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**Poverty and Participatory Governance:
The Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) Programme in St. Kitts and Nevis**

by

Minerva V. Saddler

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through Sociology and Anthropology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
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ABSTRACT

Participation in development is advocated for various noble reasons and is often permeated with lofty sentiments of “empowerment” and “ownership”. At its most basic, the concept describes the engagement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives (see Guijt and Shah, 1998: 1). However, despite such claims of ‘good’ development, a number of scholars have written substantial critiques of participation. Drawing upon the framework of governmentality, in combination with a brief discussion of post-colonialism, this thesis argues that, with the associated hierarchies of developed and developing, donor and recipient, and so forth, the practices of participation in development serve to legitimize development interventions and govern the conduct of particular groups of people. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, archival information and organizational documents, this study provides a critical assessment of participation in development thinking and practice from a Caribbean perspective.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. I am deeply indebted to my mother Dahlia, aunty Iris, Celes, Antoine and Bo. My sisters Claire and Lorraine, aunty Val, Ma and all the other members of my family for their immeasurable patience, understanding, and encouragement at a crucial time in my academic, professional and spiritual life. Your prayers and moral support have helped sustain me the past two years.

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To God be the glory great things He has done in giving me the chance to reach this level of achievement in my education. I hope to be able to continue to use this valuable education wisely.

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INTRODUCTION

Heroic claims are made for participatory approaches to development, these being justified in terms of ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness of investment and of contributing to processes of democratization and empowerment. The conundrum of ensuring the sustainability of development interventions is assumed to be solvable by the proper involvement of beneficiaries...However, despite claims to the contrary, there is little evidence of the long-term effectiveness of participation in materially improving the conditions of the most vulnerable people (Cleaver, 1999:597).

As a result of the failure of formal 'top-down' development, there has recently been interest in and attention to *participation* in development in an attempt to produce more effective development strategies. It is this presumed importance that makes it necessary to analyze the relative merits of participation. Participation is advocated for various noble reasons and is often permeated with lofty sentiments of "empowerment" and "ownership". At its most basic, the concept is defined as the active involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries from the earliest stage of project identification, through the design and implementation of development initiatives (CDB, 2005:25). Participation also, theoretically, describes the engagement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives (see Guijt and Shah, 1998:1). However, despite such claims of 'good' development, a number of scholars (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cornwall and Brock, 2005) have written substantial critiques of participation. These critiques throw some level of doubt on the emancipatory claims of participation, arguing that, rather than empowering beneficiaries at the community level, it simply serves as another means of pursuing traditional 'top-down' agendas with new forms of governance relations.

One of the areas where participatory development has become increasingly

popular to development interventions is the Caribbean region¹ (see Bowen, 2006), as governments, development practitioners and policy makers grapple to address persistent poverty since the end of the colonial period. This study is an examination of the Caribbean Development Bank's (CDB)² flagship poverty alleviation programme, the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF). The major research question addressed revolves around how participation is practiced in BNTF operations and activities in St. Kitts and Nevis, a former British colony. Drawing upon the framework of governmentality, in combination with a brief discussion of post-colonialism, I argue that, with the associated hierarchies of developed and developing, donor and recipient, expert and local knowledge, and so forth, the nature and practice of participation serve to legitimize development interventions. These interventions are designed to govern the conduct of particular groups of people. This notion of governmentality takes into consideration not only how techniques, strategies, and methods of participatory development emerge, but how participation shapes behavior and influences development outcomes.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, archival information, organizational documents and field notes, this study provides a critical assessment and re-

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the region refers to the 15 member countries of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community) – Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago.

² CDB is a multilateral regional financial institution established by an Agreement in 1969, and entered into force in 1970 (www.caribank.org). The organization's headquarters is located in Barbados.

examination of participation in development thinking and practice from a Caribbean perspective. It is a topic which has received scant critical sociological attention. The next section outlines some of the conceptual underpinnings of participatory development. The subsequent two sections discuss how participation is taken up into practice in St. Kitts and Nevis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an effort to better understand the ways in which participation produces and mobilizes a particular group of people, I rely on the notion of governmentality in participatory development indirectly and directly discussed by scholars such as Rose (1993), Dean (1999) and Cruikshank (1999). My analysis also invites a complementary post-colonial discussion in an effort to describe how, since the demise of direct colonial rule, the apparatus of development has “institutionalized a new mode of global governmentality” (Gupta, 1998:9) in the developing world³ (see also Escobar, 1988, Escobar, 1994). Both governmentality advocates and post-colonial theorists stress the interconnectedness between participation, its methods, strategies and its embedded forms of governance that endows us with new ways of understanding development practices. My goal is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of post-colonialism or to resolve the debates around post-colonialism and development, but rather to draw from a few of its central issues in order to explore a framework from which to critically analyze the

³ I deliberately avoid using the term “Third World” and prefer instead to use the term “developing world” or “developing countries” which are more helpful and widely accepted.

workings of participation within the aid apparatus.

There is some founding notion that participatory development not only obscures governing strategies embedded in posing participation as a solution to poverty, but that it is also employed as a neocolonialist tool (DuBois, 1991:26). For example, in *Global Shadows*, Ferguson provides a new understanding of the governing effects of development aid. He argues that decolonized nation-states rarely see national independence as synonymous with freedom and empowerment because of the power-laden logics of development (2006:50-51). Often, ex-colonies are held hostage by their dependence on foreign assistance and views held by donor agencies that they cannot be economically or independently viable.

Moreover, the operating relations of participation within the development apparatus speak to the fact that although ex-colonies like St. Kitts and Nevis has become formally independent, their experiences as “underdeveloped nations” indicate how much the ghost of colonization still looms over the post-colonial world. It continues to be embedded in the ambivalent relations and practices of development – practices that have the effect of reshaping everyday life in ways unintended, unforeseen, and even unseen (see Radcliffe, 2005:291; DuBois, 1991:19).

The concept of ‘government’ or more appropriately ‘governmentality’, applied here involves far more than what states or state agencies do. As Ilcan and Lacey (2006) and Li (2006:3) point out, ‘government’ can refer to a variety of programmes and practices that seek to observe, direct, monitor, shape, and control the actions of particular individuals and groups by calculated means. In this sense, government concentrates on those rationalities and techniques (e.g. “involvement”, “consultation”, “participation”) of

development that aim to systematically direct beneficiaries – stimulating them to act through projects that promote and even demand their participation. Hence, involvement, consultation, and participation are pervasive notions that emerge as a new specialization of government.

Taking these meanings of conduct into consideration, government, through the act of participation, encourages particular groups and individuals to become active agents assuming greater responsibility for their livelihoods and to do so through participatory activities (e.g. community meetings, needs assessment and prioritization, transect walks), activities which are framed as inherently positive and empowering. The mainstreaming of participation into BNTF's project cycle⁴ incorporates beneficiaries into the network of government on the promises of 'empowerment' (see Rose, 1993; Craig and Porter, 2006), while obscuring the web of control and discipline that is woven around activities such as project identification, community meetings, consultations and transect walks. Such participatory activities, while promoted as giving a voice to the poor and making them decision-makers and accountable for their impoverished circumstances, keep them subjected to the discipline of the development apparatus (Stoker, 1998:21).

Furthermore, participatory activities tend to function as both a voluntary and coercive tool, simultaneously stirring up the desires and will among potential beneficiaries to participate in their own development. In short, the poor are made to act

⁴ The stages of the BNTF project cycle are: identification, preparation, PSC approval, CDB appraisal/approval/no-objection, CIDA 'no objection (large projects), engagement of consultants for design and supervision, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, completion and hand-over, operation (CDB, 2005: 11).

