

# **DECENTRALIZATION ON FALLOW AND FERTILE GROUND: PREPARING THE POPULATION FOR DEMOCRATIC SELF-GOVERNANCE**

**Anirudh Krishna**

Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Political Science

Duke University

Box 90245

Durham, NC 27708-0245

(919) 613-7337 (Office)

(919) 960-4658 (Home)

(919) 681-8288 (Fax)

krishna@pps.duke.edu

## Abstract

Decentralizing authority to democratically elected local government is advised for reasons of efficiency and good governance, but equity may suffer if elites capture decision making at the local level. What safeguards can help promote equitable and participatory decentralization? This question is examined with the help of an original database compiled for 53 *panchayats* (village councils) in India, including individual interviews with over 2,000 local residents. Changing the structures of local governments through affirmative action has not helped so far to increase participation appreciably among traditionally excluded groups (particularly women, scheduled castes, the former untouchables, and certain tribes). Participation is quite high, however, among members of these groups who are educated, at least to the elementary level, and who are reasonably well informed. Education and information empower traditionally excluded groups to participate, and these effects are more reliable so far than the effects of affirmative action. Policies that enable people to educate themselves, particularly about their rights and about the processes of local governments, should precede or at least accompany decentralization.

# **DECENTRALIZATION ON FALLOW AND FERTILE GROUND: PREPARING THE POPULATION FOR DEMOCRATIC SELF-GOVERNANCE**

## **1. Decentralization with Safeguards**

Along with downsizing governments, decentralizing their authority is being advocated as part of the good governance agenda promoted by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies.<sup>1</sup> Deconcentrating central government offices by locating them closer to where citizens live constitutes one part of decentralization; but the more important part concerns devolution or mandated transfers of authority and resources to independently elected local governments (Rondinelli et al. 1989; Uphoff 1986).

Decentralizing authority is advised for the sake of promoting higher participation, facilitating accessible and responsive governance, engendering superior service delivery, and permitting more effective poverty reduction (for instance, by Chambers 1999; Esman and Uphoff 1984; Korten 1990; UNDP 2000; and World Bank 2001). But while it can help improve performance overall – by enabling flexible and context-sensitive decision making, by encouraging competition among local administrations, by facilitating local resource contribution, and by mobilizing communities' social capital<sup>2</sup> – grave doubts have been voiced concerning the

---

<sup>1</sup> A widely cited statistic by Dillinger (1994) indicates that of 75 developing and transitional countries with population in excess of five million, all but 12 were engaged in the early 1990s with decentralizing administrative authority to units of local government. This movement toward devolution has acquired additional momentum since then, and donor agencies have often made it a condition for providing additional assistance (Blair 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Cheema and Rondinelli (1983); Cohen and Peterson (1996); Montgomery (2000); and Smith

effects of decentralization on equity and equal access. The “most important caveat,” stresses the World Bank (2001:106), “is that decentralization can bolster the power of elites.” Instead of facilitating equity – in participation, representation, influence and benefit sharing – decentralization might result, instead, in providing additional “instruments of oppression in the hands of influential elites” (Human Development Center 1999: 53).<sup>3</sup>

Unless it is undertaken appropriately, with adequate safeguards and sufficient preparation, decentralization might severely impair equity and representation at the local level. What sorts of safeguards are helpful and necessary? What policy measures should proceed or accompany decentralization to assist with the goals of equity, participation, representation, and empowerment?

These questions are examined here with the help of an original database compiled between May and August 2000 in 53 villages of two Indian states, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and including individual interviews with over 2,000 village residents, selected through random sampling. Participation in the processes and outputs of local government is examined in relation to *gram panchayats*, village councils that have been constituted by law in nearly all of rural

---

(1996).

<sup>3</sup> Some observers are hopeful that decentralization could help enhance equity. Jorgensen and van Domelen (2001:104) lay faith in their hope that “Vulnerable communities will be better served...by public interventions that are executed in a decentralized fashion”. Most other observers are more cautious, however, while assessing the equity effects of decentralized local governance: “Power might fall into the wrong hands” (CIRDAP 1992: 105); decentralization can “reinforce local elites or self-serving leadership” (Esman and Uphoff 1984: 31); “local government...may be no more responsive to the needs of the poor – and even less responsive if controlled by a local elite” (UNDP 1998: 56).

India. Legislation enacted at state and national levels has put in place a three-tier system of *panchayati raaj* (village self-government).<sup>4</sup> The system of *panchayati raaj* was inaugurated in 1959, but it was the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India, enacted in 1993, which first provided legal recognition to *panchayats* as the “third” layer of government, functioning continuously below the national and state levels (Matthew 1995). Regular elections to these local bodies was mandated by law, official positions were reserved for schedule castes (former untouchables), scheduled tribes, and women, and the stage was set for additional devolution of resources and authority.

