

20th AMIC Annual conference, Hyderabad, India 24-27 June 2011

*'Communicating Community Re-organisation in India: Selective Developmental Interventions in Perspective'*

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## Abstract

This paper presents a critical perspective on communication with communities within the development efforts at the grassroots level in the Indian context. It is part of an exploratory research undertaken by one of the authors (Naqvi, M) on Non-Governmental Development Organisations' (NGDOs) communication with their target communities in central India. The authors present two models, selective interaction and new involvement, developed from the data collected from semi-structured interviews of different types of NGDOs in Central India. They discuss conflicting ideals at play in the objectives and approaches of the 'key players' interacting with the community, and how these objectives are communicated to the community.

The 'key players' include the externally funded NGDOs, the State funded NGDOs, the Elected Panchayat (governing body), the Traditional Panchayat (body of elders), and, the Target (beneficiary) Community itself. Since development interventions of NGDOs within participatory approaches establish gram sabhas or similar village level organisations comprised of individuals or groups from within the community to gain cooperation into their projects, a certain re-organisation is an inevitable part of ground NGDO's interaction with the target community. The new structures that emerge get modified and strengthened as the project moves on, so the social, economic, and political landscape changes significantly over the duration of intervention(s).

The first model Selective Interaction maps major stated objectives which affect the key players' interaction with the community. Conflicting approaches are identified such as political agenda driven activities of the elected Panchayat; Free market, corporate culture driven activities of the externally funded NGDOs; state funded NGDO's activities driven by compliance/control/monitoring of Government Schemes; and culture driven activities of the traditional Panchayat. Some questions are asked within the context of this model including (1) whether the agents of change (key players) recognise the consequences of developmental interventions with highly selective objectives, which may or may not be mutually compatible (2) and if they are aware, it raises further questions in the area of preparedness for the challenges emerging from this non-integrated approach evident from data. Such questions bring into focus the way communication is managed around sharing this awareness (where it exists with the agents) with the target community, how much is shared and to what end. Finally, where no such communication exists, what might be the reasons for not sharing of this awareness with the community?

The key players at the grassroots level are mapped with the range of other larger players who have a visible stake in development of the community. This second model was introduced in part as the new involvement model (Naqvi, 2004) as a modification of the 'community agency' model (proposed by Lyons et al 2001) and adjusted to the Indian context. This model attempts to look at the larger picture and identifies (1) the ongoing or eventual isolation of certain players (2) the structural constraints on key players acting through linguistic and non-linguistic means (3) Media interest at various levels of development stakeholders, and (4) information flows

Considering some of the anecdotal accounts of research interviewees, the discussion finally reflects on whether developmental interventions within the participatory development paradigm genuinely seek the integration of the local community(ies) into the global economy, or that community development is a transitory objective –the longer term objective being seamless integration of local resources into the global economy.

## Introduction

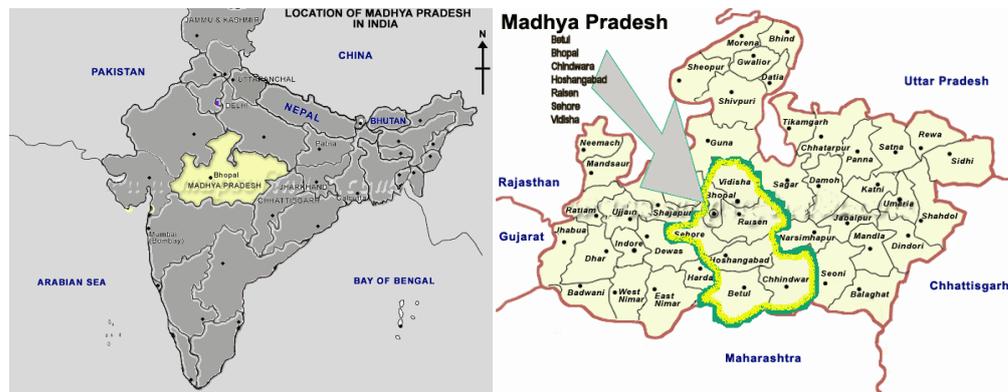
This paper is part of a research conducted in the field of Development Communication with the objective of exploring Non-Governmental Development Organisations' (NGDOs) perception of their own communication with their beneficiary communities, and with other actors on the development scene, including state, local administration and external (international) funding sources. One of the objectives for the main research was to interpret the significance and role of various actors from field NGDOs' perspective of their communication to get an insight into the *participatory approach* as in practice at the grassroots level. NGDOs need to mobilise communities to encourage participation in development projects. 'Mobilisation' has been listed in early literature on development communication (Thompson & Perschuk, 1992; Minkler, 1990) as a process by which community members become aware of problem and identify it as a priority for community action. This mobilisation, as it moves into problem assessment and analysis at the community level, ushers in a degree of re-organisation –an arrangement distinct from the one that existed *prior* to the development intervention.

The authors present two models to understand community mobilisation and re-organisation, as informed by the data collected through research. The first—Selective Intervention Model (Figure 2), brings into context the key players interacting with the community in development. A certain externality is evident in the mobilisation and subsequent re-organisation of beneficiary communities. The discussion points to the implications of having a multiplicity of development *agents* in a certain community/area, each seeking to mobilise community participation within their specific development intervention and/or components thereof.

The second—New Involvement Model (Figure 5), traces the key players to their parent ('partner') organisations and beyond into the global context. This can be used to ask other basic questions, such as: Do the communities who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the development activities in the third world countries have a say in the way these activities are designed around them and the way communities are *initiated* into the process? Do they have alternatives between *status quo* (their current socio-cultural bindings) and becoming a 'developed' society as visualised by the proponents of development interventions? If the ultimate goal of development activities is integration into the world economy, to what extent are these activities *agency* driven, and as such, what could be some of the implications for participatory development and communication?

## Research area, data & respondents

### Figure 1 Map of the Region



Eight ground level, Non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) were contacted in seven adjacent districts of South-Central India, and data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews organising field trips to the selected region (Figure 1), to gain an inner perspective on the relationships they have with their funding agencies ('partners'), and their target community(ies). A co-author of this paper, Munawwar Naqvi, is originally from this region. The major advantage of this to research was the researcher's familiarity with the Hindi language and its local dialects as also the local culture, alongside the researcher's previous experience working as a consultant with local NGDOs and therefore being able to contextualise and interpret the frequent 'NGOspeak' occurring in the data. The narrative interpretation also reveals the roles of various other actors at the community level and the complexity of constraints within which NGDOs and/or community organisations work. An overview of data reflecting these roles from NGDOs' perspective is given in Table 1.