(Cruikshank, 1999:4, 82), placing the burden of development on those least able to bear it (see also Basok and Ilcan, 2006). For instance, as we shall see, the essence of the BNTF project cycle works to allow potential beneficiaries the opportunity to identify project ideas in a long, but participatory process that utilizes various tools such as group and community discussions. The aim is to maximize their participation under the guise of empowerment, while making them the object of governmentalization. Hence, participation becomes the rationale for pressuring the poor to take responsibility for improving their own condition within a non-negotiable development structure.

One of the assertions made about the benefits of participation is its empowering effects. In other words, the argument advanced here is that it enables the poor and marginalized to have greater agency over their own lives. But while empowerment implies increasing opportunities and choices for development beneficiaries, there is a need to question the readiness with which the concept is promoted as an attribute and benefit of participation (Cruikshank, 1999: 68). ‘Empowerment’ is one of “a seductive mix of buzzwords” (see Cornwall and Brock, 2005) that has taken prominence in this new development orthodoxy, alongside concepts like “ownership” and “sustainability”. Although together these words give today’s development agendas a sense of purpose and optimism, they also suggest a controllable, governable population where everyone gets a chance to take part in the making of decisions that affect their lives (Cornwall and Brock, 2005: iii). Cruikshank points out that tactics of empowerment, mobilized in programmes like the BNTF, possess a political strategy to act upon the poor by getting them to act in their own interests (1999: 68). Thus, relations of empowerment are, akin to relations of government in that both constitute and fundamentally transform the beneficiaries’

capacity to act.

Not only does participation claim to empower, but it also proposes to give beneficiaries “ownership” of the development process. By the term ownership I mean self-direction to formulate, implement and sustain future development projects and activities. Theoretically, ownership implies beneficiary possession of the project and the development process beyond official project implementation by donor agencies (see Abrahamsen, 2004). Additionally, the term suggests the “passing control of the design implementation and monitoring of projects and programs” (Cramer, Stein and Weeks, 2006: 415) to beneficiaries. This proposed transfer of power is intended to make development aid and interventions more efficient, effective, and sustainable. However, Cruikshank emphasizes that these efforts by donor agencies are merely strategies for constituting and regulating the subjectivities of the poor (1999: 69), for beneficiaries cannot exercise full “ownership” if they retain dependence on foreign aid (Cramer et al., 2006). For example, the BNTF operational documents state that beneficiaries are expected to initiate and undertake future projects independently. But as we shall see, once intervention has taken place, the BNTF gains a foothold and communities continue to operate within the aid structure due to a lack of immediate alternative funding options.

The rhetoric of participation has been heralded as seemingly subverting traditional donor-recipient power relations. Such power reversing claims are cautioned by Marc DuBois (1991: 6) and Rita Abrahamsen (2003) who argue that given the dominant position of the developed world vis-à-vis developing world, power and control exists not in the form of an act of law or set of legal codes, but in the guise of norms born by development discourse. Such norms (for e.g. attending community meetings, information

sharing, community assessments) instill in beneficiaries a certain malleability or instructability, and a certain susceptibility that many ex-colonies are being re-colonized by extant development discourse. Thus, power relations underscore the social practices of participation and become manifest in the governing of behavior.

In focusing on the relationship between power and the poor, this study is less concerned with the forceful repression of the poor; rather it highlights “the productive effects of power which promote, transform” (Cruikshank, 1999:69), and act upon the capacities, desires, and interests of the poor. It is through this Foucauldian conceptualization of power that another side of development – one much less desirable – is revealed (DuBois, 1991:27). Akhil Gupta’s insightful and brilliant study of rural India shows how power is understood not as the antithesis of freedom and reason, but rather as a general name of relation in which differential affects of one action upon another are produced. Thus, whatever the varied intentions of development interventions, the governing rationalities of donor agencies today are indicative of “imperial and colonial power” (Escobar, 1994: 4, see also Gandhi, 1998). In my case study analysis that follows, we are alerted to how the BNTF exercises power by soliciting the active participation of beneficiaries in the implementation of projects at the community level. These projects aim to transform the poor into self-governed, self-sufficient, and active citizens, perpetuating colonialist and western-centred discourse and power relations even as they seek to focus attention on the marginalized.

In their analysis of governing through development programmes, Schneider (1999) and Ican and Phillips (2006) highlight the varying degrees to which power relations and techniques of control designed by donor agencies are disguised within and

beyond the operations of programmes that aim to shape various forms of conduct (see also Rojas, 2004; Larner and Walters, 2004). As a result, much of donor agencies' effectiveness in producing such power relations is the result of diverse participatory that are often unchallenged precisely because they are seen as rational (Escobar, 1994:105). For example, theoretically, participation is mainstreamed into the BNTF's project cycle, with the goal of a more inclusive decision-making process, yet the programme design and management are done externally. It is the CDB and its international partners (e.g. CIDA and DFID) that set the tone for 'partnership' with BMCs. Such partnerships tend to heavily favor donors (Mosse, 2005) and often result in beneficiaries gaining responsibility for projects outcome and sustainability.

By engaging in a governmentality perspective, this study attempts to offer unconventional ways of thinking about participation in development. It also provokes us to ask how certain programmes are devised and implemented in particular domains.

METHODOLOGY

A Personal Note on Background

The interests that drive this study are born of my experience working in the field of development in St. Kitts and Nevis. I am a trained practitioner and have spent my occupational career, in the largest part, in poverty alleviation and community development services of various sorts. Although the organization (i.e., the BNTF) and various governmental ministries and departments in the Federation ostensibly exist to offer solutions to social problems, I have had to recognize that, as a practitioner, my greatest investment of effort and time was in the problem of poverty not the solution. It

became clear that it is the problem of poverty (and its identifiable ‘hot spots’ outlined in the Country Poverty Assessment); and not its solutions that have ensured the continued advance funding and legitimacy of the BNTF programme and others like it. In other words, the label of a poverty-ravaged country is consistently presented as the justification for foreign aid allocation and donor intervention. Like Majid Rahnema so insightfully states: “The word ‘poverty’ is, no doubt, a key word of our times, extensively used and abused by everyone. Huge amounts of money are spent in the name of poverty. Strangely enough, however, nobody, including the proposed beneficiaries...seems to have a clear, and commonly shared, view of poverty” (Rahnema, 1991:21) or solutions to eradicating it.

The daily, on-the-ground practices of those engaged in ‘development’ illustrate that the interest of donors, multinational NGOs, and policy makers is in the problem – not in solving it (see Escobar, 1994; Ilcan 2006; Ferguson, 2006; DuBois, 1991). For instance, the labeling of St. Kitts and Nevis by the Country Poverty Assessment (CPA)⁵ as a poverty stricken country (without a national discussion of the social conditions that perpetuate the Federation’s marginalization), serves as an attractive justification to donor agencies for continuous development interventions. My research interests therefore have been fueled by what appears to be a dilemma: that the existence of development practitioners within aid agencies depends upon the presence of the very problems whose symptoms they aim to treat. In community development, practitioners are positioned and labeled as experts, and beneficiaries/recipients of aid are positioned as persons and communities in need of ‘development’ or some form of tutelage or behavior modification

⁵ The CPA is a national policy document that is drafted and utilized by countries in the region that are yet to formulate a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

(see Gupta, 1998). It is this sort of 'one-up/one-down' positioning that almost all agencies operating within the development apparatus depend on to further their work (see Polsky, 1991). To this end, I have come to view the professional/expert/client relationship as a varied social arrangement underpinned by practices that perpetuate the structure of power relations.

Despite my past experience, the goal and intent of this study is not to make assumptions about the motivations or intentions of those who engage in such practices, which may be benign, exploitative or some combination of both. Instead, the focus is on the examination of those participatory development practices whose goal is to reduce poverty, and how these operate within an obscured governing framework.