Undertaken five years after these changes were instituted, this investigation is concerned with examining two sets of issue. I look, first, at the question of Who Participates? To what extent do poor and lower caste villagers, women and other weaker sections of society participate in constituting *panchayats* and influencing their decisions? My second question is concerned with Who Benefits? Do vulnerable groups in villages share equally in the benefits of public expenditures carried out at the local level? Or are elite and influential citizens able to capture both the process and its benefits? Sections 3 and 4 look at these two questions.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Gram panchayats* (village councils), which constitute the lowest level in this three-tier system, cover between one and five villages depending on population size. Average village population in our sample of 53 villages is 1,556, and there are, on average, three villages per gram *panchayat*, so approximately 5,000 persons are served by each gram *panchayat*. The next higher level, the Janpad or Block *Panchayat*, is constituted at the sub-district level, corresponding to between 40 and 45 gram *panchayats*, on average. The highest level is the Zilla (or district) *Panchayat*. Districts in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have, on average, nearly 1,200 villages. Our analysis here is concerned only with the lowest, cutting-edge level, the gram *panchayat*, to which we refer in the following pages simply as *panchayats*, following the usage popular among villagers of these areas.

In Section 5, I look at some features of institutional design that are intended to safeguard participation by weaker sections. “Decentralization only works toward democratization if it is combined with positive action in favor of underprivileged groups,” it is asserted (Pieterse 2001), and elements of affirmative action introduced by legislation in India are examined for their effects upon participation and benefit sharing. A proportion of elected offices in *panchayats* has been reserved by law for three categories of village residents – women, scheduled castes (SCs, the former untouchables) and scheduled tribes (STs). What effect have these structural safeguards had upon performance and influence sharing in *panchayats*, and what other structural adjustments are required to promote greater equity?

Structural safeguards, such as special protections for underprivileged groups, have featured prominently in the discussion on equitable decentralization.<sup>5</sup> The present examination shows, however, that a parallel set of policy measures – related to preparing people for the task of participating in governance – can have a more substantial effect on equity. People who are educated, even to the elementary level, and who can access information from a larger number of

---

<sup>5</sup> Manor (1999: 55) enlists four structural features as “crucial conditions ... All are vitally important – indeed, in the absence of any one of them, failure is probable.” His list of four items includes sufficient mandated powers, ample financial resources, adequate administrative capacity, and reliable accountability mechanisms. Other researchers have identified additional structural conditions, including those which can help make decentralization possible in the first place. Garman et al. (2001), examining Latin American trends find, for instance, that administrative decentralization is more likely in countries where political parties have a more decentralized organization. Their conclusion, indicating a need for party building at the local level, is quite similar to what Kohli (1987) and Huntington (1968) have advocated, more generally, in support of empowerment and governance objectives. See also Ordeshook and Shvetsova (1997).

sources, are able to participate more often and more effectively than others, regardless of their income and ethnic backgrounds. They are also more likely to obtain a fair share of benefits and services.

Education and information are consistently associated with effective participation and equitable benefit sharing, and wealth and caste status have relatively little to do with these results, though gender is still an important handicap. Lower caste and poor persons in these Indian contexts have shared in the widespread expansion of elementary education that has occurred over the past twenty years, and their participation in the process and outcomes of *panchayati raj* is not significantly different, on average, from that of upper caste and wealthier villagers. Women, who are relatively less educated and less well informed, and whose participation in public domains is limited as well by cultural practices, face a more significant handicap.

Individual-level factors, especially education and information matter a great deal, the analysis shows. Structural policies, such as reservation of offices for women and scheduled castes, work best when the incumbents have some basic education and when they are reasonably well informed. Elected representatives who have no education and who do not inform themselves adequately have very little impact upon decision making within *panchayats*.

Caste and wealth matter little for who has influence within *panchayats*. Education and information matter a great deal.

Making elementary education available to all and facilitating adequate flows of information, particularly about the rights of citizens and the procedures of local self-governance, are important prerequisites – or at least, essential accompaniments – of a policy that can promote

equitable decentralization. Structural safeguards will not by themselves make decentralization equitable and participatory, unless empowerment is supported simultaneously at the individual level.

## **2. Methodology**

This study was conducted within 53 villages located in six districts – Ajmer, Bhilwara and Dungarpur (in Rajasthan) and Neemuch, Mandsaur and Ujjain (in Madhya Pradesh). The varied mix of villages selected for study include some that sit astride major roads and others that are relatively hard to access; single-caste-dominant villages as well as villages with mixed caste compositions; large villages together with small ones; and villages where the position of *sarpanch* (head of village *panchayats*) has been reserved for women, for scheduled castes (SCs) or scheduled tribes (STs), and also those where the post of *sarpanch* is open for all contestants.

A stratified random sample of men and women were interviewed in each of the 53 study villages. All households in each village were listed and classified into distinct social groups. Social groups were identified on the basis of caste, religion and tribe. Each caste group in a village constituted a separate social group, and Muslims and Scheduled Tribes (ST) were considered as distinct social groups.<sup>6</sup> A random sample of households was selected from each social group in proportion to this group's share in village population. Men and women were selected for interview in equal numbers from among households in the sample. A total of 2,013

---

<sup>6</sup> This procedure ensured that every household in the village was counted once and only once. There are no households in these villages that belong to more than one of these categories.

persons were interviewed in this manner, using a list of questions that had been pilot tested previously.

Separately, all persons in these villages who currently hold or who have at some previous time held official positions in *panchayats* were also interviewed using a separate questionnaire. A total of 315 past and present office holders were interviewed in this manner.

