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ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF WORLD VISION MYANMAR

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in International Development At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the participation of the marginalized people in community development, and specifically how World Vision Myanmar facilitates that participation. The Area Development Programme implemented by World Vision in Thabaung Township was selected as a case study. Employing theoretical continuums of participation in conjunction with qualitative research methods, the nature and level of participation of marginalized people and the factors influencing their participation, as well as the role of World Vision Myanmar in promoting their active participation, were investigated.

Before the 1990s, the dominant modes of top-down and externally-induced development failed to provide the hoped-for results in reducing poverty. As a result, a more people-oriented approach to development was encouraged and the participation of the previously ignored beneficiaries of development initiatives is now seen as vital in achieving and sustaining development outcomes. However, community participation in development initiatives does not mean that all segments of a community have an equal role in development programmes and share benefits equally.

This study found that nearly all community members participate in community development projects initiated by World Vision Myanmar but that the form of their participation varies. Three socioeconomic categories (the rich, the middle-class and the poor) were present in each research village, and the results showed that the poor were marginalized from active participation in important aspects of community development, especially in leadership and decision-making. The poor were characterized by a cluster of disadvantages. This study noted that the decision-making power remained mostly in the hands of the powerful people in the community. However, leadership styles differed between research villages, demonstrating that the poor can contribute to decision-making processes when the leadership style in the communities is inclusive of the marginalized. In contrast, when the leadership style is authoritative and individualized, the poor remain marginalized from development processes.

World Vision Myanmar has policy documents and guidelines that encourage the participation of every segment of the community, especially the poor. However, there is still room for the organization to make these guidelines more accessible for Community Based
Organizations (CBOs) so that they can apply them more effectively in their communities, and it could work to build capacities of the marginalized to facilitate their empowerment.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, my loving sisters, my beloved wife and my lovely daughter. They are the soul and heart of my life as well as the source of my happiness and strength.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**LIST OF FIGURES**

**LIST OF TABLES**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Research Background

1.3 Research Rationale

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

1.5 Introductory Narratives about My Research Fieldwork

1.6 Thesis Structure

## II. PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Overview of Community Development

2.3 Participation in Development: Concepts and Definitions

2.3.1 Emergence and Evolution of Participation

2.3.2 Definitions of Participation

2.3.3 Typologies of Participation

2.4 Participation of the Marginalized People in Community Development

2.4.1 Who are the Marginalized People?

2.5 Issues Surrounding Participation in Community Development

2.5.1 Who Participates in What?

2.5.2 Motivating Factors for Participation in Community Development

2.5.3 Challenges to Participation in Community Development

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

## III. CONTEXT: MYANMAR, THABAUNG TOWNSHIP AND THE ROLE OF WORLD VISION

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Myanmar

3.2.1 Geographical Location and Climate

3.2.2 Demographic Characteristics
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation 15
Figure 2: Characteristics of the Marginalized Households 22
Figure 3: Geographical Location of Myanmar and its Neighbouring Countries 30
Figure 4: Geographical Location of Thabaung Township 35
Figure 5: World Vision Thabaung and its Target Villages 40
Figure 6: Organizational Structure of World Vision Thabaung 41
Figure 7: Three Aspects of Community Development Process 69
Figure 8: Structure of Community-Based Organizations in World Vision’s Target Villages 84
Figure 9: Participation of the Marginalized People According to the “Stages of Participation” by Cohen & Uphoff (1980) 95

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Pretty’s Typology of Participation 16
Table 2: Different Continuums of Participation 18
Table 3: Population Distribution by Gender and Age in Thabaung Township in 2012 36
Table 4: Breakdown of Respondents by Gender and Social Ranking In Semi-structured Interviews 48

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADP Area Development Programme
CBOs Community-based Organizations
CD Community Development
CDF Community Development Facilitator
CRC Convention on the Rights of Children
D, M & E Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
ECCD Early Childhood Care and Development
GDP Gross Domestic Product
NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations
PRA Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRS Poverty Reduction Strategy
SAP Structural Adjustment Programme
VSLAs Village Savings and Loans Associations
WVI World Vision International
WVM World Vision Myanmar