My study of the BNTF participatory approach to reducing poverty in St. Kitts and Nevis is an exploratory study. Accordingly, qualitative methods were considered appropriate for an analysis of concepts, themes, perceptions and opinions derived from an examination of participation within the BNTF, about which relatively little seems to be known and which in-depth understanding is desired.

One Foot In-One Foot Out

St. Kitts and Nevis was elected as my case study for a number of reasons. First, as one of the older borrowing member countries of the BNTF, the Federation implements a wide range of sectoral projects aimed at reducing its persistent poverty. Secondly, the island has good organizational contacts that proved important during data collection. And third, I have personal connections being a citizen of the country and having worked with the organization as a community liaison officer. With these in mind, during the

proposal writing process I worked hard to develop a balance between being a researcher and a Kittitian simultaneously. I thought I would know how to “behave” as a researcher, and that I would be able to easily navigate the fieldwork process. I naively convinced myself that this would be an easy research experience. Needless to say, I was completely unprepared for some of the issues I faced.

From the beginning of my fieldwork, I acknowledged that I was in the peculiar position of being both an “insider” and an “outsider”, and that many traditional methods of conducting research directly conflict with my sense of being Kittitian. Conducting research in my country where I know many people and have relationships with the participants, made the transition from being a friend and colleague to researcher a difficult one. I was forced to analyze the programme through a different set of lenses than before. Conversations became more structured as I had to ask not only more, but different kinds of questions, often with a notebook in one hand and tape-recorder in the other. In fact, in the midst of conversations I would want to ask particular questions, but harbored concern switching modes from being a friend to researcher. One of my journal entries read,

I feel so weird and lost, how do I separate my “Kittitianness”? Should I have an advantage here or does this work against me? Does the outsider position lead to more valid research data? What do I do when building a relationship as a researcher conflicts with other kinds of relationships I have here?

I decided to make the switch visible to the participants by simply informing them that I was wearing multiple hats and the change in my tone indicated a switching of hats. Eventually, something interesting happened. I would get through a conversation without the issue being raised at all. After establishing a researcher rapport, my “job” became

less difficult as the participants and I found a way to adjust to my new role, alleviating many of the pressures felt by both me and the participants.

Despite feeling torn between my conflicting identities, in terms of my research, there were advantages to my insider-outsider status. I occupied a unique position of having instant access to participants. Thus, I did not experience the researcher's "common dilemmas of isolation, and the search for social acceptance and ties with the society" (Sherif, 2001: 440). However, some argue that the "outsider" position is a "preferable stance, as it is free from the potential bias that arises from too close an affiliation with the research subjects" (Allen, 2004: 15). This is a position I question. From my field experience, it is this precise lack of distance which enhanced my research. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that the researcher's insider-outsider status changes and varies at different points in a research project (Sherif, 2001) and is often different with different groups and different individuals.

To adequately address the central research question a combination of qualitative techniques were used for this study. This eclectic method consisted of semi-structured interviews, supplemented by data from field notes and documentary research, conducted over a five-week period⁶. I decided to undertake interviews to get individuals'

⁶ The data collection process initially proceeded more slowly than expected, but that was largely because the researcher was far too ambitious when the field schedule was prepared. In some cases, interview appointments had to be rescheduled due to participants' scheduling conflicts, and in other cases, a few respondents did not provide the richness of data expected, necessitating the contact and selection of additional respondents. However, overall, interview respondents were cooperative and supportive.

perceptions on key themes identified within this study, such as participation, poverty and development. As well, I wanted to know of their experiences with participatory methods and strategies in poverty reduction. Choosing research participants proved equally important to collecting quality data and so sampling was done to identify specific individuals that, by analysis, would provide information and an analytical lens of the BNTF programme and its activities. The study sample was drawn from a list of personnel associated with the programme at various levels. This included CDB/BNTF administrators, a CIDA representative, government figures, BNTF Project Steering Committee members and programme facilitators. Each potential interviewee was contacted and offered the chance to participate in the study. On this basis, fourteen individuals were identified as the best prospective participants for the study. I chose this combination of participants because of their positions and experiences with the CDB/BNTF. Their views on the research topic are important since they are in charge of designing and planning the programme. They also approve projects submitted by potential beneficiaries. People holding such positions have the power to determine what actually gets done on the ground (i.e. how the programme's methods get disseminated). Hence, when put together, this group of participants offers a particularly valuable standpoint from which to examine participation in the BNTF programme.

Interviews were semi-structured and efforts were made to keep them informal in order to make participants feel comfortable. All participants were required to give verbal consent to be interviewed. Accordingly, a research package containing all the necessary approved ethical documents was distributed via email to each individual in advance of the interview. The questions mainly revolved around core themes derived from the

literature, such as poverty reduction, participation, development and poverty. Interviews were performed individually in community centres, offices and via telephone. They were also audio-taped in addition to my taking notes, and on average lasted 40-60 minutes.

Interview guides were designed to provide an understanding of the features, processes, and procedures (Fontana and Frey, 2003) that characterize the participatory operations of the BNTF. The primary goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding of how participants perceive poverty, how they give meaning to development and also to participation. A second goal was to ascertain how their understanding of these key concepts influences poverty reduction efforts. With this knowledge I was then able to decipher between what was personal opinion and organizational standpoint. Yet another goal of the interviews was to understand participants' perspectives on the shift in development practice. That is, from the idea of development as 'non-participatory' (or top-down) to development as 'participatory'.

In light of the organizational diversity of my participants, I categorized them into two groups: programme administrators and facilitators. Accordingly, two interview guides were administered (see Appendix A & B). It was assumed that administrators are familiar with the CDB/BNTF mandate, policies and guiding rationalities, while facilitators are instrumental in the implementation of the programme's activities and methods at the community level. Hence, the purpose of the different interview was to understand and capture the varying descriptions of participation as part of a significant shift or change to the BNTF development agenda. Through the data that I gathered via conversations with research participants and the organizational documents I refer to next, my analysis will reveal that the description and portrayal of participation by the

CDB/BNTF does not fit with various practices of the programme.

The principal documents I examine herein come from a recent series of BNTF operational documents on comprehensive development published by the CDB. They include ‘The Basic Needs Trust Fund Fifth Programme Operations Manual’, ‘Poverty, People and Potential: The BNTF in the Caribbean’, ‘BNTF Poverty Reduction Action Plan’, and the ‘BNTF 5 Project Implementation Plan’. The documents came out in 2003, 2004 and 2005. However I draw most frequently on the 2003 Operations Manual. Collectively, these documents characterize three key areas of participatory development: project identification, planning and implementation. For example, the Project Implementation Plan emphasizes the importance of beneficiary involvement in identifying and prioritizing their most felt need, an approach the document says draws upon “the poor’s own criteria of poverty as well as their own solutions” (CDB, 2004: 5). This and the other documents convey how it is that participation has become so prominent within the wider discourse on development – as necessary for poverty reduction. These documents, disseminated to all the BNTF offices function as the programme’s working documents, guiding daily operations of the programme in each borrowing member country.

In addition, information presented in documents appears selective in that only positive aspects of the programme are documented. For example, the Operations Manual is abound with statements such as “community participation will ensure ownership and sustainability long after initial project inputs” (CDB, 2003: 11); while making no mention of other related issues (e.g. the politics of participation or the challenges to participation). Nonetheless, I found the materials useful in understanding the CDB/BNTF organizational

structure and the processes involved in the dissemination of the programme. They also helped to elucidate the key element (i.e. the adoption of the so-called bottom-up, participatory approach) of the programme's development agenda. Most importantly, examination of the documents allows me to articulate at least those parts of the programme's structure that are ordinarily unarticulated – to describe the invisible operations of power.