## Participatory Development and Participatory Communication

It is assumed that participatory development communication involves dialectical processes with full participation of people in all phases of a programme: design, development, implementation, and evaluation (Khadka, 2000). With a slightly different ordering Uphoff (1985), lists four ways of participation as seen at various stages of a development project, namely, 'implementational' stage, 'evaluation' stage, 'benefit' stage, and 'decision-making' phases of the project.

It would seem that participation in decision-making would be the most empowering for the communities where development interventions are sought, and that such participation may be the most important one to promote (Bessette & Rajasunderam, 1994). However, the respondents to this research (NGDOs) have generally stated that 'people do not know' or 'do not have the needed skills' to make decisions for themselves, and therefore the development organisations need to mobilise and organise them to be engaged in implementation and evaluation stages of the project. The research respondents also contend that a great amount

of resources will need to be directed into such 'capacity building' to enable the communities to fully participate in decision-making processes and that these are not easily measurable to be put into practice at the stages where initial development interventions are needed with much more urgency. The research respondents argue that the 'other' ways of participation is where these capacities can be developed within the community to enable them to make their own decisions towards securing their own sustained development (data).

This approach of NGDOs lends itself to criticism in the context of empowerment; since, to harness the 'energy' of movements local organisations should have a say if there is to be a programme at all, the issues it should deal with, its operationalisation and evaluation. The ideal being providing help to sub-*micro* level (village) organisations, until they become an independent (NGO-like) organisation managed by the beneficiaries themselves. "Local organizations should be enabled to seek information that is needed and to initiate and control linkages with whatever agency can supply the information or other resources needed." (White, 2004, p8). Another criticism (Cleaver, 1999), demonstrates a paradox in the structuring of organisations implementing development interventions: "The aim of many development interventions is apparently to establish or support formalized community structures which most clearly mirror bureaucratic structures. (A paradox surely, when part of the justification for participatory approaches is that they avoid the shortcomings of development delivered by state bureaucracies?)" (p601).

## The Key Players

Generally, there are four distinct type of organisations observed on the ground (interacting with communities) in the research domain in particular and development sector in India in general. These organisations and their general thematic approaches are introduced here and represented in the Selective Intervention Model (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Selective Intervention Model**



At first glance it might appear as if all the agents fit very well on the whole, and as such a comprehensive development programme is being delivered, which covers almost all aspects of human well-being. However, in actual fact it is not so, for (a) the lack of cooperation and trust between agents and, (b) the divergent approaches they employ to engage the community.

## **The Externally Funded Non-Governmental Development Organisations**

These are organisations which are not funded by the State or Central Government. Their funding sources are either International Funding Agencies or ancillaries of international organisations such as the World Bank, the UN, or charitable organisations such as Worldvision etc. Increasingly, some large private sector enterprises have also been funding development programmes within the umbrella of 'corporate responsibility', 'protecting the environment', and the like. They usually have better funds at their disposal compared to state funded NGDOs. Data suggests that they seek long term relationship either way—with their funding sources and with the beneficiary communities. The reason cited is that with short term projects it is difficult to assess impact of their development intervention and that any change brought about may be short lived and not sustainable. Their institutional development also, is associated with longer term funding relationships. "An international ecology of organisations has developed that is dependent on aid flows." (Davies, 1997, p614).

Townsend (1999), views the mushrooming NGOs as a 'transnational community' while highlights their dependency on national state, multilateral agencies or private foundations. In the researched area, they usually derive from educated urban class, and are rarely from within the development domain itself, which is predominantly rural. "As for their impact on poverty, many NGDOs may uncharitably be described as job creation for the middle class." (Townsend, 1999, p614). However, they claim to be better trained and networked, and hence prove better managers with respect to the projects undertaken in the development sector. A certain corporate rationality—probably related to the nature of their funding—is visible in their day-to-day operations as also the planning processes, and the same rationality trickles down to the village level committees (*gram sabhas*) they set up for achieving the project goals.

They interpret 'development' for the communities and mobilise support towards certain components of the programmes they seek to implement. Although, a majority of their activity is oriented towards economic development—as is evident from the reports sent to their funding sources—they claim to be working for socio-economic change. They believe that, 'no social change can come about without a fundamental change in the economics' (data), and that 'livelihood sector' tends to draw most of their resources once they begin to work with the community. This concept of economics being at the heart of social change, can be traced upwards to the funding sources, "Donor agencies often state that all aid is poverty reducing, if

only as the aid promotes growth which is necessary for sustainable poverty reduction. “ (White, 1999, p516).

### **The State Funded Non-Government Development Organisations**

The information available on State Funded NGDOs comes from the data obtained in the researched area, where they have been seen as organisational entities distinct from Externally Funded NGDOs. In most development literature these organisations have not been dealt in mutually exclusive terms from other NGDOs. These, as indicated by data, are not part of administration, but usually, their source of funding is a specific government scheme like various in the health or education sectors, or for example, in government rehabilitation efforts necessitated by major dam/road construction projects; or government planning: For instance, a survey or a study may be required by the government for which a certain education/skill level is required to work with the affected communities. They usually derive from the educated urban/semi urban class and therefore a certain externality can be associated with them, just as with externally funded organisations.

Their operations seem more bureaucratic, i.e., less flexible—being possibly a result of interaction with their funding sources—government or one of its administrative agent, as also the limited nature of available resources. Their interaction with communities has been generally observed as being on a much shorter term than that of externally funded NGDOs.

They are more overtly supportive of the Elected Panchayat and its activities, and hence inadvertently fit into the political spectrum. However, they prefer to be known as social development organisations.

### **The Elected Panchayat**

The Elected Panchayat is a democratically constituted governing body at the village, block and district level. This has come about through the government's efforts at decentralising certain administrative functions at the district level. The rationale for *Panchayati Raj Institutions* (PRIs) has been a much discussed issue in post-independent India and by late 1980s came to be seen as a priority for people's participation and mobilisation of local resources for national development. “And this has been sought to be done by building on the remnants of traditional village Panchayats which have lost their collective strength and communitarian character by now.” (Adhikari, 2008 p132).