### **3. Who Participates?**

To investigate who participates in political activity related to *panchayats*, a series of questions related to activities such as voting, campaigning, attending public meetings, and contacting public officials was included within the survey questionnaire.<sup>7</sup> These survey items covered different aspects of participation in the processes of *panchayats*.

Participation in voting to constitute *panchayats* was uniformly high among all sections of villagers. Ninety five percent of 2,013 villagers interviewed for this exercise reported that they had voted in most or all *panchayat* election held since they had become old enough to vote. Participation in voting is not significantly different among the different caste groups. Ninety four percent of STs, 95 percent of SCs, 96 percent of OBCs (other backward castes), and 95 percent of upper and middle caste persons voted in most or all *panchayat* elections. Ninety four percent of landless persons voted always or most of the time – the same as persons belonging to the largest landowning categories. Women turned out marginally less often than men – 93 percent of women and 98 percent of men reported voting always or most of the time.

---

<sup>7</sup> These questions were adapted from Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) and Verba et al. (1995).



One reason why people reported voting in such large numbers relates to requests and pressure from contesting candidates. Villagers who we met personally mentioned quite often that they had voted at least once for reasons of social solidarity, i.e., the candidate formed part of their social network, or because they wished to avoid later tension or conflict with the candidates, or because failure to vote might result in deletion of their names from the list of future beneficiaries of anti-poverty programs, or they might lose access to subsidized cereals, etc.

High voting figures are not, therefore, indicative of high levels of broad political participation or active involvement in the process of local self-government. Elections occur infrequently, every five years or less often, so they are hardly good instruments for maintaining constant participation and exercising regular control. We need to consider, in addition, some other activities – such as campaigning, attending rallies and meetings, and contacting public representatives – that are associated with electing representatives and exercising influence within *panchayats*. Table 1 below reports the associated participation rates.

-- Table 1 about here --

Participation in political activity in fact falls off sharply when we consider these other activities. The lowest figures are reported in relation to attendance at *Gram Sabha* (village general assembly) meetings. By law, in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, *sarpanchas* are required to call a minimum of four *Gram Sabhas* each year. Budgets and finances are supposed to be discussed at these general body meetings, development plans are finalized, and a list of poor families is drawn up that will receive grants and subsidized loans during the forthcoming

quarter. In all 53 villages considered here, the vast majority of villagers, 69 percent, did not attend a single *Gram Sabha* meeting during the previous year. Hardly seven percent of villagers reported attending all *Gram Sabha* meetings held in the previous year.<sup>8</sup>

Whether it is campaigning, contacting, or attending meetings that one considers, a minority of villagers, between 11 to 40 percent in each case, reported participating regularly in these activities. The question to investigate is whether it is the same group of villagers that takes part in each of these activities – and if so, what are the individual characteristics that distinguish this group from non-participants? Factor analysis was used first to check whether the same group of persons is consistently more active with respect to each of these activities. Regression analysis was employed next to discern the characteristics of individuals who participate more actively than others.

The results of factor analysis show that it is nearly always the same group of villagers that participates highly in each of campaigning, contacting, and attending meetings and rallies. Individuals' responses to six different survey questions were highly correlated with each other -, and all of these responses loaded highly on a single common factor.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Studies carried out in other parts of MP and Rajasthan and also in other states support a similar verdict of low participation at Gram Sabha meetings. Mayaram (1999) reports similar results for other parts of Rajasthan. Similar conclusions are also reported by Pai (1998) for UP; and Crook and Manor (1998) and Kurian (1999) for Karnataka.

<sup>9</sup> This single common factor has a communality of 3.87, implying that it accounts for more than 65 percent of the combined variance of these six separate elements. Support for a single common factor is provided by observing that root mean square off-diagonal residuals = 0.101, which is safely within Harman's criteria for sample size greater than 1,000. Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy: overall MSA = 0.819. A scree plot flattens out and it has a sharp elbow between factors 1 and 2. Factor loadings are all 0.7 or higher.

Some people are “high participators;” they have high scores on each of the six participation variables. They campaign vigorously for political candidates, they influence other villagers’ choices at election time, they attend *gram sabhas* regularly, and they are in contact frequently with *panchayat* representatives. Other villagers are “low participators”: they are not active in election campaigns, they do not usually attend political rallies or meetings of the *gram sabha*, and they contact *panchayat* representatives much less regularly than other villagers.

A single underlying quality or set of attributes seems to be at work that makes some persons more active and more participative than others. So what type of villager participates regularly and what type participates rarely or not at all? To address this question, a 100-point Index of Political Activity was constructed by taking an adjusted sum of scores of these six separate survey items.<sup>10</sup> Since they are all so closely correlated with each other, variables representing these six different aspects of participation were combined together into a single score. An individual’s score on the Index of Political Activity reflects the omnibus effect of diverse modes of participating. The higher this score, the greater is an individual’s overall level of participation in activities related to constituting *panchayats* and influencing their decisions. The most active individuals achieve the maximum score of one hundred points on this index, while the least active have a score of zero points.