Data analysis was guided by the objectives of the study. More specifically, the analysis of interview transcripts, field notes and documents was based on an inductive approach geared toward identifying patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. The data was analyzed using what Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as the constant comparative method. Here, line, sentence and paragraph segments of interview transcripts, and some portions of documents, were reviewed to decide what codes fit the concepts suggested by the data.

Furthermore, the data, which were primarily text based, were reviewed multiple times for purposes of thematic analysis. All aspects of text interpretation were guided by the primary research question. To this end, an initial list of core concepts and phrases was created. Those concepts included poverty, development, participation, empowerment, poverty reduction, community involvement and ownership. I examined the meaning given to these concepts during interview conversations in relation to other development buzzwords such as ownership, empowerment and sustainability. Similarly, by examining the documents I was able to draw an analysis of the words that were joined together. For example, the Operations Manual describes community participation in the project implementation phase as “enhancing ownership and pride in the poverty solution,

resulting in sustainability of projects” (CDB, 2003: 11-12). This document, along with the others, proved to have a high frequency of similarly associated concepts identified in my list. It is within these units that I locate avenues of meanings, that is, the way participation is articulated, related to and associated with other concepts. This method of identifying recurring concepts, phrases and association of words was applied throughout my analysis. In the end, an excel sheet was created, which served as an index to organize and manage the data.

The methodological approach of this study is not without drawbacks. The major limitation is that the participant sample excluded individuals at the micro-level: the direct beneficiaries of the programme. Hence, the perception of beneficiaries was not taken up in this study. Exploring how beneficiaries of the BNTF interventions define participation would be useful for future research. As well, what it means to ‘do’ participation, and who exactly participates and how, lends to meanings in beneficiaries’ constructions of development programmes and projects. These meanings and perceptions would provide a holistic approach to the study of participation in development.

PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

St. Kitts-Nevis and the BNTF: A Brief History

St. Kitts and Nevis, a twin island Federation, covers an area of 104 square miles. St. Kitts is the larger of the two (68 sq. miles) compared to Nevis’ (36 sq. miles) (Appendix C). The recorded history of the islands began when Christopher Columbus first spotted them in 1493. The islands were later colonized by Europeans in the 17th Century. However, after several years of intermittent warfare between Britain and

France, the British sought control and St. Kitts and Nevis became a British colony in 1713 (www.gov.kn; BNTF PRAP, 2003:1). With its physical location, topography and climate, St. Kitts' development preoccupation was the plantation economy (until 2005), with most of the island engaged in the cultivation of sugar. Nevis experienced less favorable conditions for sugar which led to the emergence of a smallholder economy. In 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis, as one political unit, gained independence from Britain.

According to the St. Kitts and Nevis Statistical Review 2004, the total population at the end of 2003⁷ was 47,313 with 36,068 people residing in St. Kitts and 11,245 in Nevis (www.gov.kn). A Country Poverty Assessment (CPA)⁸ funded by the CDB, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and carried out by Kairi Consultants Ltd of Trinidad and Tobago was conducted in 2001. The report's findings stated that poverty is a prominent social problem in the Federation and indicated that of the Federation's total population, 30% and 32% respectively are poor. Additionally, 11% in St. Kitts and 17% of the population in Nevis are classified as living in extreme poverty (CPA Report-St.

⁷ The year 2003 indicate the most recent population statistics. A Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) and other activities to gather national quantitative and qualitative data were conducted in early summer of 2007. However, updated population statistics are not yet available.

⁸ The CPA comprises of three main components: A SLC which gathers quantitative poverty data; a Community Situational Analysis (CSA) based on qualitative perceptions and; an Institutional Analysis which explores the impact of public and private organizations on the well-being of the poor.

Kitts and Nevis, 2001: xi). Women and children, the vulnerable, the unemployed, youth under the age of 25 and persons who occupy low paying jobs are all categorized as classes of the population most likely to be poor (CPA Report-St. Kitts, 2001:xii). Additionally, low educational attainment was attributed as one of the major causes of poverty. The conceptualization of poverty I adopt for this study revolves around the pronounced deprivation of well-being, and a situation wherein individuals, households and communities lack access to basic social services such as sanitation, health, potable water, education, land, means of production and opportunities for realization of self-respect, dignity, and self-esteem (CDB, 2004: 7; Melville and Wint, 2007: 46).

The discourse of the CPA cleared the path for particular development interventions that would require the integration of these marginalized groups in an effort to modify, transform and reshape their lives – to make them ‘developed’. Casting poverty as the prominent problem, in communities where these categories of people reside, gives agency to experts and consultants to recommend intervention on behalf of the problem (see DuBois, 1991; Gupta, 1998). For instance, despite claims of providing the poor with opportunities to remedy their impoverished circumstances, it is often the knowledge and ideas of outsiders (facilitators, project managers) that frame poverty solutions. Such solutions often manifest in the form of community projects and programs with the goal of enhancing the capacity of the poor.

Moreover, insufficient and inadequate infrastructural development combined with the suggested need for enhanced human development solidified the argument (by consultants) that the legacy of colonialism left in its path a Federation socio-economically unprepared for the task of post-independence development. The formulation of the CPA

and its pronounced findings placed St. Kitts and Nevis into a prefabricated slot, namely, that of “underdeveloped nations” (Gupta, 1998:39), less than fully equipped to cope with their own lives, and to ‘develop’ themselves.

During the colonial period, citizens were perceived by those in the developed world as “primitive”. Through post-colonialism they became labeled as “poverty stricken” (Country Poverty Assessment, 2001). As the Poverty Assessment Report – St. Kitts-Nevis states:

Prior to self-government, the country experienced all the difficulties of dependence characteristic of colonial rule. While there has been respectable growth in the economy, the country still faces some outstanding difficulties and challenges. Development is of vital importance to socio-economic growth and should be fast-tracked in poverty-stricken areas, in an effort to improve people’s living standards (2001: x-xii).

This conceptualization of the Federation legitimized the need for external assistance to analyze the development problem and to offer intervention strategies as solutions, resulting in the emergence of new relations of power. In short, the discursive shift from “primitive” to “poverty stricken” put in place structures and relations of power disguised through positive mechanisms delivered by the BNTF Programme⁹.

Governing through Participation: The BNTF Programme

The establishment of the CDB/BNTF dates back to 1966 when a team of ‘experts’ were contracted and appointed by the United Kingdom, Canada and the United

⁹ The BNTF Programme areas of funding include: water supply systems, education facilities, day-care centres, health facilities, community markets, access, maintenance and skills training (CDB, 2004).

States to undertake a development survey in the Caribbean region. The team thereafter recommended the establishment of a regional development bank, which became known as the CDB (see Hardy, 1975:9). To combat persistent poverty and “underdevelopment” in the region, the CDB launched the BNTF Programme in 1979, integrating islands in the region as borrowing member countries (BMCs)¹⁰ (BNTF Project Implementation Plan (PIP), 2005:1). The programme’s purpose and functions are to equip poor communities with resources to improve their access to basic public services, enhance employability, and reduce social vulnerability (CDB, 2005). Some of its expected results include: notably enhanced capacity of participating institutions, improved communities and groups to manage and maintain social infrastructure, capacity strengthening of communities in order to initiate and manage change, and demonstrably more efficient, participating communities (CDB, 2004: 6).

The initial launch of the programme was done through financial assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (CDB, 2004). Phases 1-4 of the programme focused primarily on the implementation of infrastructural projects and economical growth (CDB, 2004) with the assumption that the reduction of poverty would occur as the benefits of capital investment-inspired growth permeated the Federation’s economy. Poverty reduction is defined operationally in terms of human development – education, health, water and sanitation, skills training, access, maintenance, and community markets (CDB, 2004: 8). However, like similar approaches

¹⁰ BMCs of the CDB/BNTF as of 2006 include Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Turks and Caicos Islands.

used by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), this approach did not result in the rapid and sustained improvements in the lives of poor people within the region, and a new approach was sought. After the USAID was no longer able to financially contribute to the operations of the programme, the CDB sought new financiers and created a partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in 2003 for the delivery of phase 5 of the programme, commonly referred to as BNTF 5 (Hardy, 2005; BNTF PIP, 2005).

