

Community Participation in Housing and Urban Development Evidence from Al-Gireif East, Khartoum, Sudan

Muna M. Eltahir

Lecturer, Omdurman Islamic University
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Khartoum, Sudan

Abstract

Community participation is an active process by which beneficiaries or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they treasure. Community participation in Sudan is an ancient phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the Sudanese culture, and it is more prominent in rural communities, where it is known as *nafeer or fazaa*. People participate during cultivation, political life, social life, as well as in forming their housing compounds. In building their homes some participate in the planning and design stage, others in building materials preparation, and some in carrying out some construction work. Some of these communities allow women to participate fully, others allow them only partial participation, and others limit women's participation substantially. Accordingly, stakeholders' participation is an important element in the success and development of settlements that satisfy the needs of their users. Disregarding stakeholders during planning and designing of human settlements, by governments, donor agencies, national and international organizations in Sudan and elsewhere, has led to failure of housing projects.

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the dynamics of community participation in Sudan in terms of its components, activities, resources mobilized, mobilization processes, modes of implementation, actors involved, and those who are excluded, as well as the socio-political context in which community participation takes place, bearing in mind that all these factors work together. Aiming to answer a fundamental question: with incapable government agencies, can residents fend for themselves in home construction, and depend on their own collective action in the provision of basic services, such as schools, health centers and infrastructure networks? And what are the best means that could facilitate people's participation in human settlements development.

The paper is based on a field research carried out by the author in 2004, in Al-Gireif East, an village that has been incorporated in Greater Khartoum due to its hyper-urbanization. Data was collected through intensive interviews with community leaders, and a structured household questionnaire.

المشاركة المجتمعية في الإسكان والتنمية العمرانية أدلة من الجريف شرق، الخرطوم، السودان

ملخص البحث

المشاركة المجتمعية (Community Participation) هي الانخراط التطوعي لمجموعة من الناس في اتخاذ القرارات المتعلقة بالعديد من النشاطات التي من شأنها أن تسهم في تحسين أوضاعهم المعيشية وزيادة دخولهم، وفي تخطيط مستوطناتهم وتنفيذها، وتزيد من إحساسهم بالمسؤولية وقدرتهم على العطاء، وغيرها من القيم النبيلة. والمشاركة المجتمعية قيمة متصلة في الثقافة السودانية، وخاصة في وادي النيل، حيث تعرف بالفزع والنفير، ويشارك الناس بعضهم البعض في الزراعة والحياة السياسية والاجتماعية وفي عملية بناء منازلهم وفي تخطيط مستوطناتهم، وفي توفير المواد أو في عملية التشييد. وبعض هذه المجتمعات تسمح بمشاركة المرأة والبعض الآخر لا يسمح بذلك. ومشاركة المستفيدين عامل مهم في نجاح مشاريع الإسكان وفي تحقيقها لرغبات واحتياجات مستخدميها. ويؤدي تجاهل المستخدمين في تخطيط وتنمية المستوطنات البشرية من قبل الحكومات والمنظمات التنموية في السودان وغيره، إلى الإخلال بهذه المشاريع وربما فشلها

إن الهدف الأساس لهذا البحث هو تقييم ديناميات المشاركة المجتمعية في الإسكان والتنمية الحضرية في السودان من حيث الموارد، والنشاطات، وطرق تحريك المجتمع، وطرق تنفيذ المشروعات، والفئات التي تشارك في هذه العمليات، والفئات التي تعزل عن المشاركة، والظروف الاجتماعية والسياسية التي يتم فيها المشروع؛ مع الأخذ في الاعتبار أن كل هذه العوامل متصلة ولا يمكن فصلها عن بعضها. ويسعى البحث للرد على سؤال جوهري ألا وهو هل يتمكن السكان من تشييد منازلهم وتوفير خدماتها الأساسية، على الرغم من الموارد الضعيفة للمؤسسات الحكومية المعنية، وذلك بالاعتماد على مبادراتهم المحلية؟ وما هي أحسن الطرق والسبل لتفعيل عملية المشاركة المجتمعية في تنمية المستوطنات البشرية؟

ويرتكز البحث على دراسة ميدانية أجرتها الباحثة في عام 2004م في الجريف شرق وهي إحدى القرى القديمة التي تم ضمها إلى الخرطوم الكبرى نتيجة للنمو الحضري الكبير فيها. وقد تم جمع البيانات عن طريق مقابلات مع قادة المجتمع المحلي، واستبيان مع عينة من الأسر

1 Introduction

Community participation represents a voluntary action carried out by community members who participate with each other in different kinds of work to achieve desired goals. Participation includes people's involvement in decision-making, in implementing programs, sharing in the benefits of development programs and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs. (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). The United Nations defined community participation in 1955 as being synonymous with community development, which is viewed as a process which creates conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation (Chambers, 1980).