The support base of Elected Panchayat is both political—being elected through a democratic process, and administrative –being a unit of local administration. They mobilise and organise community on political lines to sustain power at the community level as well as to gain compliance with the policies of the administration. Their establishment has been criticised as potential decentralisation of nepotism and corruption, mainly because of being given grants

and administrative powers in the absence of responsibility for raising resources. “The system with its arithmetic logic, created opportunities for dividing people and provided the incentives for groups to acquire control of power and resources of the government.” (Gangrade, 2000, p72-73). A study, which sought a sociological understanding of the workings of Panchayati Raj System in the neighbouring state of Orissa in India (Adhikari, 2008, p137), found that, so far as communities’ participation in planning and decision making was concerned 91.9% non-functionaries of Elected Panchayat did not participate.

However, in the recent years, increasing number of projects run by NGDOs are being subjected to the purview of the Elected Panchayat, in the hope that this will bring more harmony into the efforts of various NGDOs working with the communities. However, this is viewed by respondent NGDOs as giving an upper hand to the aspirations of newly constituted political elite who take credit for all the hard work done by NGDOs.

### **The Traditional Village Panchayat**

This is a body of elders, which traditionally used to be in almost every village or in a close cluster of a few villages. “Traditionally, Panchayats have operated at two levels in the villages. The first level was that of the caste Panchayats and the second was *Gram* Panchayat.” (Behar & Kumar 2002, p2). As pointed out by research respondents the Traditional Panchayat,

“should not be seen as limited to a caste or sect’. ‘Occasionally, a number of Traditional Panchayats are seen to come together to work on a local (usually culture related) issues, and thus can be considered as having extensive networks’ (data).

The Traditional Panchayat does not usually have a fixed term but has an unwritten agenda—maintaining/sustaining local culture among other things. It does not have fixed budgets or other resources like the Elected Panchayat, and generally operates on local charity and/or penalties and volunteer support

“Gandhi’s doctrine for nation building and national development was based on the concept of a confederation of villages; the model derived its roots from the traditional *Panchayat* system.” (Behar & Kumar 2002, p2). In recent times, since the promotion of the Panchayati Raj and creations of Elected Panchayats, the Traditional Panchayat has been losing its standing with respect to the local issues, although it can be demonstrated that this traditional body still has power over the cultural lives of people. It is capable of mobilizing communities (usually on cultural issues) due to its historic significance, and it is still considered a storehouse of social capital. And since this traditional body is referred to by NGDOs in their accounts of establishing rapport with the community—epithets ranging from ‘elders’ ‘support base’ to ‘gatekeepers’ (data)—it cannot be ignored as an agent of development.

## Community and the nature of organising forces

Participatory approaches would list the community itself as a key player in its own development. However, in the Selective Intervention model being presented here (Figure 2), the community comes out largely as the subject of change, around which the agents of change (NGDOs) design their development intervention. In fact the perceived need for intervention itself assumes that the community is not considered capable of developing its economic prospects or social welfare or political thinking.

The various forces acting on the communities in which development interventions have been initiated, can also be plotted in terms of linguistic and delinguistified media, applying Habermas's (1981; 1987, cited in Friedland, 2001) comparison of *lifeworld* and *system*. There is (a) *Lifeworld* –social integration via communicative action, manifest in personality culture and society; and (b) *System*, which is integration via delinguistified steering media of economy and political system. Friedland (2001) has argued the element of his 'strong version of democracy that is deliberative and participatory' including certain 'normative and practical criteria' (Friedland, 2001, p370-371).

The authors summarise these criteria discussed at length in Friedland (2001) as (a) Opportunity to deliberate in public to discuss and formulate issues and problems that are important to them. (b) Possibility of these public deliberations of leading to the formation of public agendas (i.e., talk that can be directed toward a broader public sphere). (c) Emergence of public agendas from this public sphere and the relationship of these agendas with the problems citizens raise, (d) Opportunity of participating in and formulating their solutions. (e) Publicity and monitoring of these solutions overtime, so that citizens are aware of and able to decide for themselves whether and how proper solutions have been chosen and problems wholly or partly solved. If not, the cycle can begin again.

Figure 3 visualises linguistic and non-linguistic steering media on either ends of a continuum. The key players in development occupy a certain position on this continuum with respect to the processes employed in their functioning, i.e., their orientation in terms of linguistic and delinguistified media. The Traditional Panchayat and similar institutions can be placed towards one extreme whereas the economic and political interests can be placed on the other extreme. There will be some—comparatively recent institutions—occupying various middle positions. It should be noted that although NGDOs and Elected Panchayat appear to be in the same general position on this continuum, the difference is between the major objectives of each –NGDOs oriented more towards economic change (being a convenient device for the interests seated high up along the hierarchy of funding sources), whereas the Elected Panchayat seeking mobilisation and frequent re-organisation of the communities for political interests, regionally as well as nationally.

**Figure 3: Identifying *linguistic* and *de-linguistified* steering media at the local level**



One way of explaining their position in Figure 3, can be the fact that their point of convergence with the community resides in the linguistic-communicative domain. However, for the communities (at least, at this stage) it does not translate into becoming a 'communicatively integrated community' as in Friedland (2001), if only because any interpretation and negotiation between the *lifeworld* and *system* is through mediators/agents of development rather than the subjects of development themselves. That these agents (e.g., NGDOs, Elected Panchayat) are needed by interests residing on the right hand side of the continuum (Figure 3), also finds bearing in Habermas. According to Friedland, "For Habermas, even if these subsystems of money and power are largely disconnected from the norms and values of the *lifeworld*, they still depend on it for their reproduction." (Friedland, 2001, p372). Clearly, there is an 'instrumental rationality' in play, which sustains the NGDOs and the Elected Panchayat at the *micro* level, and the locus of this instrumentality is deeply rooted in the system. This instrumentality becomes more visible in the New Involvement Model in Figure 5, where they can also be seen as conduits through which structural constraints of the system converge towards the community.

### Scenarios with the multiplicity of development agents

Some of the scenarios that are frequently cited in the data, within the context of 'avoiding development component overlap' are discussed here: In some instances, NGDOs negotiate and cooperate with other NGDOs already working in the target area. However, this may not always be appreciated by the funding sources. Some NGDOs say that a way out for being able to work in any area where you see the need, regardless of other organization working on another issue in the vicinity, is to secure funding from multiple donors so that one of them cannot dictate all your actions.

