



EMERALD POINTS

**COMMUNITY  
PARTICIPATION  
AND CIVIC  
ENGAGEMENT IN  
THE DIGITAL ERA**

Localizing Sustainable Development

**MUDIT KUMAR SINGH**



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION  
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
DIGITAL ERA

*Putting the hype about e-governance into perspective, Mudit Singh does not only point to the socially structured, unevenly realized access to digital tools of citizen participation but also the continued importance of substantial decentralization and financial devolution.*  
– René Véron, Full Professor of Social Geography, the Institute of Geography and Sustainability, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

*It's rare to find a book that so adeptly links important social policy, theories of democratic participatory governance and sophisticated network analysis. Dr Singh has managed to do all three; drawing on years of deep involvement in the field, this book is a gem that is sure to be a go-to resource for everyone working in this field.*  
– James Moody, Robert O. Keohane Professor of Sociology at Duke University, USA

# COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Localizing Sustainable Development

BY

**MUDIT KUMAR SINGH**

*Duke University, USA; Indian Institute of  
Technology Kanpur, India*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Copyright © 2022 Mudit Kumar Singh.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80262-292-8 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-291-1 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-293-5 (Epub)



**ISOQAR**  
REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>About the Author</i>	xi
<i>Abstract</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
1. History and Concept of Community Participation	1
2. Forms of Participation	19
3. Factors of Participation in the Digital Age	27
4. Sustainable Development and Practice of Participation	55
5. Conclusion and Future of Participation	73
<i>Appendices</i>	77
<i>Bibliography</i>	87
<i>Index</i>	103

This page intentionally left blank

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1.	Leading Countries in Document Production.	7
Figure 2.	Production of Participation and LG Articles.	8
Figure 3.	Dominating Collaborations in the Scientific Production.	9
Figure 4.	Production of Top 25 Sources.	9
Figure 5.	Thematic Mapping of Community Participation and Local Governance from WoS.	10
Figure 6.	Keyword Network Related to Community Participation and Local Governance.	11
Figure 7.	Keywords Used by the Articles.	12
Figure 8.	Evolution of Key Themes Across Time.	12
Figure 9.	Conceptual Diagram of Community Participation.	17
Figure 10.	Occupation and Participation.	39
Figure 11.	Vacant Positions in GP Members Election.	44
Figure 12.	The Model of Child and Women Engagement in Nova Scotia, Canada.	61
Figure 13.	Institutional Design of PLHIV Mainstreaming in Rajasthan, India.	70
Table 1.	Concepts of Participation and Related Thinkers.	15
Table 2.	Intervention Models of Community Engagement.	24
Table 3.	Factors at Various Levels Affecting Community Engagement.	28
Table 4.	Caste Influence in Open Meetings.	35
Table 5.	HHS Participation and Education.	36
Table 6.	Year-Wise Audit Situation at Different Levels of PRIs.	37
Table 7.	Income-Wise Participation.	38
Table 8.	Participation in New and Old GPs.	39
Table 9.	Network Estimates of Community Participation in PRIs.	41

Table 10.	Network Peer Effect and Participation.	45
Table 11.	Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations.	57
Table 12.	Some Associations of Local Governance.	59

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNA	Community Need Assessment
CBA	Community-Based Assessment
CP	Community Participation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GEN	General Castes
GP	Gram Panchayat
GS	Gram Sabha
HDR	Human Development Report
HH	House Hold
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SC	Schedule Castes
SNA	Social Network Analysis
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
WB	World Bank

This page intentionally left blank

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mudit Kumar Singh** is a 2017–2018 batch Fulbright alumnus and currently affiliated to the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (Postdoctoral Fellow), and Duke University (Visiting Research Fellow).<sup>1</sup>

Dr Singh has been carrying out research, advocacy and teaching for the past 12 years in India. He has worked with a variety of communities including people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in Rajasthan, the flood-prone community in Bihar, female and youth from villages of Himachal Pradesh and the stone-breaker community in Uttar Pradesh. He has been part of the policymaking process at the ground level in building urban health and employment generation policy in India.