BNTF 5 is the current phase of the BNTF, and represents a shift in the design of the programme from a 'top-down' approach to being "demand-led within targeted areas" (CDB, 2005:28). In accordance with the 'new' international development agenda ushered in by donor agencies (e.g. the World Bank, IMF, United Nations) during the 1990s, the BNTF's most prominent and emphasized feature is an approach that places people at the center of its development processes (BNTF Operations Manual (OM), 2003). This translates into the involvement, and more specifically, the participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders in all stages of the development intervention process - from project identification to monitoring and evaluation (BNTF PIP, 2005). According to CDB and its development partners, the participatory approach is a comprehensive and holistic method that allows for a more socially inclusive development process that would result in projects being community-based, community-driven and results-oriented, producing a mechanism for reducing poverty in BMCs (BNTF PIP, 2005). When asked to give some details of the programme, one participant responded:

When CIDA joined the programme and in fact gave us about US\$25 million to add to the programme, they insisted that we take on board an approach to finding out what men need and want, and what women need and want. CIDA insisted on this and simply because it's a poverty

reduction programme, and that's what BNTF 5 is shifting towards. We have always in the past shifted, but BNTF have to go one step further and look at doing development for people. Remember that BNTF started as a make work programme when unemployment was very, very high. It was suppose to be a very fast acting program not much analysis, no appraisal. But we no longer operate like that anymore. I feel like BNTF has moved towards a goal and objective which says that BNTF is about enhancing human capacity for development. So we have to focus on people and what people need and listen to what people think they need to get themselves out of poverty.

To this end, the classic phrase 'development for the people, by the people' has been adopted as the BNTF cornerstone.

It should be noted however, that because the formulation, design and management of the programme are carried out externally (by its managers, the CDB and primary donors, CIDA), it is unlikely that projects will genuinely derive from the community itself. This is an argument furthered by James Ferguson (in his work on the development crisis in Africa) who refers to Africa as a graveyard of development projects due to their consistent failures resulting from externally induced development and externally managed processes of development (Ferguson, 2006; see also Botes and van Rensburg, 2000).

As others have noted (e.g. Cornwall, 1998; Fraser, 2005), participatory agendas are merely an attempt to gain consensus on preconceived projects disguised as being conceived and planned by the people. Despite its well intentions to engage beneficiaries in the process of decision-making, critics contend that the act of participation (whether genuine or disguised) often begins "only after projects have already been designed" (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000:42). Therefore, despite efforts by the BNTF to mainstream participation into its projects cycle with the prospect of giving everyone who has a stake a voice and a choice, I suggest a useful alternative is to consider participation

as an “art of modern government” (Larner and Walters, 2004:405), that is, as a governmental rationality. More specifically, I am interested in what some may refer to elsewhere as “participatory governance” (e.g. Mosse, 2005; Ilcan and Lacey, 2006; Li, 2006; Cruikshank, 1999), in which the CDB/BNTF and its development partners, represent a regime of development that took over where formal colonial rule came to an end (see Gupta, 1998; Escobar, 1994, Escobar, 1988, DuBois, 1991). This alternative exploration of participation is worthwhile because it affords the opportunity to question the motivation of this ‘new’ development agenda with utopian features. It also allows me to explore whether the BNTF’s approach to reducing poverty in St. Kitts and Nevis in fact produces its desired outcome.

This study suggests that the BNTF 5 programme evokes many of the themes of current development discourse, primarily that of participatory poverty reduction. That is, the programme aims to reduce poverty with the active participation of the poor. Like other developing countries, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis has been convinced by past experience that the most promising path to reducing poverty, and to better development, is a participatory approach in which potential beneficiaries are actively involved in all stages of development projects.

There is a general consensus held by the CDB/BNTF administrators that participation is good, and that the participatory approach is the best vehicle for reducing poverty in St. Kitts and Nevis. One senior administrator stated, “development has to be about people first...BNTF is about enhancing human capacity for development and BNTF 5 is more of a people-centred programme, focusing on people, on people development, development for people”. Although the poor may benefit from an increase

in attention and possible opportunities, increased responsibility for the success or failure of projects is also attributed to the poor. Participation is associated with relevance to poverty reduction efforts of the BNTF because it is believed to enable groups and communities to identify problems, develop solutions, and facilitate change that in the long-term will improve their circumstances.

The definition of participation outlined in the document *Poverty, People and Potential*, implies the full inclusion and involvement of beneficiaries in the identification, proposal and implementation of development projects (CDB, 2005: 25). Beneficiaries in this case, as the Operations Manual outline, are any unit that is a recipient of the BNTF assistance, be it the individual, communities or groups (CDB, 2003). This description of participation advanced by the CDB/BNTF assumes that potential beneficiaries have a say in the course of development decision-making. But technically, “involvement” under this definition could also be interpreted as carrying out objectives that are decided by the CDB. In addition, exactly how participation is measured in recorded projects like the Deane-Glasford Primary School Expansion, the Dieppe Bay Primary School Upgrade or the Capacity Strengthening Training project is not clearly understood, and the sketching of what exactly constitutes participation remains hazy.

My study found that there is a common understanding of core principles which inform the BNTF approach, two of which are international aid ‘buzzwords’: “empowerment” and “ownership”. These terms are ubiquitous within the language of the programme (CDB, 2005; BNTF PIP, 2005), and discussed by programme personnel with the assurance of change and the promise of doing development ‘right’. This is evidenced by one administrator’s comment: “In BNTF philosophy how we think that people for

whom the facilities are being built, they need to own them...When you bring people on-board, they are participating in the whole exercise and because they are given a say, that's how you empower them, that's how you get ownership." Both empowerment and ownership as the rationale for participation are given great currency by programme advocates.

The BNTF projects are extremely diverse. They range a variety of sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, access, day care centres, community markets and skills training (CDB, 2004). Projects are implemented in the poorest communities identified by the CPA and are intended to take quick, effective and targeted actions to assist poor communities and vulnerable groups. In this way they aim to be "demand-led", stimulating beneficiary participation. However, my study found that although BNTF projects are largely community-based, they remain primarily organizational-driven and managed. Although background documents (BNTF PIP, 2005; BNTF OM, 2003) outline roles for beneficiaries in every phase of the project cycle, projects remain partially collaborative and participatory only in their initial identification and implementation phases. One participant tells a story of how descriptions or 'how to' steps in programme documents are not always practical on the ground.

Listen, from my experience it aint always possible to get poor people involved all the way and do the tings we want them to do. Sometimes it works and most times it don't. You get them to participate in some stages and not others, so we just do what we have to do for reporting. One Saturday morning with about 30-35 persons from the Dieppe Bay community itself, they came out, ahhm, the school was repainted, it was community effort. We attempted the same thing twice in St. Peter's we used a PA system...yeah we attempted in St. Peter's after we added 2 classrooms they say they wanted. We used the ahhm, written media, we used a gentleman who drives around with a PA system and publicize these events and we still did not get a good response.

The concern raised here is that because the word participation has become virtually a mandatory part of what is now taken to be good development practice, its actual effectiveness in affecting projects is debatable.

In terms of the overall impact of the programme's participatory approach, the aforementioned example and others that I will discuss indicate that participation has proven to be more complex than envisaged by the CDB. By this I mean putting participation into practice. From my experience working with the organization, the BNTF, like other development agencies, has been slow to make structural changes to accommodate their participatory approach. As a result, programme impact varies in accordance with the nature and scope of projects, and the characteristics of the host community.

