

Participatory Governance and Sustainable Livelihood: Synthesizing the Theories of Participatory Democracy and Entitlements

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Abstract

This paper takes a brief look at definitions and basic concepts of governance and sustainable livelihood approach (SLA), and attempts to establish the basis for a possible synthesis of the theories of entitlement and participatory democracy. It reviews current thinking on participatory governances and looks at its potentials for bestowing upon ordinary people the responsibility for pursuing sustainable livelihood for themselves, within a synthesized theoretical framework of participatory governance and entitlements. Although these concepts and issues are presented in existing literature as separate themes and/or under different disciplines, it must be kept in mind that they are inter-related in their actual and potential manifestations as real phenomena in society. It is in belief in the potential of participatory governance to confer on people opportunities to better decide their livelihood destinies with changing dynamics that motivates that pursuit of a synthesis of two theories in order to further the cause of sustainable livelihood.

Keywords: *Participatory Governance, Participatory Democracy, Sustainable Livelihood Approach, Entitlements.*

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Background to the Study

Studies on governance and livelihood have an appreciable level of attention from both researchers and development practitioners because they constitute two important determinants of the state of society with practical implications for the lives of people, both the rulers and ruled. Issues of authoritative allocation of values and livelihood conditions are critical areas of interests because of relevance in defining the socio-economic and political milieu for institutional dynamics underlying state-civil relations, relationship among persons and groups, and the processes that such relationships drive in society. There exists a considerable amount of literature on these two concepts, the most important of which are those authored by important international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department for International Development (DFID), among others. This study undertakes a theoretical dive into the multidisciplinary approach to explaining social phenomena that are related to one another, and in this case participatory governance and sustainable livelihood. Two theories, participatory democracy and failure entitlements, are the focus of this following discourse.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This paper reviews the concepts of governance and sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) in an attempt to establish a strong intellectual basis for a possible synthesis of two theories, namely C. B. Macpherson's theory of participatory democracy and Amartya Sen's theory of failure entitlements. The objectives of the paper are: explain participatory governance and SLA as they related to the two theories; to identify the elements of the theories that are relevant for explain the points of overlap or interface between participatory governance and sustainable livelihood, and to expand the foundation of existing knowledge on strategies for sustainable livelihood.

Methodology

This study utilized secondary materials like journal articles, texts and internet materials as sources of information for the discourse. The works of the proponents of the two theories are also used to draw up details that make up the different themes and analytical sections of the paper. The qualitative content analysis of the sources of information is used construct the argument in favour of a possible synthesis of the two theories.

Governance, Participatory Governance and Democratic Theory

One of the most critical features of the modern state is government, which is the institution or set of institutions charged with the responsibility of managing the processes through which public resources are managed and public affairs are conducted – governance. Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. Governance is the totality of interactions in which the government, other public bodies, private sector actors and civil society participate, all aiming at solving societal problems or creating societal opportunities '——'(Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015). The plurality of actors in the process of governance, as implied in the above definition, also presupposes the idea of a governance framework. This manifests in terms of the entirety of tools, procedures, processes and functional specializations among actors designed

consciously or evolved unconsciously to address a number of issues in society; in terms of the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels; and also as comprising mechanisms, process and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate and pursue their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and resolve their differences'——(Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015).

It is pertinent to identify different governance styles or how governance objectives are achieved. '——Meuleman and Niestroy (2015) identified three ideal governance styles: hierarchical governance, market governance, and network governance. Hierarchism refers primarily to modus operandi of state apparatus and institutions i.e. government. Market governance is a governance style that favours autonomism or independence from government control and values efficiency, time, and also individual responsibility and, therefore, empowerment. Network governance is an egalitarian system that favours social equality; it is a style of governance is characterized by high in trust and inclusion, and is open to “win-win” solutions.

Toikka (2011) has enumerated some conceptual ideas that elaborate the network dimension of governance: governance basically refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks that are charged with policy-making. Governance network therefore refers to any setting with a plurality of actors and possibly no formal control system that can dictate the relationships between the actors, resulting in a multiplicity of organizations from within as well as from outside the government, because the policy issues are complex. Defining the policy problem is quite demanding: setting policy goals, finding solutions, implementing decisions or undertaking any similar activity require resources that are in the hold of several individuals, groups of individuals and organizations or institutions, thus giving rise to a relative interdependence of those organizations, individuals and institutions. This interdependence in turn provides the parties in the network considerable autonomy from the central control of government, although there may be several interfaces.

