

Ladder of Participation

The Ladder of Participation has eight steps, each representing a different level of participation. From bottom to top, the steps explain the extent of participation and how much real power stakeholders contain to have impact on changes and determine the process and its outcomes. The ladder can be a valuable framework for understanding what is meant when organizations (facilitators) and their engagement, outreach or organizing approaches refer to 'participation'. The terms 'the facilitators' and 'stakeholders' are used as shorthand, but could represent residents and organizations.

At the bottom of the ladder, forms of non-participation are used by facilitators to impose their agendas onto their stakeholders. Participation, as various degrees of tokenism, occur when stakeholders are asked about changes and share their opinions on those changes, which facilitators denote as 'input'. However, the input of stakeholders will not have a leading or major effect on the change occurring. Therefore, participation does not lead to effective and collective transformation, but is communicated and perceived as so. At the top of the ladder, participation is about stakeholders having direct involvement to impact, negotiate and modify the current program, organization or system.