According to Muhammad, community participation is a deeply rooted ancient phenomenon in the Sudanese culture and has been common especially among traditional people in rural areas and villages, where it is usually men's domain (Muhammad, 1975). In rural areas people are accustomed to plan and build their houses and neighborhoods in conformity with their tradition, culture and their living environment, and it is affected by religious beliefs, ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as laws, political environment and economic situation. While in urban areas peoples' participation depends on different factors such as cultural backgrounds, economic situation, social relations, history and age of the neighborhood.

In southern Sudan for instance, which is inhabited mainly by animist African tribes, people participate in building their huts. First women prepare the circular wooden frame, with the help of their family, friends, and neighbors, but when it comes to the upper conical part, it is usually prepared on the ground by the men of the family, then friends and neighbors collaborate to lift it on top of the wooden frame, that has been prepared earlier by women, later women gather to do the finishing touches of the hut. – e.g. plastering it with mud and cow dung.

In the northwest, which it is mostly inhabited by Arab nomadic tribes, tents form their buildings, and since their economy depends on livestock herding, wool is used as the main building material, and it is prepared and woven all year long by women, then fixed by men, after that women decorate the tents with handicraft items they make.

2 Divisions of Community Participation

Community participation in Sudan hence could be divided by area of residence into two broad categories (Figure 1):

2.1 Community participation in rural areas

It is common that families build their homes with their family, neighbors, and friends help, without local government help. Different aspects helped the continuation of community participation work in rural areas such as:

- i) *strong social capital*: that is created as a result of residents' good social relations,
- ii) *size of community*: which is small in most of these areas, allowing residents to know each other's desires and preferences, and
- iii) *use of locally available building materials and construction techniques*: this is made easy for people to participate especially in building their private homes and simple public buildings.

2.2 Community participation in urban areas

Community Participation in urban areas of Sudan could also be divided into:

2.2.1 Community Participation in the inner city: Where life is rather complicated, participation is achieved through local community groups/organizations with the help of local government agencies, while participation in private homes is limited. In the presence of high technology, imported building materials and strong by-laws, which require the help of professionals, the owner's role will be limited to participation in decision-making, materials supply and provision of free labor in rare cases.

2.2.2 Community Participation in squatter settlements: Residents of peripheral squatter settlements are mostly migrants who have moved from different rural areas in Sudan, due to natural and man made disasters creating squatter communities that have different social and cultural backgrounds. Here participation resembles part of their rural cultures. It is also the only way that helps them cope with their new living conditions, and encourages them to mingle with each other and dissolve

all their cultural differences. Because of the neglect they face and the threats of eviction and/or destruction they experience, they have to pull together with their own boot straps to build their homes and to provide basic services.

2.2.3 Community Participation in suburban villages: community participation is a natural phenomenon among residents of these communities who are rather homogeneous, because they are relatives and neighbors who knew each other for a long time. Community participation in both rural and urban areas could also be divided into two types:

- i *Spontaneous community participation:* This kind of participation is purely spontaneous and does not require the presence of any formal organization and usually ends by the completion of the project. But it strengthens the relationship between community members.
- ii *Organized community participation:* This kind of participation requires the presence of local community groups or organizations to orchestrate the cooperation between different actors involved in the process (Kafeel, 2001). It depends on money donated by community members, organizations, donor agencies or individuals, with technical advice from government officials and professionals. This also could be divided into two types:

ii.a. Small-scale community participation: This is carried directly by small neighborhood groups or sub-groups, e.g. youth group, parents group or women's groups. Examples of projects usually carried out by such groups include: building a class room in a school, remodeling of local public buildings, or carrying out different activities in the neighborhood.

ii.b. Large-scale community participation: Large scale community participation in road construction, electricity supply, or water supply, requires the collaboration of different parties i.e. community members, local government departments, and donor agencies. Community members are either self-mobilized or mobilized by their local government.