Evidently, government is just one of the actors in governance; other actors active in governance vary according to level of government and area of need. For instance, in rural areas other actors may include influential land lords, associations of peasant farmers, cooperatives, women guilds, NGOs, research institutes, environmental interest groups, religious leaders, finance institutions, political parties, and the military, among others. However, the concept of governance network does not preclude government; rather, it emphasizes the advantages of pluralism where complementary inputs from stakeholders outside formal government institutions are a part of governance processes. The persistence of the argument for an unchanging importance of government in governance gave rise to the concept of meta-governance, which implies the conscious management of governance networks by the government through either formal or informal interfaces – meta-governance exists where the government above the network sets conditions for the network processes, hence public managers are called 'meta-governors' '——(Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015; Toikka, 2011).

Given the aforementioned, participatory governance interest acknowledges that members of communities can make valuable contributions to governance by highlighting the nature of the community agency that is at the core of policy interest in participation and how it differs from government efforts at community engagement. Participatory governance as a subset of governance theory grounded in the theory of participatory democracy emphasizes democratic practices and offers the theory and practice of public engagement through deliberative processes (Fischer, 2015). Participatory governance processes are distinct from both representative and direct democratic practices. Strictly speaking, participatory governance comprises the formal extension of public voice into political decision-making beyond elections; it is usually designed or adopted formally to complement rather than replace the traditional representative institutions of liberal democracy. It is needful here to situate the participatory paradigm within the broader context of state-civil society relations: broad participation of all sectors of civil society (social inclusion) is very important to guaranteeing lasting peace and sustainable development, because it is practical participation that transforms individuals into citizens with duties and rights to decide what becomes of their lives and communities. Therefore, participatory governance allows citizens to share the responsibility of planning and guiding the direction of public affairs and for the implementation of policy recommendations and decisions.

Existing literature presents contemporary theory of democracy as having several strands: the elitist theory (Sartori, 1958; Schumpeter, 1942; Pareto, 1915; Michels, 1911; Mosca, 1896), the pluralist theory (Aron, 1950; Manheim, 1929), the group theories (Dahl, 1991; Dahl, 1956; Truman, 1951; Bentley, 1908) and the theory of participatory democracy (Macpherson, 1966; Macpherson, 1973). The theory of participatory democracy is opposed to previous democratic formulations that view modern democracy as primarily the rule of politicians in which ordinary citizens play a very limited role, at regular intervals during elections. It regards people's political participation – the active involvement of individuals and groups in the governmental processes that affect their lives, including policy formulation, implementation and monitoring – as the basic principle of democracy (Gaubu, 2003). The champions of participatory democracy and participatory process insist only on increasing citizens' participation within the existing democratic system, rather than suggest an alternative system for its operation.

Sustainable Livelihood Approach and the theory of Entitlements

In order to capture the influence of formal and informal legal structures on livelihood conditions, one could turn to the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) that is based on the idea that vulnerable people draw on a range of material and non-material assets to pursue multiple strategies in the face of an external shock (Rubin, 2009). The SLA is a multidimensional, integrated and rational approach to poverty eradication and livelihood improvement; it is one of the methods used to enhance understanding of the livelihoods of people in general, but especially of poor households. As a concept, SLA provides a more rounded picture of the complexities of living and surviving in poor communities than other understandings based on measures of income, consumption and employment (Kamaruddin & Samsudin, 2014). A livelihood consists of capabilities, assets and activities required for a

means of living and it is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base – in other words, the essence of SLA is the pursuit of livelihood security with its interrelated dimensions: food, economic, health, nutrition, education, empowerment, and environment (Akter & Rahman, 2012; Scoones, 1998).

SLA has the various aspects. The first is livelihood assets, which comprise people's strengths or the human, social, natural, physical and financial capitals/resources upon which livelihoods are built. The second is livelihood strategy, which refers to the range and combination of activities and choices that people make/undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals. Third, livelihood outcome or the achievements or outputs of livelihood strategies, such as more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security and a more sustainable use of natural resources. Fourth, institutional involvement: this refers to the entirety of policies, institutions and processes that effectively determine access to various types of capital, to livelihood strategies and to decision-making bodies and sources of influence. Finally, the vulnerability context: this comprises the external environment in which people exist, especially when they have to face harmful threats or shocks with inadequate capacity to respond effectively (GLOPP, 2008). According to this approach, people's ability to strategically draw on these assets in the face of a famine and other adverse conditions will determine their survival potential and long-term livelihood (Rubin, 2009).