Mainstreaming participation into the BNTF project cycle reflects the centrality of the approach within the CDB strategy. Consistent with the literature (Craig and Porter, 2006; Cornwall and Brock, 2005), participation has become an act of faith in the BNTF process, something research participants believe in and rarely question. When participants were asked about the idea and practice of participation, responses were consistently articulated with other buzzwords. One participant who has been part of the BNTF Project Steering Committee for approximately four years stated:

I think it is imperative because ahhhm from a local level, from a St. Kitts point of view when anything is established or put down in a community you need them to be stakeholders, and not just stakeholders, you need them to have a sense of ownership over it. I see it as an opportunity people can have a say in their own progress. Ahhhm, from what affect their circumstances, their way of life, quality of life and so on.

Another participant who has been working with the programme for just under five years commented that:

Once people are involved in the participation...people's capacity raise, their ownership...they'll take ownership to the project in a much better way. They will care for it; they will see that it is being maintained. They will make sure that the persons who the facility has been given to, that they too, you know what I mean, will appreciate and use it to the best for what it was intended for because they are involved and empowered.

Working with the programme for over 10 years, another added that:

Part of the goal of this idea of getting the beneficiaries to participate in all phases of the project is so that they develop a certain capacity; they are empowered to some aspect that they don't have to continuously go back to BNTF for assistance. If they are not involved it means that sustainability and maintenance of the project will become an issue.

These comments suggest a common conceptualization of the concept of participation. That is, potential beneficiaries are to participate, be empowered, have ownership of projects, as well as exercise a capacity to make development decisions – resulting in claims of sustainable development.

The comments above also suggest to me that one, participation possesses an efficiency argument, in that it is believed to be a tool for achieving better and sustainable project outcomes and; two, it is viewed as a process which enhances the capacity of communities and groups to improve their own livelihoods. Despite these perceptions, the revelation is that the involvement of beneficiaries is dictated and limited by the structure of the programme – a structure that is externally formulated, and one which gains consensus through the participation of beneficiaries. Hence, despite consensus that beneficiary participation should engender active processes, its practical application of what participation actually is remains challenging. For example, a former member of the PSC expressed some criticisms when he was asked about the practice of participation.

Participation on its own in whatever form is one thing, but participation in decision making seem to be out of reach for the poor. Certainly from my experience, you're involved in the...the stakeholders in consultation,

but what they say they want after they participate is not what they were necessarily getting. I remember sending participation information down to the CDB on one project and CDB said essentially this is unacceptable because of the levels of participation of women. They seem to have an idea on paper of what participation should be, but don't understand their guidelines may have needed to be reworked so that it fits reality not the other way around.

What is being revealed is that we should be careful how policy and operating documents come to portray participation. In essence, we must distinguish between participation as rhetoric and practice.

Within the structure of the BNTF participation operates as 'faceless' power. As such, this study does not embrace the leap of faith that participation gives beneficiaries a genuine sense of ownership. What my findings imply is that participation is an imposed agenda. As the following example illustrates, it is an agenda with pre-determined opportunities and choices, that claim to give agency to the poor. As Stoker (1998), Li (2006) and Ilcan and Lacey (2006) caution, although aid programmes are often promoted as upholding the voices of the poor through their active involvement, these programmes often aim to govern individuals and groups in diverse ways. One example is the frequent and extensive discussions with potential beneficiaries, exercised in a series of community meetings, as part of the set procedures established by the CDB. No community meetings took place during my trip. However, during the time I worked with the BNTF I conducted many of these meetings and received 'best practices' training in conducting meetings.

As outlined in organizational documents (BNTF OM, 2003: 12-17; CDB, 2005) initial discussions in a meeting represent the early stage of the participatory process – a sort of verbal contract as to what each side will expect of the other. The BNTF

facilitators usually explain that the goal of the programme is to ‘help them to help themselves’ and stress that the focused outcome of any project is the community’s strength and ability. Facilitators then engage meeting attendants in one of several participatory activities called community needs prioritization. This activity allows those present to not only verbalize publicly the many unmet needs of their community, but also to gain consensus on which concerns are most important. As is often the case, the meetings conclude with a community agreed “list” of potential projects ranked in order of priority. This list is an itemized sheet of community needs expressed by residents of a community. The items or needs are arranged in order of how the community would like them to be addressed by the BNTF. For example, the Lodge Project community may express that they would like the roof of the primary school repaired, the alleyway down a particular street constructed, a skills training program in carpentry for male youths, etc. Of these needs the community collectively identifies repairing the roof of the school as their most important need, followed by skills training and so forth. At this stage, facilitators often deliberate as to which potential project would be possible under the BNTF funding criteria.

It should be noted that transect walks usually precede community meetings. One facilitator described a transect walk as “the ground work that is done by the BNTF staff. The ground work basically means talking to key informants in the community, community leaders, talking to some of the males and females so you get a balance as to, ahhh, the kind of information that we collect”. From my experience of having worked as a community liaison officer, information obtained during transect walks allow facilitators to consult the BNTF pre-determined list of approved funding areas and to

prepare and coordinate meeting presentations accordingly. Facilitators then attend meetings with the knowledge that not all of the community's or group's felt needs will align with the BNTF prescribed "menu" (or criteria) of acceptable projects.

Consequently, the "list" becomes somewhat of a shopping list whereby facilitators work their way down the list until a mutually desired project is hit upon – which usually is an alternative project from the "menu" that supposedly meet the desires of beneficiaries.

In the end, it is usually a question of how much of the project BNTF will finance in return for the community's involvement. If the result is an infrastructural project, communities are persuaded to make contributions through voluntary effort and/or self-help voluntary unpaid labor. In the case of a skills training project, beneficiaries are involved as subjects. When these situations occur, they correspond to the idea derived from the literature that participatory activities are voluntary and coercive simultaneously (Cruikshank, 1999). So, in these instances, the number of people involved in either situation are carefully noted and then reported back to the CDB as an indicator of "sale" of the project; a sort of participation index. Thus, to the extent that beneficiaries decide their priority needs and are engaged in project implementation, the BNTF approach as explicated in reviewed documents (e.g. CDB, 2005) is appropriately labeled "bottom-up". The reality, however, is that communities and groups that propose projects have to abide by pre-determined procedures prescribed by the CDB, which could either accept or reject the proposal. The result is that the roles of communities and groups are circumscribed by the procedures set at the "top". Therefore, despite claims of doing business in an entirely different way, the structure and operations of the BNTF continue to reflect a "top-down" agenda, which the literature speaks to. The present practices of the BNTF appear to be in

line with the argument made by Mosse and Lewis (2005) in that where new procedures are claimed to be operational, it is truly both old and new forms of development that are cohabiting, reflecting continuity as opposed to radical divergences.

One aspect evident from the research data is that the CDB continues to provide various participatory training workshops for facilitators in support of its claims of doing 'development' differently. These efforts are necessary and relevant. The problem, however, remains that while field workers are being trained in participatory, "bottom-up" approaches, they continue to carry out their work in a framework of "top-down" planning. Furthermore, this top down planning supports what previous research by Mosse and Lewis (2005) and Mosse (2005) conclude – that participation legitimizes disguised governing development interventions. In light of this, it is no surprise that there is no evidence of beneficiaries "owning" any implemented projects. This reality was sadly expressed in frustration by one participant who stated, "the communities...any time they want something done it's BNTF they finding for assistance. It is the same thing we are experiencing over and over. So it's like we serving now, like the people come to us to remedy all of their problems". Hence, participation is not a path to empowerment, but rather a process by which beneficiaries become empowered not in themselves, but through a relationship with facilitators (outsiders), by seeking out facilitators' 'expert' knowledge to remedy their impoverished situations.