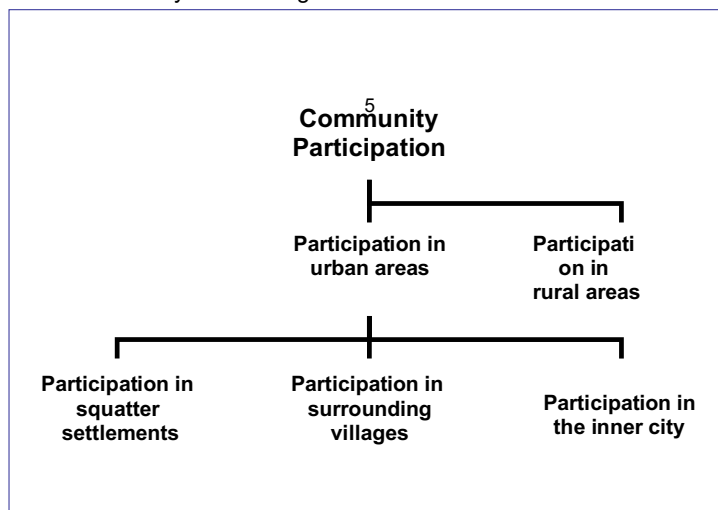


Figure (1) Divisions of Community Participation by Location

3 Community Participation in Al-Gireif East

The present paper is based on a study I have conducted in the Summer of 2004 in Al-Gireif East [a suburb of Khartoum, the capital of Sudan which has a population of 5.5 million inhabitants growing at an annual rate of 5.6% per year (Figure 2). Al-Gerief East, consists of three sections: (i) a planned neighborhood; (ii) unplanned neighborhood both of which are occupied by the *Garrafa*, who are the oldest settlers in the area, and consider themselves as the owners of Al-Gireif East; (iii) a semi-planned neighborhood, which experienced some sort of planning by local governments. People in Al-Gireif East participate in their social life, building their private homes, their public buildings or any other kind of participatory work called for by one person, a group, or different sectors from the community. For this study I have classified my data to cover peoples' participation within a small context which includes peoples' social participation as well as their participation in building their public and private buildings.

Will be add later :Commented [G1]

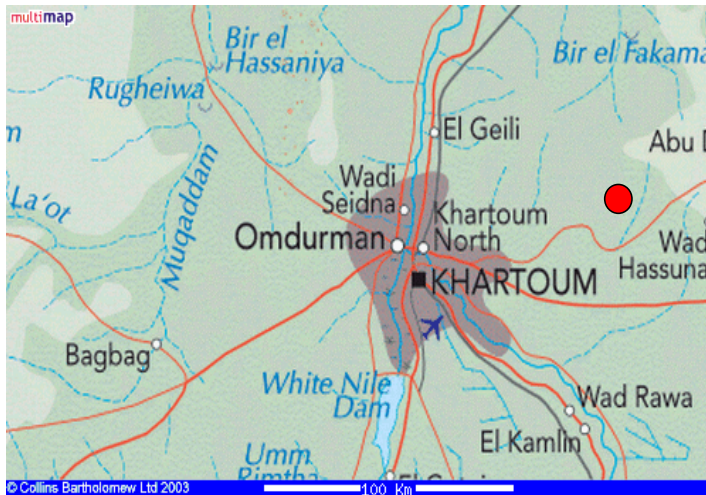


Figure (2). Location of Al-Gerief East

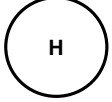
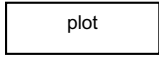
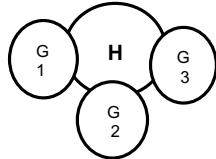
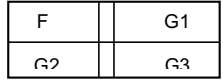
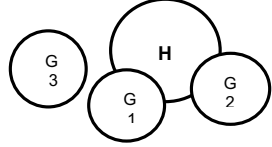
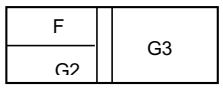
3.1 Participation in Social life

Participation in social life among Sudanese people is common especially in weddings and funerals; the degree of this participation varies from one community to another. This often takes the form of monetary contribution by relatives and friends to a family, which has either a wedding or a funeral. In Al-Gireif East, this form of social participation has become an integral part of their life. It has greatly strengthened social ties amongst them and affected the house layout in the unplanned and semi-planned sections of AL-Gireif, and helps the development of the area through community participation.