Another approach is to avoid undertaking development interventions in locations where there is another NGDO already operating even if the development component is different. Many reasons are given for this approach: (a) It becomes difficult to evaluate whether it is your own

efforts that are bringing about a certain change or it is some other dynamics –prominent being the intervention by another organization working in the same region, (b) getting the community to participate in ‘too many activities’ and concentrate on ‘too many issues’ at the same time, and (c) the community is already on record somewhere (at the funding organization or administrative level) for being ‘touched’ by another organization and a different kind of funding.

Some respondents believe that it was preferable to engage another section of the community in the same geographical location and wait out for the other NGDO(s) to move out of the region.

Another practice evident from data is to undertake another distinct or complementary development component in the same community –another need, which will fit into the programme already being run by another NGDO. This happens when an NGDO is directed by the administration or their funding agents to complement a government or other development initiative. This approach is seen more with State Funded NGDOs. It may be appropriate to mention here that usually State Funded NGDOs do not have a choice in whether to go into a particular community –they frequently have a government designated project to work in a certain area and they need to implement it regardless of who else (institutionally or individually) is working in the target community, on whatever development component—common or other.

Moreover, NGDOs and their development interventions are not homogeneously spread out over districts or states. Data also indicates that in most cases a development intervention by an NGDO is usually a one-off chance for a certain community to move towards changing their social or economic conditions. Two important questions, borrowed from Laverack (2001) are reproduced in this context: “Can all the domains be equally supported by outside agents in a programme context?” and, “How are the operational domains inter-linked?” (Laverack, 2001, p142).

The general response to this from NGDOs is that there is no guarantee of a comprehensive programme ever reaching a community.

“We have A, B, C components in our programmes and we are willing to take these to a community. Some other organisation (not in the vicinity) may have P, Q, R components, which the community may need desperately, but we can undertake only that for which we have been agreed funding by our sources ... and we cannot guarantee that they (other NGDO) will decide to come into our region, whether now or after we move on, and take the initiative for those missing components.” (data)

In the context of cooperation, one of the respondent NGDOs said that,

“A sense of respect for fellow organizations still persists. But for being transparent in policies, programmes and strategies, most of the NGDOs do not have a kind of sharing relationship.” (data).

Networking is a much talked about component in social sector. It is felt that NGDOs should assemble under one umbrella and enable the communities to raise voices for their rights, and sometimes the organizations themselves should come to the fore to enter into dialog with district or state administration on people’s issues—this is rarely seen. One respondent said that,

“Some organizations feel that, why they should join in a certain action which is not their community’s priority. There are many factors related to success and failure of social networking amongst NGDOs.”(data).

Another respondent said,

“Under a larger umbrella, we have failed to come together. Madhya Pradesh had a federation of voluntary organisations –the difficulty was that we could not sustain because most of the representatives were running their own organisations and couldn’t give time to the network... moreover, the perception of the members was that others used the network for their own promotion... it was a bad experience.” (data)

Yet another response was that,

“Yes. Cooperation between NGDOs can be seen in the funding networks. One organization [usually a corporate NGO] heads the group and receives the funds from the donor and then distributes it to other partners as per the agreed norms.” (data).

Such responses (as cited above from the data) can be interpreted as a general lack of mutual trust between NGDOs, alongside their self assessed need to run their own prioritised programmes in areas/communities of their choosing. However, they do interact on a different platform and mostly talk about, their successes, Government apathy towards social sector etc. and try to explore opportunities for national or international funding.

The lack of strategic cooperation between NGDOs can be traced upwards to the larger (parent) NGOs and international organisations, as has been discussed by Servaes (2007) in the context of UN Agencies’ differing perspectives and conflicting outcomes “The aforementioned theoretical changes in the perspective on development communication (modernization, dependency, multiplicity), have also reached the level of policy-makers. As a result, different methodologies and terminologies have evolved, which often make it difficult for agencies, even though they share a common commitment to the overall goals of development communication, to identify common ground, arrive at a full understanding of

each other's objectives, or to cooperate effectively in operational projects. Consequently, it is difficult for development organizations in general and UN agencies in particular to reach a common approach and strategy." (Servaes, 2007 p487). So the complexities arising out of multiplicity of agents and approaches may be there for some time.

## Mapping the development agents in the global perspective

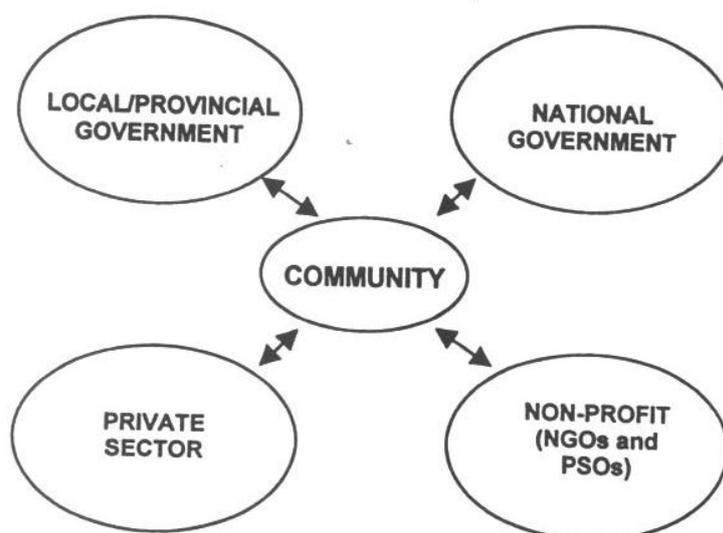
It will be appropriate here to see the development initiatives on the ground –key players represented in the Selective intervention Model (Figure 2), mapped in the context of national and global forces which have a direct bearing on these initiatives. Regarding the interpretation of the local in the global context, Servaes (2001) builds on Tomlinson (1994) and Giddens (1994) for one, that "our day-to-day experience of locales is certainly structured by forces which are, ultimately, global" (Tomlinson 1994, p.153, cited in Servaes, 2001, p21); and two that "globalisation does not only concern with the creation of large-scale systems, but also the transformation of the local, and even personal context of social experience" (Giddens, 1994, p4-5, cited in Servaes, 2001, p20).

