Marginalised or Enabled Voices? 'User Participation' in Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen widespread debate around issues of participation. This has been the case at all tiers of government, within a wide range of user communities and organisations and within the academic world. Yet there remains a lack of clarity about many aspects of participation, including the ways in which it is conceptualised and operationalised. This includes key questions such as the purposes of participation – is it to improve governance, to improve service delivery or to improve social and human capital (National Community Forum, 2006) – as well as who is participation for, who participates, and what are the limits of participation?

This paper will explore these debates through a discussion of the theoretical literature and by examining several distinct examples of participation across social policy. It will thus set the current concern with user participation in the context of wider debates around democracy, governance and representation, as well as participation *per se*.

Reference
National Community Forum (2006) 'Removing the Barriers to Community Participation', NCF

Key Words: governance, participation, representation