How well do different individual attributes – gender, education, wealth, and caste – relate with high levels of participation in local government? Table 2 below reports the results of

---

<sup>10</sup> We first re-scored the values of each variable so that each of them has an equal weight of one in the index, and we then rescaled this sum so it has a range from zero to 100 points. Correlations of the six individual items with the Index are all 0.77 or higher. Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha = 0.875.

regression analysis. The dependent variable is the Index of Political Activity, measured on a 100-point scale. Regression coefficients relate, thus, to the number of percentage points by which the dependent variable increases or decreases as a result of a one-unit change in the respective independent variable.<sup>11</sup>

Independent variables are coded as follows.

- *Gender*: Men=0, Women=1;
- *Religion*: Hindu=0, Muslim=1. No other religions are practiced in any significant numbers in these villages.
- *Caste*: We used separate dummy variables for those caste groups, particularly for SCs and STs, and other backward castes (OBCs), which are traditionally regarded to be less privileged and less active politically.
- *Land* (as a measure of wealth or asset holding) is measured in terms of hectares owned by the family of the respondent. Other measures of wealth, including cattle ownership and quality of house construction, were also considered, but these were closely correlated with landholding, suggesting that landholding is not an inappropriate measure of overall wealth in these rural and agrarian contexts.
- *Education*: is measured by the number of years a respondent attended at school.
- *Access to Information*: measures the number of information sources, out of seven, that are regularly accessed by any respondent. These seven sources include family members,

---

<sup>11</sup> The dependent variable has a mean of 39.3 with standard deviation = 22.1, skewness = 0.49, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic=0.86, suggesting that normality is reasonably well approximated by these data. Multicollinearity is low as discussed below. White's general test does not reveal the presence of any significant heteroskedasticity.

neighbors, prominent persons in the village, radio and TV, newspapers, and the informal village assembly. Apart from one of these sources, i.e., newspapers, the rest are equally accessible by educated as well as uneducated persons, so education is not closely correlated with this information variable, as verified by the data.

- *State* is coded as follows: Madhya Pradesh=0, Rajasthan=1. (District dummies were also employed in the analysis but without achieving any significance.)

-- Table 2 about here --

Caste and wealth are found not to be significantly associated with participation in *panchayats*. Education, information and gender are all significantly associated with high participation, as examined below.

- *Gender*: Women participate to a much smaller extent than men. Controlling for other factors, women score, on average, 24 points lower than men on our 100-point scale of political participation.
- *Caste*: Among the different caste groups, only Scheduled Tribes have a significantly different participation level. On average, members of Scheduled Tribes score about six percentage points lower than others, which is a significant difference but not as considerable as that which exists between men and women. (This difference disappears, however, when we consider the interaction between gender and tribe, as discussed below). Scheduled castes (the former untouchables) and other backward castes do not have any significantly lower scores for political activity. Indeed, coefficients for the associated dummy variables are

positive, but they are not statistically significant, indicating that backward and scheduled castes do not participate significantly less, on average, than middle and upper castes taken together.

- Access to Information has a significant association with participation levels – a fact that is extremely relevant for policy purposes. The addition of one more source of information to a person's repertoire (among the seven that we consider here) tends to increase participation by more than five additional percentage points.
- State: The analysis also indicates that villagers living in the three Rajasthan districts participate, on average, to a level that is five percentage points higher than those who live in the three MP districts, though why this should be so is not entirely clear.
- Age and religion are not significantly associated with political activity scores.

An interactive variable was included to assess whether older women participated significantly less than other villagers. This variable (measured as age times gender) turns out to be mildly significant (at the ten percent level but not at the five percent level) and not large in size. Another interactive variable was constructed to assess the combined effect of gender and caste. In particular, it was examined whether being ST *and* female is likely to reduce participation even further than would be suggested by adding together the individual coefficients of these two variables. The resulting interactive variable (ST times gender) was significant (at the 0.05 level) and the size of its coefficient was also large (-6.45). Notably, the variable ST loses significance when this interactive variable is brought within the analysis, though the overall gender variable continues to remain significant and high. What this analysis implies is that

participation in political activity is low not so much among all scheduled tribes but particularly among the women of this social group. While all women participate less than men, participation levels among ST women are lower by an additional 6.45 percentage points, on average.

Along with gender, the analysis shows, education and information are the other significant influences on participation rates, and neither of these factors is closely correlated with wealth or caste status. The correlation coefficient between land ownership and education was only 0.14 and that between land ownership and information was even less (0.09).<sup>12</sup> Education is not the exclusive privilege of those with large landholdings, and information is reasonably symmetrically distributed among high- and low-caste villagers.<sup>13</sup> Far from replicating differences in wealth and caste status, our data suggest, education and information tend to mitigate and equalize differences in political participation among villagers. Gender is an altogether different story, however. Women are less educated and less informed than men, on average, and they also have substantially lower political participation scores.

---

<sup>12</sup> Correlation between education and information is 0.445, but this is still not high enough to cause problems of multicollinearity. The value of the Condition Index is 14.64 for the model reported above, indicating that collinearity is low enough for the model to be accepted.

<sup>13</sup> The conclusion that education and information are fairly evenly distributed among different caste and landowning categories is supported as well by another large-sample study conducted a year earlier in Rajasthan villages. Among villagers, those aged between 18 to 25 years, it was found that SCs had, on average, 7.0 years of school education, while upper castes had 7.1 years. The difference in educational achievement between upper castes and backward and scheduled castes has eroded in the last twenty years, and parents of all castes are increasingly sending their children to school (Krishna 2002).