We have used the concept of 'Geometries of Development' (Shah, & Wilkins, 2006, cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006) to actually plot the major national and international stakeholders in development in the light of data obtained through the research. However, it should be born in mind, as Shah & Wilkins point out that "the meaning of development is inherently unstable, and institutional actors in positions of power try to *fix* or stabilise it in ways that promote their own interests" (Shah & Wilkins, 2006, cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006, p556). They also criticise the dominant geometry of development in that this "implies a vectorial relationship whereby interventionist policies and programmes, created at various institutional points' are projected as in 'the best interests of their target communities" (Shah & Wilkins, 2006 cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006, p558). The New Involvement Model introduced here, which attempts to map the interconnectedness of the local and global actors, supports the criticism that the 'dominant geometry' (Shah & Wilkins, 2006) is still very much a part of the development scene.

The New Involvement Model (Figure 5) was introduced in part (Naqvi, 2004) as a modification of the 'Community Agency' model (proposed by Lyons *et al*, 2001, p280-281) and adjusted to the Indian context. Lyons, *et al* developed two ideal type archetypical models for developmental projects at two ends of the spectrum. One (Figure 4a) characterising De Beer's (1996) 'empowerment' paradigm, as distinct from community participation suggests a project which is owned in all sense by the community, and as such the community interacts directly with all other agents (Lyons *et al*, 2001, p279). The other (Figure 4b) represents the 'involvement' paradigm (De Beer, 1996, as cited in Lyons *et al* 2001, p 280). In this model of development the state can be seen as initiating and managing the project –The community is

visibly in touch with the contractors (private sector) and the provincial government, but not directly in contact with the national government or with non-profit organisations.

**Figure 4a. Ad hoc project structure—introduced by Lyons, *et al* (2001, p280) as the community agency model.**



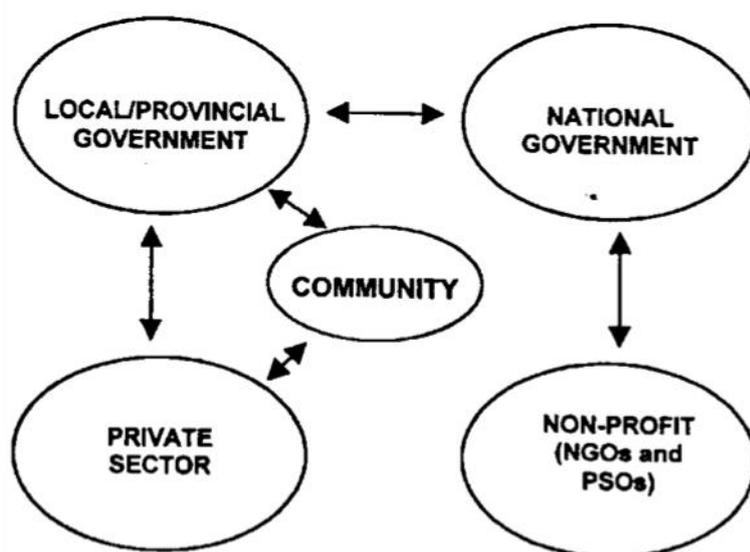
In the Indian context, data points strongly to the fact that the 'target community' of a particular development initiative is not in direct contact with the private sector suppliers of services and cannot be said to be in direct contact with the state government unless the Elected Panchayat is conflated as meaning to be either the 'community' itself or state government itself. This is problematic for a visual representation because, although the Elected Panchayat is a democratically elected body, it is reported (data) that once elected, it acts more as a unit of administration—driven by the policy and larger political interests—hence a distinct entity on the development scene.

Again, drawing up the Indian context, Figure 4b model of the 'involvement' paradigm (Lyons, *et al*, 2001 p281) does not fit the information obtained from research data without conflating the 'community' with the Elected Panchayat. Adhikari, (2008, p137) quoted earlier in the discussion, also points out that major decisions are made by the Elected Panchayat, more often in the absence of non-functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Therefore, the Elected Panchayat needs to be represented on its own between the community and the private sector (contractors, service suppliers etc.), and between the community and the state government.

Figure 4b –Lyons's *et al*, (2001, p281) Involvement model, represents non-profit organisation as one block interacting with the National Government. But in the Indian context, non-profit organisations are of many different types, interacting with the Community and the various

levels of corporate and political structures. The New Involvement Model in Figure 5 allows representing both the State Funded NGDOs and Externally Funded NGDOs mapped separately, aligned with their parental and other 'partnership' affiliations all the way to the international organisations and the global corporates.

**Figure 4b. Bureaucratic Project Structure—introduced by Lyons, *et al* (2001, p281) as the Involvement Model.**



The Traditional Panchayat, identified earlier as a key player in Selective Intervention Model (Figure 2), is also mapped in the New Involvement Model (Figure 5) as a separate entity, closest to the community. Although, this traditional organisation of the community gets increasingly marginalised, even through the life-cycle of development interventions, it has been acknowledged by the research respondents, that it still holds considerable sway within the community—a reason for NGDOs to keep them persuaded to elicit a desired level of community participation. During local elections too, various political interests vie with each other to get a favourable response from the Traditional Panchayat. Beyond this, the Traditional Panchayat is not seen by other key players as of major consequence, whereas, in the old order of things, they used to be primarily the mediators of the community's resources and custodian of the environment/habitat.

The triangulation between 'habitat/environment', 'traditional/cultural authority' and 'community' was the known social structure in the old order of things. This has been mapped on the other side of the major development agents. The triangle so formed can also be seen as the boundary of local and the global. However, this becomes contestable, when with increasing privatisation at the national level, the natural resources—being more lucrative for the private sector—tend to gain the dynamics of the global forces comparatively faster than the community.

Referring back to the 'Geometries of Development' (Shah & Wilkins, 2006, cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006, p556), it is easy to see in Figure 5 that (a) the 'key points'—institutional sites where development programmes and policies are made—are distinctly separated from the community, (b) the 'spaces'—various kinds of spatial actors, nationally and globally speaking—may not be fully realised by the community, and (c) the vectors – linkages among institutions and spatial actors—do not appear to connect the community equitably with other actors.

In the light of discussion above, it may not be entirely appropriate to attach the term 'Participatory' with this Model; and as such it may best be called *The New Involvement Model*, primarily because at this stage the loci of both *change initiative* and *deliberative initiative* reside outside the community.