3.2 Participation in Private buildings

Because Al-Gireif residents strongly believes that newly married girls should have a secure living situation among their families, they build within their housing compounds a nucleus that consist of a bedroom, a

bathroom, and a courtyard for their married daughters to help the bride and bridegroom start off their new life on a solid and secure state. Young men, on the other hand, usually move out of their parents' houses when they get married. Figure (3) illustrates the various changes in the layout of a typical house/compound as a result of the changes in the life cycle of the family.

| Stages | Structure of the family | Changes in House layout |
|---|--|--|
| Stage No 1 Husband, wife and young children living within one quarter | Nuclear family  |  Single family plot with one entrance or two in some cases to allow a separate entrance for women |
| Stage No 2 Girls start to get married and live in separate quarters within their family compound (hosh) | Extended family  |  Plot starts to be divided into separate quarters to accommodate new changes in the family structure. |
| Stage No 3 One family moves out others expand in its place | Multi family  |  Other married girls expand their quarters in their sister's place to accommodate new changes in the family structure. |

Legend: H: house G: girls' quarters F: family house P: plot

Figure (3) Changes in Garrafas' houses layout as a result of social participation

3.3 Participation in Religious Buildings

People in Al-Gireif East have strong religious beliefs, therefore they are very active in building mosques whether inside Al-Gireif East or outside it. They are usually mobilized for this cause by their religious leaders. Two good examples of community participation in religious building are Sheikh Sarhan Mosque and Abdul Bagi complex.

3.3.1 Sheikh Sarhan Complex

Sheikh Sarhan was a prominent religious man, who was one of the first settlers in the area. He was an educated man who got a degree from Al-Azhar University at a time when there were only few educated people in the area, and Al-Azhar students and graduates were highly respected. He used to teach in a large open space for a long time, thus gained peoples' respect and love throughout the years; therefore they were easily mobilized by him to participate in building a mosque for all of them to pray in and to listen to the teachings of learned men like him. This led to an active participatory process whereby community members contributed in cash and in kind and donated their labor in excavation, brick laying and preparation of building materials and water for construction.

The mosque was built in a big plot, accommodating a number of related activities: praying, religious education, religious festivals, a tomb, and living quarters for students from outside the area. Years later the settlers decided to name the mosque as well as the neighborhood in his honor. The mosque was remodeled recently, also through participation of community members headed by their mosque committee. It was enlarged, a minaret was added, and a health center for which people were mobilized to honor one of the martyrs (*shuhada*) from the area. A shop and house were also added so as to be rented out to provide income to finance all the running costs. The living quarters of the students have been remodeled, and a shaded area has been added to accommodate a nursery school (Figure 4). These changes in activities within the mosque complex have been made according to changes in community needs, creating a new complex that accommodates various functions, which operate independently from each other. Each one has a sub-committee that oversees its affairs, but they all report to the mosque committee (*lajna*).



Figure (4) A View of Sheikh Sarhan Complex

All these changes have been accomplished according to recommendations of community members, by their help and effort and under their direct supervision. Different lessons could be learned from this complex:

- People themselves can decide what their needs are; therefore, they become flexible to accommodate changes in these needs, and to adapt new ideas.
- Technical advice by professionals is needed during participatory work to solve different problems that come up during implementation.

3.3.2 Abdul-Bagi Complex

It was initiated by one of the residents of Al-Gireif who convinced his family to donate a piece of land to build this complex to honor their late mother. He provided a design for the complex, donated most of the money needed for construction, and provided other donations from abroad. The complex consists of a mosque, health center, a house for

- Religious beliefs and community needs were the only motives through which people were mobilized for building Sarhan complex, while in Abdul Bagi complex people were mobilized by a family who wanted to build the complex to honor their mother.
- Local authorities and professionals were involved in the building process of Abdul Bagi, while on the other complex local government officials were ignored completely during decision making and the building process.

3.4 Participation Actors in Al-Gireif East

The main actors in community- initiated projects in Al-Gireif were:

3.4.1 Residents

Residents in the unplanned and semi-planned sections of Al-Gireif are divided according to their tribal backgrounds into two groups:

- (i) Al-Garrafa: who live in the unplanned neighborhood, have their own culture, history and a strong slang language. They are very proud of themselves, and their community and how they have consolidated it throughout the years through community participation.
- (ii) The 'others': or the strangers as they are called by the Garrafa, have originally moved to greater Khartoum from different parts of Sudan, then settled in Al-Gireif East forming different quarters, that are identified according to their tribal backgrounds: Shaigia, Danagla, etc. Each group has its own culture and social differences but as life goes on, these differences start to dissolve gradually, because of residents' continuous interaction and participation in building their community and sharing of public buildings.

3.4.2 Local community groups and sub-groups

Normally these have informal nature. They do not meet regularly nor do they have a formal structure and membership rules. They are formed when an issue arises. The prime examples of these groups are the school and the mosque groups.

3.4.3 Popular committees

These committees were formed at first by the government as part of the local government system and were generally accepted by existing groups and community leaders, but gradually they were rejected by residents because they became authoritarian and less responsive to people's needs. This situation created conflicts between residents and their local government. (i.e. popular committees).