He completed his Master's in Business Administration in Rural Development in 2009 from Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad. After working for about five years with civil society organizations, he joined his PhD in 2014 and visited Duke Network Analysis Center, Duke University, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, and the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur during his doctoral training.

He has published in high-quality international journals and presented to a variety of audiences including government, police, researchers, and health and legal practitioners.

His recent studies apply a mixed-method approach to explore linkages between social capital, social networks and public participation in the context of local governance and public policy. Currently, he engages with a variety of stakeholders – trade unions, government, civil society organizations and workers at the Just Transition Research Centre, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology that can help in devising a community-centric policy to shift away from fossil fuel to renewable energy in India.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 <https://muditsingh.netlify.app/>

2 <http://www.iitk.ac.in/JTRC>

This page intentionally left blank

# ABSTRACT

Since World War II, nations across the globe have devised many institutions from local to global level to achieve the best possible governance of resources to meet development goals. This book is primarily based on my field studies of Indian villages and slums over the past twelve years in India. But it has gone further to include cases from other parts of the globe to present a comprehensive picture of community participation at local levels.

On the one hand, scholars argued for the engagement of local people for the success of development projects. On the other hand, some scholars stressed on the building of democratic institutions that may involve the public through direct and indirect means. The World Bank and the United Nations also considered the importance and need of such local institutional building for the success of development projects. Thus, local democratic institutions are highly crucial for developing countries like India, where the majority of the population still lives in villages. Since independence, various states of India started building democratic institutions called *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs) run by the elected members and bureaucrats.

Acknowledging the various forms of participation, and factors that are discussed by scholars around the globe, I present a conceptual model that more or less explains community participation at local levels. From the field work, the study has used two important indicators – attendance and ability of attendees to speak in the meetings as a measure of their participation and active participation, respectively. I discuss the socioeconomic factors – income, age, landholding, embedded social capital in the social networks (whom they are friends with and seek help), education, gender etc. and power that transcend through these socioeconomic classes that eventually shape up individuals' decisions to participate in local governance and in development interventions through external agencies.

Based on my experience in India, I also discuss the community-centric institutional arrangement that can potentially help marginalized sections of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. The analysis in the book suggests that with high social capital, elites and brokers are vocal in the open meetings regulated by village panchayats. At the same time, social capital also

works as a support system for weaker sections. This way, I highlight the good of social capital working for the individuals, whereas social capital potentially working against the collective efforts for the rural poor. Further, the research finds that the creation of new villages facilitated by the state administration might help to achieve the attendance level of villagers but active participation level does not improve. Narratives from the community suggest that villagers demand for further decentralization, especially of financial powers at the village level itself. According to them, this may genuinely empower the village council members that may result in the revival of village committees to meet the objective of power transfer to villagers. The community reflections echo the scholarly shift towards treating participation as an *end* in case of local governance instead of a *means* to achieve certain intervention objectives. Unless the financial decentralization happens at local committees, the development intervention by any agency (Government or CSOs) will keep getting biased outcomes often working against the marginalized sections.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere gratitude to Prof (Retired) A. K. Sharma, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur, and Prof (Retired) S. K. Pant, Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Uttar Pradesh, India, for their continuous moral and professional support in supervising my doctoral thesis. I extend my thanks to Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral scholarship that supported my visit to Duke University where Prof James Moody and the team at Duke Network Analysis Center, Social Science Research Institute, gave their extraordinary support and quality inputs in my thesis work.

My sincere thanks to all the non-profit organizations in India who gave me an opportunity to learn and work with the community living in diverse socioeconomic and geographical contexts in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh. My heartfelt regards to Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology Allahabad for facilitating my PhD. in difficult circumstances and that to Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research Mumbai for adding quality to my analysis through its Visiting Scholar Program.

Lastly, I thank Prof. Pradip Swarnakar, Founder, Just Transition Research Centre, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur who provided me with a conducive atmosphere to finish the book.

