Deconstructing Public Participation: Why Public Participation Has Stagnated Development In Africa

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ABSTRACT
More than 2 decades have passed since public participation was first introduced in many parts of Africa, but African nations haven’t progressed significantly in development since then. Many factors may have contributed to this lax and deceleration of development, but there is an unspoken politically-incorrect fear that public participation may be a strong contributing factor. This is in stark contrast with the progress of many Asian countries which is happening faster than that of Africa, and Europe. This is despite governments of these countries advancing, in their national development ideals, expert-led, technocratic ‘top-down’ approaches almost wholesale. China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and other Far- and Middle- eastern countries have registered faster paces of development in the recent past. Some of these countries have flirted with totalitarian leadership and communism - which as seen through the western-lenses, are dysfunctional undemocratic systems, usually demonized as strongholds of human rights abuses. While their development may be a result of a repertoire of factors, including, foremost, government policies and political goodwill, one difference is in the level of expert-led development initiatives in those countries, the “Top-Down” approaches that have broadly been trashed in Africa. Public participation is a moral concept for advancing inclusivity and equity. But it is also amoral and irresponsible if applied wrongly. The brand of public participation or alternative approaches to development will determine whether a state develops or not. While this paper does not seek to advocate for what have been termed the “Tyranny of Experts” and“Tyranny of the Masses” it seeks to call to attention the enabling role of both the experts and local knowledge in development. This study will use a comparative-evaluative method to look at the approaches to spatial development, especially of infrastructure delivery systems using case studies from Europe, Africa and Asia.

Key Words Concepts: Public Participation; Stakeholders Consultation; Infrastructure supply