How do these factors influence the manner in which benefits and services are distributed among villagers? We examine these outcomes in the next section.

#### **4. Who Benefits?**

Laws relating to *panchayati* raaj in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh make gram *panchayats* primarily responsible for performing a set of municipal and development functions. The Madhya Pradesh *Panchayat* Raj Act of 1993 and the Rajasthan Act of 1994 both provide a list of services and programs that gram *panchayats* are required to provide in each village.

How many and what type of villagers actually received these benefits and services was surveyed by focusing upon a subset of activities that are most important for rural residents. In particular, education and health services, drinking water, veterinary services, housing, agriculture extension, irrigation, loan and subsidy programs, employment generation activities, dispute resolution and security, and roads and transportation facilities were considered – activities that are particularly important in these rural settings, especially insofar as households' welfare and livelihood security are concerned.<sup>14</sup>

Each of the 2,013 respondents was asked whether these services are availed equally by all village residents and also whether they felt that they were themselves relatively excluded from

---

<sup>14</sup> Not all of these services are performed as yet by *panchayats*, but it is intended in both states to accord formal supervisory authority to *panchayats* for all of these functions, and in Madhya Pradesh, in particular, line agency officials responsible for these functions are required to report regularly to *panchayat* officials. Patterns of inclusion and exclusion from benefits are quite similar in either case, as we shall see, and it is the characteristics of individual villagers rather than the agency providing the service that is more important for determining who benefits.



any or all of them.<sup>15</sup> Before analyzing the sample by caste, gender and other demographic and personal attributes, it is helpful to take a look at the responses received from the full sample. Table 3 reports these results.<sup>16</sup>

-- Table 3 about here --

The broad group of 12 benefits and services can be classified with the help of these data into three separate categories relating, respectively, to mild or no exclusion, moderate exclusion, and relatively severe exclusion. The first category – Mild or No exclusion – includes schools, health facilities, drinking water, and transportation that are regarded as being fairly and equitably distributed by at least 75 percent of respondents. School facilities and transportation are clearly

---

<sup>15</sup> Client group assessments of this kind are necessary not only for comparing and aggregating performance related to very different kinds of services (health and education vs. water supply and transportation); more important, they provide an indication of the extent to which local governments are *responsive* to different needs of citizens. In this regard, see Crook and Manor (1998: 9).

<sup>16</sup> We asked two different sets of question. The first set was related to exclusion in general: Are any groups in the village excluded from these 12 benefits and services? The second set asked about the same set of activities, but this time in respect of the respondent's personal situation: Did the respondent feel herself or himself personally excluded from any of these services and benefits? Responses to these two separate questions are very closely related to each other. Correlation coefficients are greater than 0.9 for each corresponding activity, suggesting that answers to these two sets of questions are interchangeable and either one can be used in analysis without affecting the overall results. Table 4 reports the results of the second set of questions, reflecting respondents' sense of personal exclusion.

at the top of this list. In both cases, more than ninety-five percent of respondents reported feeling no sense of personal exclusion.

Moderate exclusion is seen in respect of agriculture extension, credit and finance, justice and conflict resolution, security, and contacting higher officials. More than one quarter but less than half the respondents felt they had been excluded from these services.

Majority exclusion is reported, on the other hand, for the three activities – loan and subsidy programs, housing assistance, and job training and employment generation – that constitute the core of the poverty alleviation initiatives implemented by the state with the help of *panchayats*. In each case, between one-half and eighty percent of respondents felt that they and their families had been excluded from the corresponding service.

To examine who is included or excluded from these services and benefits, scores are added together for each respondent over the eight services and benefits for which moderate or majority exclusion is reported. The resulting Index of Exclusion From Services and Benefits has a maximum value of eight, indicating that this respondent feels excluded from all eight of these services, and a low value of zero, indicating exclusion from none of these services. 334 respondents reported the lowest possible exclusion score of zero, while another 269 reported high-exclusion scores of seven or eight.

What types of persons feel more excluded and what types less excluded from these eight benefits and services? Table 4 reports the results of regression analysis.

-- Table 4 about here --

The following conclusions emerge from the analysis concerning which factors are significantly associated with exclusion from benefits and services.

- *Gender* is not a significant variable for the analysis of exclusion from services and benefits.
- *Caste* is also not very significant for the distribution of benefits and services from *panchayats*. However, STs do feel themselves significantly excluded from services and benefits.
- *Wealth* is not significant for this analysis.
- *Age* and *Religion* also do not achieve any significance.
- *Education* continues to be an important influence on exclusion. More educated persons are likely, on average, to feel themselves excluded from a smaller number of services, everything else being the same.
- *Access to Information* is once again revealed to be a significant and sizeable influence on exclusion. Access to a larger number of information sources is negatively associated with exclusion, implying that persons who have relatively higher access to information are likely to feel excluded from fewer services.
- Finally, the dummy variable for State is also significant, implying that villagers in Madhya Pradesh are on average likely to feel marginally less excluded from services and benefits than those who live in Rajasthan.