Until 1951, the conventional explanation for the cause of famines was food availability decline (FAD), rather than mere population increase; it is essentially a reaction to Malthus' theory that population increase would outpace increases in the means of subsistence. However, FAD does not explain why only certain sections of the world or populations within countries, such as less developed countries or agricultural labourers respectively, were affected by famines while others were insulated from the same. Therefore, Amartya Sen (1993; 1990; 1981; 1977) suggests that the causal mechanism for precipitating starvation includes many variables other than just decline of food availability, such as the inability of an agricultural labourer to exchange his primary entitlement (e.g. labour for rice), especially when his employment became erratic or was completely eliminated due to external shocks. Therefore, famines are due to an inability of a person to exchange his entitlements rather than to food unavailability – i.e. failure of exchange entitlements.

The entitlement of a person refers to the set of alternative commodity bundles that can be appropriated through the use of the various legal channels of acquirement open to that person. In other words, it is the set or sets of income and resource bundles over which individuals, households and communities can establish control and secure their livelihoods (Akter & Rahman, 2012; Sen, 1981). Entitlement failure occurs when it is not possible for a person to transfer to and acquire alternative commodity bundles with enough food to survive in the event of adverse conditions or elimination of initial endowment (Sen 1981:51). Famine prevention must therefore be concerned with the protection of entitlements rather than with just food availability as such. He further advances the position that lack of democracy and famines are interrelated: famine is more likely to occur in a country without free speech, public

action and social justice. For example, the presence of democracy and free media is very likely to prevent famines because the media, as a medium for expressing opinions and suggestions, will attract attention to any emerging food shortages or other similar challenges, and the government will have to act quickly to prevent such challenges and ensure sustainable livelihood.

Discussion: Argument for a Synthesis of Two Theories

It has been noted already, regarding the SLA, that people's ability to strategically draw on available assets in the face of either famine or other adverse conditions will determine their survival potential and long-term livelihood. It is the belief of this paper that this will require them to have not only the ability to make choices regarding what they can do, but also the ability to modify or change institutional arrangements and processes that can expand their asset base and/or improve their access thereof. It is this conviction that provides the basis for a possible synthesis C. B. Macpherson's theory of participatory democracy and Amartya Sen's failure of exchange entitlement theory for a predictable sustainable livelihood. The concept of participatory governance suggests that the process of addressing livelihood and development challenges requires the involvement of different governance stakeholders, including those whose livelihood is most likely to be affected by those challenges, both actual and potential. Therefore, there must be a way to integrating the vulnerable into the governance network that will resolve challenges that threaten their livelihood sustenance.

The theory of participatory democracy advanced by C. B. Macpherson (1973; 1966), as earlier mentioned, repudiates the elitist, pluralist and group models of democracy and regards people's the active involvement in the governmental processes affecting their lives (i.e. political participation) as the basic maxim of democracy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) asserts that sovereignty does not only originate in, but is also retained by, the people despite their transition from the state of nature to civil society. Therefore, sovereignty cannot be alienated or represented. Rather, the people's deputies are merely agents of the people, not their representatives, and government is only an instrument to carry out the general will (Gaub, 2003). This implies that the people must constantly deliberate on public policy in order to give the government directives in the interest of their will. The theory of participatory democracy believes that if people get better opportunities for political participation, they will be disposed to deliberating on public issues and watching the process of policy implementation – their participation is both a necessary and an essential part of good society.

Although the failure of entitlement was employed by Sen (1981) to explain famines, it can be used to understand the dynamics of livelihood conditions that affect people in general, and particularly the rural poor whose means of livelihood constitute elements of nature such as land and water that can be affected by natural disasters and other manmade disasters, coupled with the corresponding strategies for accessing and utilizing the same for generating livelihood incomes. Sen (1981) opines that in addition to natural disasters and inadequate production techniques, lack of infrastructure and democratic ethos could all contribute to the lack of food. By extension also, the ability of the people to initiate strategies to alleviate nature-induced and other adverse conditions threatening their livelihood and to take actions that will

improve their personal and contextual capacity to adopt alternative livelihood bundles is the core essence of the proposed synthesis of the theories of participatory democracy and failure of exchange entitlements. The two theories together can explain how people ought to participate in development governance in order to secure their livelihood entitlements.

Conclusion

Sustainable livelihood is shown here to be partly a function of people's ability to exchange their entitlements, and also a function of their ability to engage and influence the governance processes and arrive at favourable institutional and other contexts that will minimise failure of exchange entitlement that could lead to threat on the sustenance their livelihood. In other words, the political must be favourably disposed to the socioeconomic, and this is best ensured by imbibing participatory governance practices. Discussions, analyses and predictions with respect to such practical overlapping phenomena require theoretical frameworks that can provide adequate explanations of the variables from the different sectors playing out in real life situations. This is the essence of the proposed synthesis of the theories of participatory democracy and exchange entitlement. This, we believe, will provide a conceptual framework of analysis with predictive capacity for sustainable livelihood of people.

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