**The New Involvement Model attempts to bring into focus certain key issues:**

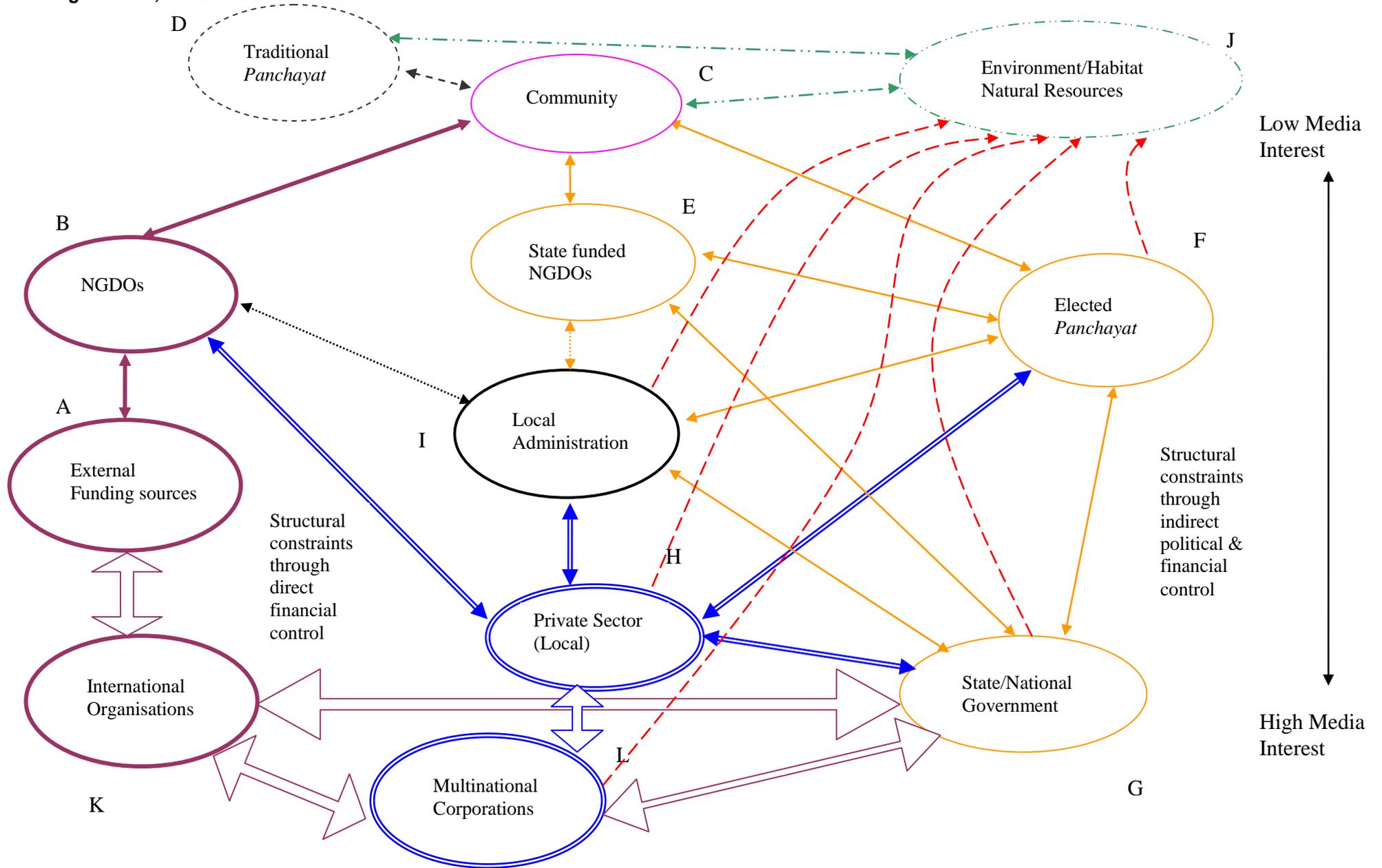
It represents the non-contact of community level organizations and self-help groups with the funding sources, service organisations, private sector and administration. This appears to have a direct bearing on the inability of the community to decide for itself its own future with respect to its own environment/habitat and available natural resources.

It focuses on multi-agency issues –It may be/not be preferable for some actors to work with other actors. For instance, the result oriented institutional culture of Externally Funded NGOs versus the perceptively bureaucratic culture of Elected Panchayats. Also evident is the ongoing or eventual marginalisation of certain players in the development sector such as the Traditional Panchayat and other historical groupings. This may be so because so far as the development initiatives by NGOs is concerned these traditional groupings are not seen congruent with the community nor are they seen as part of other institutional players in development.

It underlines structural constraints flowing down through the hierarchy of larger interests, and acting on the key players on the ground, through linguistic and de-linguistified means of change—In the hierarchy of NGOs through direct financial control, and in the hierarchy of Panchayati Raj Institutions, through indirect political and financial control.

It also represents 'Information Flows' –whereas the nature of information is more project implementation oriented downward and the reports going out may be more representative of the 'readiness' of the community in the consumer society or for further structural changes associated with government planning.

**Figure 4: Marginalisation of Traditional Panchayat, NGOs and Elected Panchayat as re-organisation forces, community's non contact with Funding sources, Administration & Private Sector.**



It maps mass media interest in the developmental activities, which is evidenced in the data, to be more oriented towards the corporate and administration level than at the grassroots level changes. In arguing for a call for participatory research which is in tune with 'more representative communication systems', "many researchers have expressed the need for an alternative communication system that is democratic, participatory and decentralised and that is rooted in masses who are currently marginalised by a communication system that serves the preponderant interests of a transnational corporations and the dominant internal economic and political power groups."(Nyamnjoh, 2000, cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006, p604).

Finally, it points to the underlying interests of Corporate sector (local and multinational) and the Government sector –shown in dotted curved red lines appearing to converge on the natural resources in the vicinity of the community; It may initiate a debate on whether the developmental activity initiated by either source may be employing the linguistic point of convergence with the community through NGOs for achieving objectives which are more suited for business and politics than for the betterment of community's socio-economic prospects. If that were so, then the development initiative can be seen as a global investment in the creation and management of natural resources and in producing semi-skilled labour at the local level. And by extension, the participatory communication and development exercise can be interpreted as converging towards 'labour relations' activity of the future.