It is hardly surprising to find that variables that are significantly associated with the distribution of benefits and services from *panchayats* are virtually the same as those that were found earlier to associate significantly with the index of participation. Three variables are

significant in association with both of these measures of exclusion – Information, Education and ST. Apart from the category of Scheduled Tribes, however, caste categories are not otherwise very significant in understanding participation and benefit sharing. Gender is significant for participation but not so much for sharing services and benefits.<sup>17</sup>

Purposive interventions intended to promote equity in these local governments must deal with the factors implicated in this analysis, namely, education, information, ST, and gender. Structural measures to deal with the last two of these variables – ST and gender – have already been implemented in Madhya Pradesh and also in Rajasthan. Following the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment, up to a third of all elected positions in *panchayats* have been reserved for women. Positions for STs and SCs have been reserved from an earlier time in proportion to their share in each *panchayat*'s population.

Section 5 of this paper examines how these and other structural features have assisted with the goal of equitable participation and benefit sharing in *panchayats*. To what extent has reservation of official positions resulted in reducing disabilities among women and STs. The first part of this analysis examines overall participation rates in villages where *sarpanch* positions have been reserved by law for specified underprivileged categories; the second part of the analysis looks particularly at participation by women and STs in these villages; the third part of the analyses assesses a criticism that is frequently voiced related to the reservation policy, namely, that efficiency has suffered as a result of reservations; and finally, the fourth part

---

<sup>17</sup> Benefits are distributed by household and not so much to individuals, suggesting one probable reason why gender is not significant for the analysis of benefit distribution even though it was significant for the analysis of participation.

examines features associated with higher participation by elected representatives belonging to reserved and unreserved categories. Conclusions and policy recommendations are reported in Section 6.

## **5. Assessing the Effects of Structural Change**

### Village Characteristics and Political Activity Rates

Data already presented demonstrate that participation rates are higher on average among individual villagers who are male, non-ST, educated and well informed. Those who do not share these characteristics – in particular, women, STs and the uneducated – tend to comprise the category of relatively excluded villagers. In addition to these individual-level features, village-level structural variables are also examined in the analysis reported in Table 5 below.

-- Table 5 about here --

Examining village-level features it was found that:

- *Population size* is not significant in affecting participation in political activity.<sup>18</sup> The coefficient for this variable is not significant in alternative specifications of the regression model.

---

<sup>18</sup> We used number of households as a proxy variable for village population. Population figures were available at the time of field investigation only for the 1991 census, and they are therefore almost ten years old. Since it was physically impossible to enumerate population for each village, we relied, instead, on collecting data for number of households in each village in the sample.

- *Caste* is also not relevant for this analysis. The proxy variable, social group ranking, does not achieve significance.<sup>19</sup>
- *Infrastructure* is also not very important. With the sole exception of school facilities, reported below, none of the infrastructure variables was significant in regression analysis. The results for the variable, “Distance to Market,” are reported in the table above. Additionally, I looked at some other infrastructure variables related, respectively, to water, electricity, post and telegraph, link roads, and transport facilities. None of these variables was significantly associated with the dependent variable, either individually or in combination with any of the others.
- *Distance from Gram Panchayat Headquarters* is significant, however, and our data indicate that people who live in villages that are also *panchayat* headquarters participate more actively, everything else being equal, compared to residents of villages located some distance away from headquarters. Groups of villages have been combined to constitute the jurisdiction of *panchayats*, and villages that are located closer to where the *panchayat* is headquartered tend to face fewer barriers to participation, by and large.

---

<sup>19</sup> Different variables were employed to assess the effects of caste. For example, I looked at percentage of SCs, percentage of STs, proportion of upper castes to the total of SCs and STs, etc., but none of these variables was at all significant in any alternative specification of the regression model. These results are not reported in Table 5 because these variables are closely correlated with the three *Sarpanch* variables that are used here. Because of statutory provisions, percentage of SCs is likely to be comparatively high, for instance, in *panchayats* where the position of *sarpanch* is reserved for a SC person.

- *Education* continues to be a significant influence, as shown by the variable “Distance to High School”. Most villages have a primary school close at hand, and usually one or more primary schools are located within each village. Middle schools are also located usually no more than two to three kilometers from most villages. Differences between villages in terms of educational facilities are most apparent, however, when comparisons are based upon distance to high schools. In the sample of 53 villages considered for this analysis, this distance ranges from zero to 25 kilometers.
- *Reservation Policy*: Among the reservation variables, no significance was achieved by WOMAN and SC, implying that *panchayats* where the position of sarpanch is reserved for women or for SCs, respectively, are not likely to have any significantly higher (or lower) levels of political activity by the population in general. However, participation in political activity is significantly lower in *panchayats* where the position of *sarpanch* is reserved for Scheduled Tribes. Villagers residing within such *panchayats* tend on average to score between six and seven percentage points lower on the political activity scale. This finding is consistent with the earlier one indicating that individuals belonging to STs participate considerably less than those belonging to other caste groups.

Comparisons among villages indicate that Distance to *Panchayat* HQ and Distance to High School are the two most significant variables associated with differences in participation levels. While distance to high school is familiar from the previous analysis in Section 1.1, where education was seen to be an important correlate of participation; distance to *panchayat* HQ is an entirely new variable that comes up when political activity levels are compared among villages.

Among the individual-level variables considered here, Access to Information continues to remain significant, as it was before in Section 1. As noted previously, education and information are not closely correlated with wealth or with high social rank, indicating that the significant policy impacts can be achieved by focusing upon these two areas.