This page intentionally left blank

# HISTORY AND CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## INDUSTRIALIZATION OF SOCIETY AND WORRIES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As a departure point, the book provides a very brief historical overview of the world development that led to generate great thinkers and literature while borrowing major contemporary thoughts of various disciplines to explain community-centric governance. I will initially discuss the modern development paradigm that ultimately raises the question – are we heading in the right way of people-centric development? Further, I attempt to answer the question of learning from the experiences of community and practices in India and that from select parts of the world.

On the basis of historical written evidence of Hindu mythical literature, societies were prosperous around the world during the Harappan and its contemporary civilization. There were many civilizations that flourished well and vanished. The signs of urbanization can be traced back to even this period. Expansion of territories was the main concern for people in power. There was a kingdom-based world increasing over time and space. During the eighth century BCE, Greek and Roman civilizations arose and they played a key role in shaping Western philosophy. The earlier philosophers of these civilizations focused on explaining the whereabouts of the physical world and human soul. Later, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Cicero wrote about Ethics, rules guiding human life and society (Sedley, D. 'Ancient philosophy'. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy 1998). During the same period, the world witnessed religious revolution giving birth to Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam alongside existing Hinduism. Religion had a great impact on human society. The great empire of Ashoka is considered to be the most powerful society of

that period in the Indian sub-continent. He was a devotee of Lord Buddha and had done a great deal of work to spread the message of Buddhism across the contemporary world. Mughals were other emperors who brought major change in society while following Islam. In Europe, the same was the case with Christianity. Kings followed either the Protestant or Catholic way of life as defined in their sacred book, the Bible. Those not following Christianity, e.g. the Jewish, were considered to be anti-Christians, and many wars throughout history were triggered due to this reason. An informal practice of social work existed in the form of providing food, money, temporary shelter, rest houses etc. for the needy and poor. The British, Dutch and French started expanding their colonies. Discovery of a new world known as the United States was seen as a new opportunity for settlement. It was the era of massive expansion of territories all around the world. The British Empire existed in India, Africa, the United States and Australia. By the end of the eighteenth century, most of the colonies were free, but India and Africa remained under colonial rule serving the interests of the European countries. The invention of metal-based machines led to the industrialization and strengthening economies of the nations. With the rise of capitalism and industrialization, the world also witnessed the transition away from agricultural society leading to a new form of development in society. This led social scientists to think of how industrialization and colonialism were affecting society and what can be the best model of economic and societal development. Community participation was considered one of the best ways to achieve the community development that later attained popularity in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century. The popularity has given rise to multiple meanings and practices of participation in the context of development.

#### HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE TERM PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT

There are multiple views of participation. Participation is simply to have a part or a share in something (Oxford Dictionary). The word originated in the late fifteenth century from the Latin word *participat* that means 'shared in'. To talk of participation in a broader sense, we must look at the conceptual and practical implementation of 'participation' with regards to its wide *social* context. I am using the term social to refer to the entire human and non-human component that relates an individual with the individual's surroundings in a society. The surroundings shape and get shaped by one's action every time and

result in a multidimensional relational complex social setting in which a person aspires to grow and develop – the development that people visualize for themselves, their families, communities and nations. The term development is a popular word among academicians, development agencies and countries around the globe. As a verb it means to grow, become more mature and advanced (Hornby & Cowie, 1993). There are various views and definitions to explain the term. One can define it by tracing it historically, social scientists may pose their social development theories, and economists may give their own version. But everyone agrees to one common characteristic of development, i.e. ‘change’ which is desirable and leads to the path of (debatable) progress. However, it is debatable who decides the progress and what is ‘desired’ progress? The stages of changes, growth or advancement of organs can be understood in the wider concept of development in Biology. Is it also applicable to Societies: the institutions, culture and relations? Do the countries with ‘developed’ tag present a mature, advanced society and Asian, Latin American and African Societies are underdeveloped (Pawar, 2014)? This is highly debatable. For the purpose of this book, the meaning of development is improvement in quality of life.