The slow pace of the CDB to make the structural changes required to devolve power from their own managerial system, results in beneficiaries being disciplined into "buying" projects shaped by the programme's structure, rather than achieving a sense of ownership of development projects. Ownership in practice then occurs once projects are

sold, and cease to be something owned by the CDB/BNTF. At this point ownership is therefore transferred to beneficiaries. Hence, as the literature reveals, ownership could never be complete, if communities and by extension St. Kitts and Nevis, retain dependency on foreign aid (Cramer, Stein and Weeks, 2006).

It is believed by BNTF administrators that empowerment is an outcome of participation. The concept is conceptualized by the CDB (2005) as the ability of groups and community members to gain mastery over their lives, and to create a social environment where capacities can be realized. But, despite the BNTF attempts to employ an empowerment framework, to some facilitators, its formal structure is not necessarily conducive to participation. As a participant expressed in frustration:

[Y]ou have a bottom-up approach, a bottom up approach to the top when the top has already made up its mind. It just does not work. If you want to have a bottom-up approach then there must be some clear understanding that what the bottom says will have some relevance at the top. You can't have a bottom-up approach where the top has already made up its mind on what is good and what is not good.

What is implied here is that although participation aims to alter top-down bureaucratic planning into an inclusive bottom-up process, the structure is still given precedence over agency of beneficiaries. As a result, any relational aspect between donor and recipients loses any chance to be transformed. A participant serving on the BNTF Project Steering Committee for over three years remarked, "I think that the whole structure does not lend itself well to this participatory approach...the whole structure of the BNTF and CDB. The whole system that they have in place...it's more set up to deal with things and stuff that really don't have anything to do with people". This comment supports my point made here that the structure of the participatory approach does not allow for a more fluid and open structure of operation that invites full inclusion of beneficiaries. More

importantly, the concern raised here is one of beneficiary disillusionment and the fact that there is a wide gap between the experience of participation on the ground and the rhetoric of the BNTF. In short, the representation of agency to the poor the programme puts forward does not translate into their full participation.

Moreover, due to the embedded hierarchies within the development apparatus, it is facilitators who own the participatory tools, select the potential project, and record and summarize (based on the programme's funding criteria) information abstracted from meetings. Hence, although roles are outlined for beneficiaries to play, they cannot participate on an equal footing. Consequently, they do not have the opportunities to be "empowered" or to gain competence and control to "own" projects, because beneficiary participation is often under the influence of development targeted regions and populations.

In this study participation is intended to put beneficiaries in the driver's seat of their own development, enabling them to help themselves. As such, the BNTF programme is an archetypal example of the new trend in international development, as pointed out in the literature by Escobar (1994) and Craig and Porter (2006). It is premised on the notion that empowerment is an attribute of participation, which in turn incite feelings of ownership, setting the stage for sustainable development. However, my examination here corroborates what previous studies by Cruikshank (1999) indicate: that participation as a concept is complex, and beneficiary empowerment as a benefit of participation is difficult to measure.

The impact of the BNTF participatory approach varies in accordance with the nature and scope of projects, and the characteristics of the host community. When asked

to give an account of the programme's success, one facilitator's answer was quite ambivalent: "Well we don't have the data but I, I think eh that access to certain things have been improve drastically. In terms of skills training, we, as can't be guaranteed eh that everybody we train is going to secure a job, but we have provided skills training in areas that we think people can become marketable in". This inability to identify the direction and extent of changes made by the programme in the lives of the poor and the marginalized corresponds with my discussion that projects more often reflect the CDB's priorities and perceptions of development, rather than beneficiaries' needs.

Overall, the programme's impact on reducing poverty is minimal, considering that communities and vulnerable groups still have many unmet needs. Despite CDB's claims, participation within the BNTF programme does not seem very participatory. One reason for this may be the fact that CDB elides the degree to which the participatory approach itself is an institutionalized agenda and thus itself non-participatory at the point of conception. Despite these overall challenges, the BNTF has had a positive effect on infrastructural access (i.e. roads, alleys, pathways). Evidence of this impact was found primarily in rural communities.

The BNTF programme can be of benefit to the poor, as over time a poverty focus has become more central to the programme's mission. As a result, facilitators have been able to use projects to raise awareness of social and poverty issues. Nonetheless, the programme remains essentially a donor instrument. However, it deserves mention that facilitators are hard-working, well intentioned individuals, who are committed to making changes in poor communities. They are often faced with subtle juggling of different perspectives or agendas: those of the CDB, the executing ministry or agency, the

different stakeholders within the community, and their own – all while trying to do the best job possible for the poor.

I have been convinced by my analysis that the BNTF approach should be neither exclusively top-down nor exclusively bottom-up, but preferably a balanced process of mutual respect and responsibility for designing, planning, implementing and evaluating development projects. Significant and tangible inputs from the “bottom” such as community-based knowledge, should compliment the contributions from the “top”, such as expertise and financial capital.

In addition, the implementation of participation needs to be sensitive to national and local politics and their impact on beneficiary involvement. Projects should be responsive to the local context in communities, keeping in mind that each community has its own distinct culture. Also, projects should address direct concerns for felt needs and should take into account the socioeconomic and political conditions of communities. It would also be beneficial for attention to be paid not only to outcomes of projects, but also to process. This includes, practical and meaningful opportunities for beneficiaries to engage and be part of projects, because the degree to which anti-poverty programs are sustainable depends on whether projects are authentically addressing real needs.

CONCLUSION

This study is a valuable addition to the limited body of literature on the CDB/BNTF and development interventions in the Caribbean region. It provides useful insight for policy makers, researchers, and communities and groups interested in the operations of development aid. Previous studies have focused largely on impact

assessments of the BNTF at the institutional level, and most of those studies have either been undertaken by the CDB or published by CDB consultants.

This study makes two principal contributions. First, it provides a better understanding of the BNTF programme as a poverty reduction mechanism. It does so by focusing on the qualitative aspects of the programme's operations, processes and activities. Second, by exploring poverty-related concepts and themes, the study confirms that the BNTF projects do not have a direct impact on poverty, but they help to create conditions for improving livelihoods that are concomitants of poverty.

Additionally, participation is a complex, difficult to implement and ubiquitous concept (with the clamours of "empowerment" and "ownership") that has gained considerable purchase in development literature in recent years as a solution to reducing poverty. The CDB's flagship anti-poverty mechanism, the Basic Needs Trust Fund Programme, has adopted a participatory approach in its efforts to alleviate poverty in its BMCs. To this end, the primary purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to investigate the significance of 'participation' in this poverty reduction initiative. It was also my aim to examine how the concept is put into practice in BNTF projects and activities in St. Kitts and Nevis.

In-depth interviews supplemented by document reviews and field notes, combined to produce findings that are consistent with the theoretical literature that maintains that participation, rather than altering aid relations, is a donor instrument to further control and exercise power over the already marginalized poor, doing so through obscured means of government.

BNTF projects were found to be largely community-based, but primarily

organizational driven. The participatory effects of projects vary in accordance with the scope of projects and host community. While projects have improved some conditions, beneficiaries have yet to gain access to the power necessary for sustained development, due to the CDB's slow pace in relinquishing control of development projects.

Finally, people in development, at all levels, often think they know how to make things better for their targets. The people on the ground (facilitators) do what makes sense there; the people one level up (administrators) do what makes sense to them, and up the tree it goes. By the time projects get approved and are turned over to potential beneficiaries, they are so muddled it is no wonder projects do not produce their intended impact. Donor agencies that have adopted *participation* as the panacea to poverty, have applied a stand-alone approach to addressing such persistent societal problems, while ignoring the beneficent exercises of power in this approach. This study is a modest attempt in trying to initiate such debate and draw attention to these realities.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide for the CDB/BNTF Officials

Date of Interview	
Position in Organization	

Personal Demographics

I was wondering if you could tell me about your work with the CDB.

