes, enhancement in incomes, relevance to the local and community economic conditions and empowerment of participants in terms of secure and sustainable livelihoods.

These four actions-community communication, data collation structure, deployment system and outcomes documentation - taken together, make governance a major tool of social transformation in general and enable skill development programs, in particular, to be demand-side

(community demand, that is) oriented in contrast to the supply-side push that is evident at the moment.

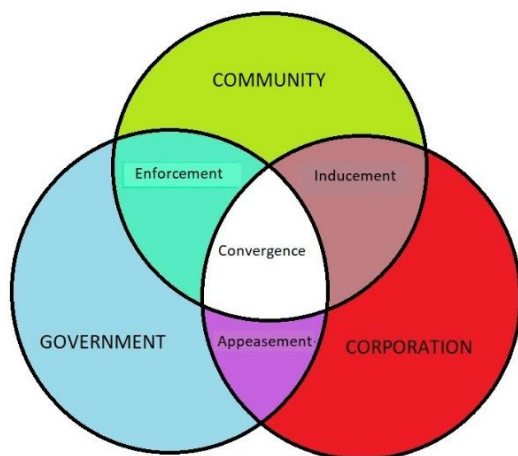


Figure 4

Covernance is also an aspect of human rights in the planning and delivery of social development programs. It is a human right to be consulted regarding the type and quality of program delivered to the vulnerable section of society on public funds. The community needs to be invested in its own future to protect its:

1. Dignity, as stated earlier;
2. Livelihood, to explore options that demand side livelihood may not take into account or has no awareness of;
3. To enhance its income without violating its traditional sources of income;
4. To maintain familial and social cohesion;
5. To promote vocations that have been passed on from generations; and
6. To ensure fair wages and equitable treatment for labour at all stages of engagement in industry, in every kind of employment contract.

This article has explored the idea that community participation norms must apply to skill development programs in India to make such programs REAL-Relevant Enterprising Accessible and Localized - for sustainable impact which would include regular incomes, reduction of distress migration, strengthening of human dignity and promoting familial cohesion and support. That is a partial list of benefits that are expected to flow from such a strategic move in skill development. This article emphasizes a crucial element in the participatory development framework-the consultation process, which is embodied in design thinking.

The community participation that this article builds on goes beyond participatory development that is embedded in non-profit action. In its emphasis on Design Thinking, this thesis provides a strategic, inclusive, egalitarian focus to community participation. Design thinking emphasizes planning a program from the ground-up. The Interaction Design Foundation defines Design Thinking in the following words: "Design Thinking is an iterative process in which we seek to understand the user, challenge assumptions, and redefine problems in an attempt to

identify alternative strategies and solutions that might not be instantly apparent with our initial level of understanding. At the same time, Design Thinking provides a solution-based approach to solving problems. It is a way of thinking and working as well as a collection of hands-on methods.

"Design Thinking revolves around a deep interest in developing an understanding of the people for whom we're designing the products or services. It helps us observe and develop empathy with the target user. Design Thinking helps us in the process of questioning: questioning the problem, questioning the assumptions, and questioning the implications. Design Thinking is extremely useful in tackling problems that are ill-defined or unknown, by re-framing the problem in human-centric ways, creating many ideas in brainstorming sessions, and adopting a hands-on approach in prototyping and testing. Design Thinking also involves ongoing experimentation: sketching, prototyping, testing, and trying out concepts and ideas." (7) This article has built up to advocate design thinking as crucial to creating human-centred, consultative skill development programs that create humanistic impact. Targeted programs in skill development are designed and implemented without adequate consultation with the participant community. This disconnect with the community leads to underachievement of program objectives. Often such programs face local resistance and grudging acceptance. More importantly the real needs of the community continue to remain unmet, while institutions seek to derive publicity and regulatory mileage from the initiatives. Will community consultation assist the adoption and impact of vocational and skill development programs? Could the involvement of participants in the conceptualization and delivery of the programs enhance the outcomes? This article answers both questions in the affirmative.

Paul Francis and Susan Jacobs, both of who worked in the World Bank, say that development is by its nature social (8). Its ends embody social values. Its means are social processes and institutions. Its benefits and costs are distributed across communities, social groups, and organizations. All development is, therefore, in some sense social-because all development necessarily expresses social objectives, requires social mechanisms in order to achieve those objectives, and has social consequences. Korten and Alfonso also argue that 'all development is social development' in the sense that people are the central purpose of development, their skills and capacities its critical resource. (9)

To take inputs from all stakeholders in designing, and implementing, a social development project can only enhance the reliability of the design, further enabling the application of the REAL-Relevant, Enterprising, Accessible and Localized-paradigm in social design.

The idea of Relevant, Enterprising, Accessible and Localized (REAL) skill training posits that consulting with communities and skill-training participants on the training that is most relevant to them would empower the rural masses significantly and help locate livelihoods closer to their homes. They would not be displaced as migrant labour, grist for giant industrial mills in far off

places. An article recently stated that “the rural economy was not designed to absorb local labour. Therefore, the root of the migrant labour crisis lay in the lack of employment opportunities in rural India, which must be restructured with vastly diversified productive activities to absorb local labour. Thereafter, when they migrate it would not be out of distress, but bargaining for better prospects.” (10)

A United Nations report (11) also states that “lack of alternate livelihoods and skill development in source areas, locations from where migration originates, are the primary causes of migration from rural areas...” The report adds that “...labour migration within India is crucial for economic growth and contributes to improving the socio-economic condition of people. Migration can help, for example, to improve income, skill development, and provide greater access to services like healthcare and education.”

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