

ABSTRACT

Analysing practitioner experiences to improve the practice of participation

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The research has identified factors that must be present for participation to be effective. These factors pertain to the way participation is defined in the project, the potential participants, the implementers, the funders, the project design, the social context in which the project is taking place and the resources available to support and implement the project. The factors that must be considered include: making a determination of what purpose the participation will play in the project; the potential participants having a felt need for the project or having a willingness to participate; the implementers having good facilitators with positive experience in implementing participation in projects; funders who are supportive of the participatory approach and who are willing to invest funds over an extended period of time to support the project; a project that offers direct and indirect benefits to the participants; a social context where there is a history and culture of participation; and time, which emerged as the most important resource ahead of human skills and experience, technology, finances and facilities. In addition, there is a set of core values including co-operation, compassion, commitment, democracy, equity, transparency and honesty that must form the philosophical foundation of the project to enhance the likelihood of effective participation. The study has arranged the factors in an easy to use checklist that should assist in the design, monitoring and evaluation of participatory projects.

Keywords: Participation, participatory processes, evaluation, checklist