In the beginning of twentieth century, the world saw a major collapse in the leading economies and societies underwent major transition. Production declined, markets were down and resources started becoming scarce. Then came the Economists with their major concerned for economic growth of a nation and improvement in the life of the poor. The United States and Russia were the two powerful countries that adopted capitalism and socialism views of development. In order to remain economically strong and powerful the new ideas for development and reconstruction of the world was required. European countries including the United States and Russia had to play a big role in it. Having witnessed intensive industrialization and urbanization, the two were considered to be the indicators of development and this led to the establishment of new paradigms of development. It is argued that the reason of poverty is lack of entrepreneurship, low income and low savings; countries with a big population are poor because their large amount of production goes towards feeding the population. Thus these countries considered themselves as developed and others as underdeveloped referred to as Third World.

In the present world, it may or may not be facilitated by the external agencies such as government and international donors. Harrod-Domar argued that due to increase in marginal propensity to save, the part of outcome is invested to production thereby continuing growth process. Till the 1940s this model was operational on developing countries. Till the beginning of the twentieth century, sociology was leading alone in developing the theories of

human development. It is in only the 1950s that Economics began to develop theories to explain development (Hettne, 1983).

### Participatory Rural Development

Leonard Hobhouse coined the term 'social development' to represent planned development of society (Midgley, 1995). Thus began the planned intervention in various sectors, viz. education, health, livelihood, water and sanitation etc. The next problem before the planners was selection of methodology and tools for proper interventions. Until the 1960s people were considered to be helpless and needy. With this perspective governments followed a top to bottom approach by designing and implementing subsidy based programmes that administrators thought 'good' for people. In contrast to other developing economies, e.g. Africa and the Caribbean, Indian academicians feel that external exploitation has caused much more economic problems for India (Girvan & Girvan, 1973). Similar thoughts gave rise to participatory approach in a bottom-up direction by involving communities. Here came the concept of 'participation' in the late 1950s for the first time as confirmed by Stiefel and Wolfe (1994, p. 21). However, in the Rural Development context the term was used in the 1970s (Mpolokeng, 2003).

Participation primarily aims to provide good design for development projects, improves the service delivery mechanism, thereby improving the coverage of target beneficiaries. In other words, it enables a more just distribution of public resources and helps in reducing corruption (Mansuri & Rao, World Bank, 2012). Of late, the development paradigm has shifted to making the growth inclusive and participative, as the fruits of earlier development models have failed to address some of the critical issues that have been haunting the planners, thinkers and political leadership for quite some time. These issues could be summarized as the issues of mass hunger, poverty, malnutrition and regional disparities. Post-World War II to the late twentieth century, the term participation was debated as a method (means) to achieve project objectives and as an end to achieve participation of disadvantaged (empowerment) (Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 1983; Cohen & Uphoff, 1977; Economic Commission for Latin America, 1973; Guijt & Shah, 1998; Mohan & Stokes, 2000; Okley, 1991; Paul, 1987). With the World Bank (WB) promoting the comprehensive development paradigm, the participative literature took what scholars call the deliberative democratic turn. It resulted in much detailed literature on critic and support of participation (Crook, 2003; Chambers, 2007; Hickey & Mohan, 2005; Kothari, 2001; Kanji &

Greenwood, 2001; Lane, 2005; Mayoux, 2001; Mansuri & Rao, 2009; Parfitt, 2004; Stiglitz, 2002; Wald, 2014; Williams et al., 2003). It was argued by the comprehensive development school that project participation largely promoted and supported by civil society organizations (CSOs) can only achieve limited success and without the democratic participation the local political institutions cannot be made more accountable, open and transparent, the desired change will not be realized on the larger scale. It was also advocated that the engagement of people required structural changes and need of sustainable participatory institutions.