## Community re-organisation

The issues of mobilising the community towards development interventions and subsequent re-organisation may be seen as a complex relationship between the agents and the subjects. The externality of NGOs, coupled with the lack of education in the target communities and poor awareness seem to be intertwined – most communities at the initial stages of development intervention have known little else than the *status quo*. Respondent NGOs have illustrated the way they generally begin interaction with the community as,

"We draw a social map of the village –where the school is, the hand pump is, the power supply is, the new *pucca* road is being constructed etc. This brings out an acknowledgement from them that something is not right and that they need get involved in NGOs' programmes to be able to create more facilities in our side of the village."(data).

This kind of approach initiates the need for re-organising to achieve certain economic and social objectives. However, the associated political implications cannot be ruled out which would manifest itself in future. The respondent NGOs mention 'winning over' the Traditional Panchayat to be able 'to make inroads into the community' however, in the course of their progressively direct interaction with the community and their mobilising it towards the new socio-economic targets (especially by the time the development projects reach their benefit stage), a new kind of collective and associated leadership begins to emerge in the beneficiary community. While, this may not be in immediate conflict with the Traditional Panchayat for deep rooted

historic and cultural reasons, it does contribute to taking away some of the erstwhile influence of the Traditional Panchayat and isolating it further from the developmental activities.

Such observations on the ground can be related with Servaes's (1999) emphasis that culture was the arena of the struggle for empowerment, in part because the new nations and movements for empowerment have themselves insisted that affirmation of independent cultural identity is the heart of the matter (Servaes, 1999). The 'dignity and value of one's own identity', 're-evaluation of local culture', and 're-signifying cultural institutions' should –as advocated by current research on communication for development (White, 2004, p21), be affirmed by empowerment in order that one's own cultural capital achieves greater recognition and is valued more. However, in the context of the observation cited above, it appears that culture is being (or is deemed to be) compromised in more ways than is discussed in current literature.

Also from the governance perspective, it cannot be ignored that an inevitable outcome of development interventions by NGDOs, is the evolution of a new class at the sub-*micro* level, which, with eventually acquired networking potential, may grow into a challenge for the other (political) kind of elite –the latter created by the devolution of administrative powers by the state under the Panchayati Raj system. The Externally Funded NGDOs appear to be aware of this issue but maintain that most of their current interaction with the community and the reciprocal participation was limited by,

“The community's not being in a position (from the perspective of awareness) to be involved in decision making processes and that for some time they were/will be taking part in implementational, evaluative, and benefit stages of the NGDO—introduced project(s). That by the time, the political aspirations emerging from the social change linked to the economic development efforts by the NGDOs take effect, the external organisation may have moved out of the region.” (Data)

The above example aptly illustrates the externality of re-organisation forces at the community, while also points to the limitation of NGDOs commitment, the latter being bounded by project-term or other criteria imposed by the funding sources.

In the Panchayati Raj system (73rd Amendment –Panchayati Raj Adhiniyam, 1992) where certain administrative powers and governance are being moved to the local, the Elected Panchayat is emerging as the overseer of development activity at the local level through both government and non-government agents. This has been received by the development community with mixed reactions. Some NGDO respondents say that this eventually allows people to evaluate/view comprehensively their efforts for their own well-being undertaken by a multitude of agents at the community level. It is intended to bring under one umbrella all the aspects of their social, economic and political aspirations and they (communities) can be more aware and start participating in the decision-making processes. However, there is fear of certain groups being disadvantaged in both –the new socio-political structure, and by participatory approaches as practised by NGDOs as has been discussed above in the context of Traditional Panchayat. “Participation involves the more equitable sharing of both political and economic power, which often decreases the advantage of certain groups. Structural change involves the redistribution of power.” (Servaes, 2001).

## Concluding notes: Identifying tensions

“With NGOization of the local public sphere, established communication processes change and sources of power and influence on the local level shift.” (Lang, 2000)

If this is interpreted as creating new structures, at least two kinds of structural changes are seen to be occurring: One at the *micro* socio-economic level (groups in village periphery, small human habitats) that is initiated by externally funded NGDOs and that has latent political aspirations. The other is at the *micro-meso* political level (village, block and district), which tends to overtake the gains made by the former. Another example from data endorses this view,

“The lack of social networking amongst the NGDOs is undermining the voices of community based organizations. To understand it more clearly, NGDOs in their respective areas institute the grassroots organizations such as Self Help Groups, Farmers Forum, Elders’ forum etc. and build their capacities to raise voices for their basic human rights. These forums/groups do their task and make representations at Block or Tehsil level. To influence rules/regulations/norms or policies at district and state level it becomes the responsibility of NGDO Network to have dialogue with the government. But the lack of understanding, cooperation, and sacrifice at NGO level leads to non formation of a network or disintegration of a network if ever formed. Thus invalidating the efforts of the community based institutions.” (data)

There is no instance in the data collected from the respondent NGDOs suggesting that beneficiary communities have been apprised either at the onset of development interventions or during the project phase, or towards completion of the project that there were political implications of the socio-economic changes. In fact, there is a hint of a utopian behaviour when the village level *gram sabhas* constituted by NGDOs are at work on the developmental projects. The communities, therefore, do not anticipate how the stronger political forces will play upon the changing turf. Another drawback associated with in the approaches of NGDOs appears to be that while NGDOs intend to mediate and manage the communities in relation to the funding sources and service agencies –being careful not to expose them directly to these agents, on the grounds of their lack of awareness and associated vulnerability, the communities are however ‘expected’ to manage their political affairs by themselves, which may actually contribute to putting them at risk of conflict with powerful interests and jeopardise their safety.

The processes outlined here in the case of central India are ongoing, and it still remains to be seen how they play out in the longer term, but at this stage a tension is indicated –initiated for most part by the institutions involved in the development sector. This tension can also be viewed from the perspective of organisational culture. Lewis, *et al* (2003) see a challenge of analysis where multi-agency projects are involved. “If cultures of organisations matter—as we have argued they do—then the matrix or organisational cultures and their interactions clashes, and commensurability will contribute to explanations of the success or failure of particular development interventions. In the examples of projects researched by our team, it was found in all

cases that *success* was impaired by a fragmentation of meaning between actors embedded in different organisations.”(Lewis *et al*, 2003, p554).