#### Participation by Women and Scheduled Tribes in Reserved and Unreserved *Panchayats*

To consider the effect of the reservation policy more specifically upon women and STs, average participation rates were compared in two subsets of villages – those where the position of *sarpanch* is reserved and others where no such reservation is in place. Table 6 below reports participation rates among women. Column 1 of Table 6 relates to those nine villages where the *panchayat* is headed by a female *sarpanch*. Column 2 relates to the remaining 44 villages where the position of *sarpanch* is not reserved for women. The 100-point Index of Political Activity (explained earlier) is split here into three parts, denoting High, Middle and Low participation scores,<sup>20</sup> and participation rates are compared only among women within each of these two subsets of villages.

-- Table 6 about here --

No dramatic changes in participation are apparent when the two samples are compared. A relatively smaller proportion of women fall within the lower third category in the nine reserved

---

<sup>20</sup> These score ranges divide the population into equal thirds, which enables us to disaggregate results within each third.



villages – 47 percent – compared with 53 percent for the 44 unreserved villages. However, the proportion of women in the upper third category is almost the same (about 11 percent) for each of these two sets of villages. The difference of about six percentage points is made up by the greater proportion of reserved-village women who fall within the middle category (42.5 percent, compared with 36 percent in unreserved villages). The associated chi-square statistic is only 2.63, indicating that these two samples of 9 and 44 villages do not relate to populations that have any significantly different characteristics.

Similarly, no spectacular differences were manifest when we compared participation rates for STs in reserved and unreserved villages. Column 1 of Table 7 reports participation rates among STs in eight villages where STs are *sarpanch*. Column 2 reports participation rates for STs in all 53 villages. Once again, some differences do exist for the two categories of villages, but these differences are not large enough to indicate that the reservations policy has so far produced any statistically significant effects.<sup>21</sup>

-- Table 7 about here --

Reservations are a useful corrective for a situation where women and STs have traditionally been kept apart from public life and where differences of gender and tribe still count a great deal in explaining individuals' relative participation in public decision making. Five

---

<sup>21</sup> Similar analyses were conducted for villages where the position of *sarpanch* is reserved for SCs and OBCs, respectively. As could be predicted given the previous analysis, participation rates in these two types of *panchayats* do not differ to any significant extent from those observed in all *panchayats* in general.

years of the reservations policy has not been enough, however, to produce any considerable dent upon customary patterns of participation in local governance activities. Results might be more obvious, however, if these reservations are continued for a longer period.<sup>22</sup>

Whether reservations should be continued for a longer time period runs up against the allegation that efficiency is sacrificed in the quest for equity and participation. Critics of this policy allege, that well-qualified persons are debarred from public office merely because they happen to be of the wrong caste or gender; and the pool of eligible candidates becomes narrowly confined. Reservations for women have caused considerable consternation, in particular among upper-caste males who occupied or aspire to occupy leadership positions. “Development has been set back by at least a decade,” claimed one person who I interviewed, “in villages where a female has been sarpanch for the last five years.”

#### Does Performance Suffer as a Result of Reservations?

To examine whether there might be any truth to this allegation, I examine differences in performance between reserved and non-reserved *panchayats*. People’s satisfaction with *panchayat* functioning was assessed in relation to a set of activities, including supervising teachers and repairing school buildings, employment generation, provision of loans and subsidies, housing assistance, physical security in the village; and social and community works, for which authority has been delegated to *panchayats* in both states studied here. A 100-point

---

<sup>22</sup> Examining decentralized local governments in six developing countries, Blair (2000: 24) concludes that “even bold affirmative action does not easily or rapidly empower women,” so longer periods of affirmative action might be necessary for achieving the desired results.

Index composed of individual satisfaction levels related to these eight items has the following associations with independent variables – Table 8 below.

-- Table 8 about here --

The only variable that is significant (and which also has a numerically high coefficient) is *Access to Information*. Public satisfaction with gram *panchayats* is higher in villages where residents have access to more sources of information.

None of the three reservation variables was significant in regression analysis, even among alternative specifications of the model, indicating that average satisfaction levels are not significantly different between unreserved *panchayats* and those reserved for women, ST and SC candidates, respectively. Even though the signs of these coefficients are all negative – lending some partial truth to the assertion that reserved *panchayats* are less effective than unreserved ones – standard errors are also high for these variables. This observation suggests that while some among the reserved *panchayats* perform very poorly, others of the same type perform well enough to restore average performance to comparable levels. More than reservation type some other characteristics of *sarpanchas* are relevant for understanding differences in *panchayat*'s performance levels.

Reservations can and should be continued for longer, particularly since there appears to be no significance in the allegation that performance suffers when elected positions are reserved for particular categories. Additional supports will be required, however, to help enhance the effectiveness of elected representatives, particularly those belonging to reserved categories.

### Representatives' Influence on Decision Making

What sorts of policy supports can help make reserved category sarpanchas more effective? This question is examined by looking for factors associated with higher and lower levels of participation by elected representatives.