Consequently, institutional reforms and institutional building supported and promoted by the government and CSOs was crucial as the second wave of participation to promote pro-poor participation (WB, 2004). Academic works and practices developed in the last two decades point towards the convergence of participatory community development programmes and the participatory democratic institutions resulting in participatory governance as a space where bottom-up and top-down interests negotiate at the local level. As a result, many developing countries have focused on improving local self-governance mechanisms through public participation.

Martin Ravallion (2012) has mentioned in his foreword in a study by Mansuri and Rao (2012):

*The World Bank alone has invested about \$85 billion over the last decade on development assistance for participation. However, some observers feel that policy making in the area is conceptually weak, that project design is informed more by slogans than careful analysis. There have also been questions about whether participatory development effectively reduces poverty, improves service delivery, and builds the capacity for collective action. Some observers also find that participatory projects are complex to implement and deeply affected by context, and are thus unsuited for large development institutions such as the World Bank.*

The joint effort by government and non-government agencies represents a 'top-down' strategy for institutional reform and includes identified target groups in the development process (Mohan & Stoke, 2000).

At a local level, building decentralized local governing agencies to achieve community participation is one of the top priorities of development interventions (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). However, building such institutions requires careful consideration of local polity and social conditions. Indeed, some thinkers argue that powerful local elites influence community participation processes, often working against the interests of socially marginalized groups,

and it is believed that marginalized groups would want to replace the dominant elite class (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2005). This approach echoes the Marxist perspective of conflict between ruling and deprived social classes, which can ignore individual-level psychological fears and costs involved in such conflicts, especially in the context of open meetings in developing countries such as India. In India, local elites often control the participatory process and local governing councils, and often, their formal or informal consent is required for any external intervention. Hence, conceptualizing participation without engaging the local political dimensions will result in an incomplete assessment of community engagement at local levels.

Elite capture and brokerage, in principle independent of state and federal elections, shape the participation of the local community in open village meetings. Sanyal and Rao (2018) argue that local polity adversely influences these open meetings following the polls. State election commissions conduct the polls every five years under India's Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) system. The PRIs involve two stages of community participation, first in elections and then in open meetings regulated by these elected representatives. However, due to limited election data, these elected positions in village councils have not yet been empirically examined. Barrett and Zani (2015) assert that understanding local governance and voting mechanisms is essential for an inclusive local democracy. Therefore, because elected representatives regulate these open meetings, the linkages between participation in elections and open meetings are an important consideration. I have examined these linkages by assessing the participation of villagers in electing the council of villages, followed by understanding the community view of achieving participation in local village democracy. The book attempts to uncover the locals' viewpoints (qualitative data) and occurrences (quantitative information) of their local governance participation.

In this book, I have first analyzed the recent trends in the development of community participation and local governance literature by using bibliometric analysis technique with the help of the bibliometric package in R (Derviş, 2020). The figures from 1 to 8 are a result of my analysis of community participation and local governance literature. I further discuss the lessons of community engagement from various communities and explain how the key indicators of social and economic status (gender, race, class, caste, income) relate to public engagement in policy and governance matters at local levels. I will further discuss the mechanisms (local election and open meetings) regulated by states (local governance indicators) that shape the participation at grassroots levels. With a long history of local (village) governance from the developing world, India has attempted a great deal to make the system