3.5 Resources in Al-Gireif East

Resources are important participation ingredients that could be mobilized for the development of the area, and they include:

3.5.1. Social capital

Community participation in Al-Gireif was facilitated by residents strong social capital created among residents because of their intense social interaction, biological relations, and marriage ties.

3.5.2. Materials

Availability of a number of kilns along the Nile for baking bricks and lime owned by residents who are willing to participate by donating some of these materials was crucial for the success of community participation. Also important was the availability of a number of trucks owned by residents in the area, who are willing to transport building materials for free.

3.5.3. Free labor

Availability of a number of skilled laborers among residents, some of them are skilled in brick laying, plastering...etc., who are willing to donate some of their time for community projects.

3.5.4 Existence of a number of workshops in the area

The oldest of them is Abdullah El-Sa'aid's, who owns a steel workshop in the main market and seems to have good relationship with both the Garrafa and the migrants. A number of interviewees told me that he has

contributed most of the steel work in most participatory project around the area.

4 Obstacles to Community Participation

There are a number of obstacles that hinder community participation in Al-Gireif:

- Lack of a clear social and physical development plan in the area.
- Culture and tradition, which exclude women from contributing to participatory work, leaving out an important helping hand from contributing to development efforts.
- Lack of trust between residents, local government and popular committee members.
- Absence of monitoring and evaluation of community participation projects by professionals.

5 Evaluation of Community Participation in Al-Gireif East

Community participation in this part of the city could be classified as self-help, where community members initiate, plan, implement, maintain, monitor, evaluate and adapt new changes in their needs, without any outside or government help and permission. Community members here have a vision of their participatory projects, they do not stop when the main building is done, but go one step further and assist in providing supportive buildings that finance different activities, e.g., building a number of shops within the project to be rented out to assist with their running costs (e.g. Sarhan Complex).

Residents' social participation was a major factor in shaping different neighborhood layouts, individual house layouts, and has created a sense of dependence among family members which does not allow them to develop themselves in any direction. Culture and tradition in the area continue to exclude women from all kinds of communal work, and does not allow them to participate in any kind of public work or meetings. They participate only through food preparation for groups involved in participatory projects.

Generally speaking, the developmental history of the settlement, residents' social relations and biological ties, availability of resources, free labor and skills facilitated residents' participation in the urban development in Al-Gireif.

Community participation in the area does not satisfy all residents' needs because of lack of cooperation between residents and their local government due to conflicts over land ownership issues. Negligence of the local authority to community leaders by appointing other leaders for popular committees has led to residents' refusal to participate with the locality in any joint work, and actually ignored them completely during their participatory project.

6 How to Develop Participatory Work in Al-Gireif East

A number of steps could be taken to develop participatory work in the area:

- Preparation of a development plan through full collaboration between community members, officials, professionals and various local groups is the right way to mobilize resources and to channel disjointed efforts in the right direction.
- Involving different community members, especially women, who should be empowered by enabling them to make their own choices, and to increase their participation in decision-making at the community level.
- Establishing links and a good working relationship between local community members and local authorities by requiring officials to make an effort to: i) respect the socio-cultural context before making any approach. ii) respect and make use of local perceptions, and abilities and involve local people in setting up any development projects. iii) respect residents initiatives and choices.

Nurturing spontaneous community initiatives like the ones observed in Al-Gireif East, coupling it with professional assistance and guidance from local authorities seem to be the best formula for a sustainable urban development.

Bibliography

- Anisur, Rahman. 1993. *People Self-Development, Perspectives on Participatory Action Research*: Zed Books.
<http://www.sulibertador.com>
- Cohen, D. and Prusak, L. 2001 *In Good Company. How social capital makes organizations work*, Boston, Ma.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eltahir, Muna M. 2001. "Potentials of community participation: case studies from Diar Al-Shigia, Sudan". Sudan National Center for Research, 5th Scientific Conference: Housing and Development in Sudan. Khartum, 17-21.
- Hamdi, Nabeel. 1991. *Housing without Houses*. New York: Vann Ostrand Reinhold
- Kaafeel, Abd Allah, 2001. "The Role of Popular and Voluntary Governance in Municipal Projects with reference to Khartoum Sudan (1991-1999)". Arab Urban Development Institute.
- Moser, Caroline 1994. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. Routledge
- Oakley, Peter 1999. *Projects with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*. I LO.
- Turner, John. 1972. "Housing as a Verb," in J. Turner and R. Fisher (eds.) *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process*, New York: The MacMillan Company.