Even so, we may only be looking at part picture if we are just taking into consideration the interactional clashes between the external agents or sub-agents. This we argue because it will be hard to deny that prior to development interventions by NGOs, the community was organised in some traditional way, so that there already was a structure within the community and any interactional clash of external agents with that existing ‘community organisation’ seems to be either unaccounted for in most reports or passed on as resistance to development initiatives by a certain groups—the latter almost always finding credibility in the context of India where the *traditional* is equated with endorsing *status quo*—particularly the caste system & associated negativities. “While conceding the fact that in the present climate characterised by an accelerated assault on anything and everything remotely believed to be ‘traditional’, justification of *status quo* needs to be evaluated in the context of threats to the very survival of traditions, it would nevertheless be importunate for the “progressive” to remain a yardstick, a measure of universality.” (Thomas, 1995, cited in Gumicio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006,p666).

Respondent NGOs have pointed to their need to enlist support of the traditional groupings and leadership to be able to make inroads into the community. It may not be out of place to suggest that the Traditional Panchayat still retains its *communitarian* character. However, in post-independence India the ‘traditional’ was never given an opportunity nor the means to reform itself; instead, almost 50 years after independence, new governance structures like the Panchayati Raj Institutions were put in place which did not qualify as ‘emergent’ from the traditional structure—as envisaged by Gandhi to be a prelude to *Gram Swaraj* (Adhikari, 2008; Kumar & Behar 2002)—and these PRIs have since grown in a different direction accommodating the larger political and administrative interests more than that of the local community. We believe that, there are some questions here for the well meaning modern civil society especially in the wake of ongoing criticism of PRIs for their failure to be sufficiently deliberative with the grassroots: Is it time to revisit the traditional while it is still in collective memory as a self managing system at the local level? Will it not be appropriate to restore the historic continuity, extend legitimacy to, and support the *traditional* to *re-form* itself and be the true deliberative and democratic voice of the community?

Similarly in the academic arena, it may be prudent to reflect on the fact that by the time the specific issues on the ground are collected and presented as reports from the development sector, and by the time the issues come into the academic discussions of participatory development and communication, these become over-generalised and tend to lose their deserved analytical treatment on the basis of actual culture and practices of communities *vis-à-vis* the strategies employed by the development agents.

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**Table 1: Overview of NGDOs' perception of roles of various stakeholders in the development activities in rural central India** (Summarised from NGDOs' responses on communication with various entities at different stages of development intervention)

	Community	Traditional Panchayat	Elected Panchayat	Field NGDOs	Local Administration	National Funding Sources	International Funding Sources
1. Desire for change	Unaware of their own living conditions, and Apathetic to alternatives	Visualise change in traditional ways	Desire regrouping in the political sense	Initiate comparing with other societies	Not Interested	Bring into context & act through Field NGDOs	Bring into context & act through Field NGDOs
2. Project Identification, need analysis, PRA	Present, but no capabilities	Involved when culturally sensitive issues emerge	Aware, but not directly involved	Conduct, record and mediate with funders	Not participating	Approached by NGDOs after some initial work e.g. baseline survey	Approached by NGDOs after some initial work e.g. baseline survey
3. Project Design	Present, but no capabilities	Involved when culturally sensitive issues emerge	Involved if local political ramifications emerge	<i>Micro</i> -plan but often modify to fit with funders' demands	Involved if conflict with administrative interests emerge	Usually not flexible with Macro-planned and generalised projects they seek to fund through NGDOs. Stress their own agenda	Comparatively flexible with <i>micro</i> -planned projects if coming from credible NGDOs. Have their own agenda but willing to make minor compromises and adjustments
4. Project ownership	Least –namesake only, except where self-help groups e.g. 'gram Sabah' are better educated	none	Take credit for projects in their area for PR purposes	Total management at field level. Procure funds	Interested in development statistics for government records	Financial control & expertise support.	Financial control & expertise support.
5. Awareness generation actions –“rights mode” –the newly envisaged mother-of-all development activity	Acting as educated and advised by NGDOs	Supporting NGDOs if convinced	Fear loss of control and unfavourable regrouping	undertaken, generally if not asked to work as activists by certain funders	Wary of communities being more aware	Want results in the “rights mode”	Want results in the “rights mode”
6. Information demands of Donors	Unaware of information issues, and insensitive to what exchanges occur between the NGDO and Funders	Unaware of information issues, and insensitive to what exchanges occur between the NGDO and Funders	Not concerned	Comply with funders demands for information. No alternatives to funder imposed accountability.	Only NGDOs compliance with annual returns is sought. No Control over funder-NGDO relationship.	Seek transparency. Conflicting views on accountability. Get better information on funded project.	Seek transparency. Set norms for accountability. Get better information on funded project.

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	Community	Traditional Panchayat	Elected Panchayat	Field NGOs	Local Administration	National Funding Sources	International Funding Sources
7. Access to project information, control	In principle, yes. In practice limited by literacy & access to technology.	In principle, yes. In practice limited by literacy & access to technology.	In principle, yes. In practice limited by literacy & access to technology, political will	Actual information developers. Some access to technology	Access to what is provided by NGOs' annual reports, or through local media.	Owners of project information. Full control	Owners of project information. Full control
8. Structural constraints flowing down – linked to the kind of funding	Prompted by NGOs to (re)organise with almost every new partnership with funders	Not affected directly	Not affected directly	Directly affected, reflected in frequent changes in HR absorption, and day to day functioning	Not affected	Impose conditions vis-à-vis use of development funds	Frequently advise changes to NGDO functioning vis-à-vis use of development funds
9. Existing community organisation & dynamics	Generally accept <i>status quo</i>	Impose <i>status quo</i> . Socio-cultural control	Seek re-organising of community to gain state planning compliance and political advantage. Political and minor administrative control	Seek re-organising of community with the aim of project management. Socio-economic activity	Support elected panchayat's re-organisation activity. Extend legitimacy to elected panchayat (Panchayati Raj and its components)	Advise NGOs to work with elected panchayat. Extend legitimacy to elected panchayat	Provide training to NGOs on group/community management. Supported organisation models are generally 'external' to community.
10. State intervention & obligation	Some awareness. No control	Some awareness. No control	More aware. Can ask state administration to interfere on various pretexts	Usually fully aware of state powers. Try to avoid conflict with administration in project implementation	Will not usually interfere if the project does not produce a major conflict of socio-cultural nature and/or if it helps in PR and presenting better development statistics	Advise NGOs to support local administration in their programmes	Concerned about results in development terms if NGOs get into trouble with local administration and a project has to close down. Leave to NGDO to sort out