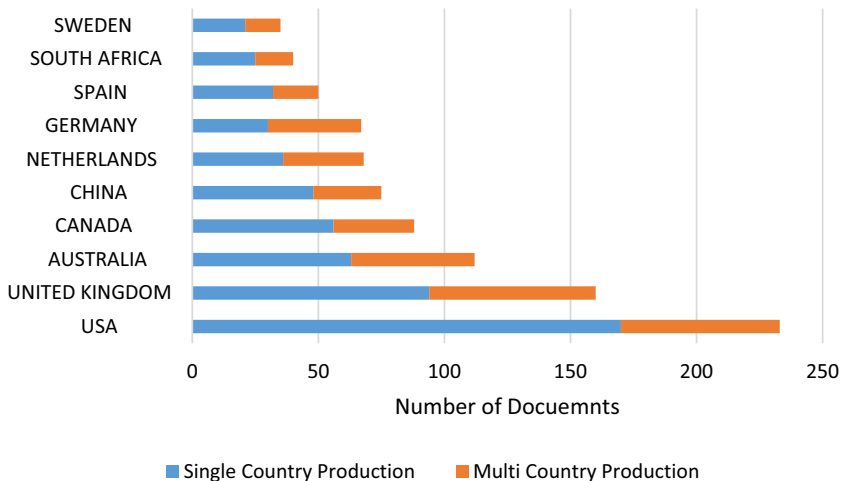
pro-poor while making the system participatory, transparent and accountable with several reforms leading to establishing a nationwide network of PRIs in 1993. Therefore, the writings have built mainly upon the Indian scenario with cases from other countries. It also attempts to shed light on the community perspective of public participation at various administrative levels.

### TRENDS IN SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Using the keywords ‘community participation’ and ‘local governance’, I have followed an inclusive approach to conduct all the relevant scientific production on WoS available (from 1997) till date to uncover the recent trends and thematic evolution in the research field. The table in the appendix describes the bibliometric data used for the analysis.

#### Countrywise and Timewise Production

Fig. 1 shows top 20 countries around the globe that produce on the community participation and local governance literature. China finds place among top 3 from South Asia; whereas, India ranks at 16th place. Despite the fact that India has the second largest population after China and shares its northern boundary in the same region of South Asia, the difference in research



**Fig. 1. Leading Countries in Document Production.**

production is not encouraging. The need of improved knowledge building in the theme under discussion becomes more important in light of the fact that India ranks low on many development indicators compared to other countries in the production list.

As far as the focus of scholar community is concerned, the popularity of research in the field of participatory development in local governance grew exponentially after 2010 (Fig. 2). This is understood as early participatory school largely treated the participatory tools as a way of avoiding friction with local polity and it only began taking deliberate democratic turn in the twenty-first century (Stiglitz, 2002). Likewise, the top sources of production located in the global north countries (Fig. 4).

### WHO ARE THE LEADING COLLABORATORS?

The United States and the United Kingdom, followed by Canada and Australia, appear as some of the leading countries that show a collaborative production of the scientific publications (Fig. 3). No wonder, the continued thrust on development interventions in the developing countries shows that these countries have a trend of collaborating with the countries in various regions, viz. South Asia (India, Indonesia, Nepal), Latin America (Brazil), Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa) and Europe (Finland, Sweden, France, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Netherland).

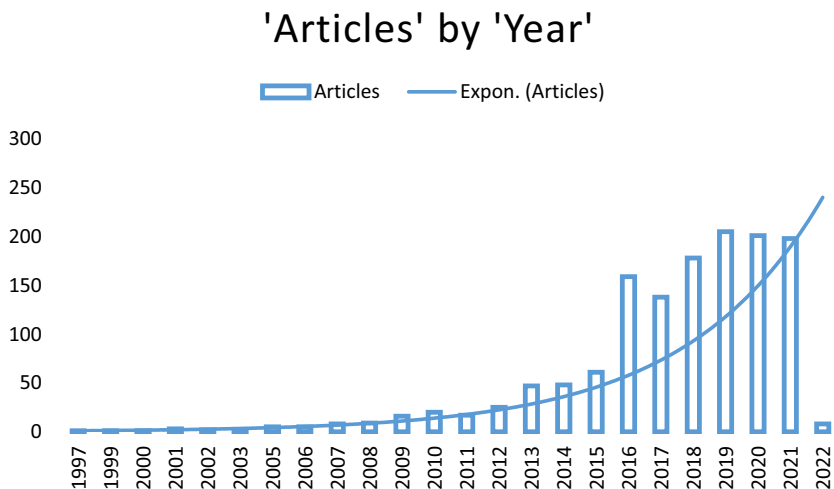


Fig. 2. Production of Participation and LG Articles.