1. What is your official position with the CDB?
2. Which category best reflects how long you have worked with the CDB? () 1-5 yrs () 6-11 yrs () 12-17 yrs () 18-23 yrs () 24-30 yrs
3. Could you give me a brief summary of what your job/duties involve?
3.2 Do you think the activities of your job are connected to the people the programme is seeking to work with?

Poverty and Development

1. Can you briefly tell me, what is your understanding of development?
2. Similarly, what is your understanding of poverty?
3. What are some norms or values do you think are important to addressing poverty?
4. Who are the poor?
4.2 Who decides who the poor are?

The BNTF Programme

1. Can you give me a brief overview of the programme?
2. What about the programme's current approach that makes it 'new' or different from previous approaches to reducing poverty in this area?
3. What is this approach meant to accomplish?
3.2 What is its ultimate purpose/objective?
3.3 What are its goals?

'Participation'

1. It has been suggested that *participation* is the new buzzword in development, and as a result has become central to development initiatives of all kind. What do you think of that?
2. What is your understanding of *participation*?
3. What are the advantages of using a participatory approach?
3.2 What are its challenges and/or limitations?

Poverty Reduction

1. In your experience how have approaches to reducing poverty changed?
1.2 Where do these changes come from?
2. What should the poor look like after they have been involved in programme projects and activities?

Conclusion

1. Do you think your programme is distinct to these parts of the region?
2. Have you seen this (participatory) approach operating elsewhere?
3. Do you think it is a good approach for BMCs and the Caribbean generally?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for BNTF Facilitators in St. Kitts and Nevis

Date of Interview	
Position with Organization	

Personal Demographics

1. What is your position with the BNTF Programme?
2. Which category best reflects how long you have worked with the BNTF? () 1-5 yrs () 6-11 yrs () 12-17 yrs () 18-23 yrs () 24-30 yrs
3. Can you give me a description of your duties?
4. Do your duties allow you to connect with the people the programme is seeking to work with? How so?

Poverty and Development

1. What is your understanding of development?
2. How do you understand poverty?
3. Who are the poor?
 - 3.2 Who defines who the poor are?

'Participation'

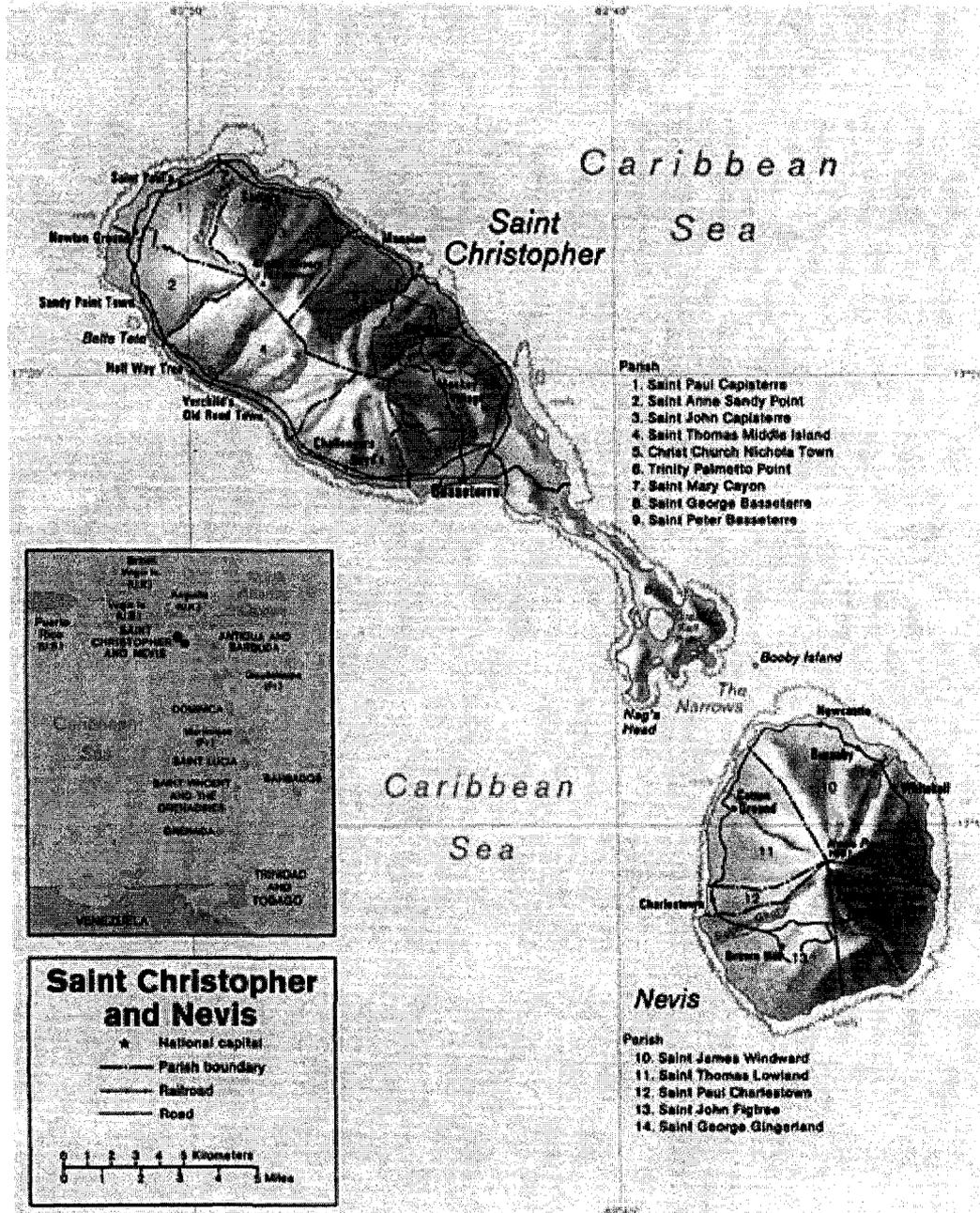
1. It has been suggested that *participation* is now central to development, and that it has been mainstreamed into programs and projects. What do you think of that?
2. It is also suggested that it is important to get people involved in all phases of projects. What do you think of that?
3. What does beneficiary involvement mean to you?
4. Who are programme beneficiaries?
 - 4.2 What does it mean exactly for beneficiaries to be involved in all phases of the project cycle?
 - 4.3 In your experience how is this normally done?
5. What ideas do you think drive this notion of community or beneficiary involvement?
6. What has been your experience in getting people to take part in various projects?
7. What measures do you take to get beneficiaries involved?
 - 7.2 What types of activities do they typically engage in?
8. Does it matter if beneficiaries take part in the activities of the project cycle?
 - 8.2 What bearing or impact does their involvement have on project outcomes?
9. What challenges do groups/communities face in their efforts to get involved in projects and activities?

The Programme

1. BNTF is in the 5th cycle of the programme's existence. Tell me a bit about your experience implementing the programme in this area?
2. In your experience, what is different about this installment?
 - 2.2 Where do you think these changes come from?
3. What do you think of this approach the programme uses?
4. What is the goal of using this approach in St. Kitts & Nevis?
 - 4.2 Do you think it is a good approach for the country? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C

Map of St. Kitts & Nevis



Source: www.gov.kn

VITA AUCTORIS

Minerva V. Saddler was born in the twin island Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis. She graduated from the Cayon High School in 1992. Several years later she went on to York University where she obtained a BA Hons. in Sociology and Law and Society in 2004. She is currently a candidate for the Master's Degree in Sociology at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Summer 2008.