Four different questions were included in the survey administered to elected representatives in order to elicit information about their participation in meetings of *panchayat* officials. The first question asked respondents about how often they attend meetings on average. The second inquired about the length of time they spent at each meeting – did they stay usually for the full duration of the meeting, or did they often leave at some point in between? In addition, representatives' subjective or cognitive assessments were elicited through a third question, which asked about the influence they exercised at these meetings compared with other members. The fourth question probed deeper into these self-assessments. This question has multiple parts relating to twelve different aspects of decision making and deliberation within *panchayats*, including budget and finances, administration and supervision, agenda setting, liaison with government departments, decisions related to education, health, development assistance, construction projects, women's issues, and matters related to public complaints. In each case, a respondent was asked to make a self-assessment about how actively he or she participated in comparison with others, and individuals' scores for all these separate parts were added together to derive a final score on this question.

Scores on each of these four sets of questions were found to be very closely correlated with scores on each of the other questions. A single common factor was found to be associated with

the four separate questions, which explained more than 70 percent of their combined variance.<sup>23</sup> Representatives who participate actively in any one activity associated with decision making in *panchayats* are also likely to be active in respect to other such activities. There is an identifiable subset of elected officials who participate actively in decision making within *panchayats*, and there are other representatives who are more alienated and withdrawn.

Regression analysis was employed to discern the features that distinguish highly active from less active members. A summary measure of participation, akin to the 100-point Index of Political Activity created for ordinary villagers, was put together by combining responses to these four questions. This Index of Participation by Representatives was regressed upon a number of demographic and other variables. In addition to the variables considered earlier, such as education, information, caste and wealth, we also included a dummy variable for *Sarpanch* (elected head of *panchayats*) and another one for *Up-Sarpanch* (deputy head). The variable, *Sarpanch*, in the following regression table is a dummy variable that is coded 1 if the respondent is a sarpanch and as zero otherwise. Similarly, the variable, *Up-Sarpanch*, is another dummy variable that is coded 1 if the respondent is a deputy *sarpanch* and as zero otherwise. Table 9 reports these results.<sup>24</sup>

-- Table 9 about here --

---

<sup>23</sup> Communality was calculated to be 2.84.

<sup>24</sup> Once again, there is little evidence of multicollinearity. Condition Indices for the two models are 20.11 and 12.24, respectively. Heteroskedasticity is also not in evidence.

Results for elected representatives are broadly similar to those observed for the larger sample of individual villagers.

- Gender is once again strongly and negatively associated with participation. Female members of *panchayats* participate to a considerably smaller degree – more than 15 percentage points less than males, on average.
- *Religion* and *Caste* are once again *not* significantly associated with participation by representatives in *panchayats*' activities across the study population. Even when the sample was analyzed specifically for SC and ST representatives, no significant differences in participation levels became apparent. Representatives elected from among these reserved categories do not participate any less actively, on average, compared to representatives from general (unreserved) categories.
- *Wealth* (as measured by landholding) also does not have any discernible association with participation.
- Education and Access to Information are significantly associated with higher participation. Every additional year of education tends, on average, to raise representatives' participation by more than two-and-a-half percentage points. Similarly, higher access to information is associated with greater representatives' participation – by almost three percentage points, on average, for each additional source of information that they consult.
- *Sarpanchas* (or heads of gram *panchayats*) are, not surprisingly, revealed to have a much higher average participation score – 13 points higher – than either *up-sarpanchas* (deputy heads) or other elected representatives. *Sarpanchas* dominate the activities of *panchayats*,

and other elected representatives participate to a considerably lesser extent. Most representatives felt they could do little, if anything, to challenge or modify the decisions taken by the *sarpanch*. This is a structural effect, which can be addressed through suitable changes in procedures, as discussed below.

I will examine the need for such structural changes in the concluding section of this paper. But I will also highlight a major conclusion that has emerged repeatedly in this analysis, namely, that some individual-level factors are consistently correlated with diverse dimensions of participation in local governments. Policies intended to make local governments more participatory, more equitable, and more effective should adopt measures that squarely address these individual-level factors.

## **6. Conclusions: Policies that Add Value to Decentralization**

Both the villagers' as well as the representatives' data sets indicate that caste and size of landholding are not particularly relevant in relation to participation in *panchayats*' activities. Differences in landholding and caste membership are not associated with any significant differences in participation levels, either by ordinary villagers (Table 2) or even by their elected representatives (Table 9). Similarly, participation in benefits and services at the local level is also not significantly different among people of different castes or by extent of landed wealth (Table 4). Among demographic categories, only gender and tribe are significant for this discussion of equity in decentralized local governments, and people belonging to these two categories participate considerably less than other villagers. To have decentralization with

equity, thus, it will be necessary to build in some safeguards, especially for these two categories of village residents: women and scheduled tribes.

Apart from gender and tribe, which account for a large part of differences in participation scores, education and access to information are the two most significant influences associated with higher participation in local government. Whether participation is considered in relation to the processes of local government (Tables 2, 5 and 9), or in relation to benefits and services (Tables 4 and 8) – i.e., whether we consider the inputs or the outputs of local government – education and information are invariably significantly associated with results, and they have quite substantial effects.

Measures that can help safeguard participation by all, particularly by women and by scheduled tribes can be of two types. The first type are concerned with making changes in formal structures, while the second type are more concerned with enhancing individual citizens' capacity to participate. Public policy has been almost exclusively focussed so far on the first type of safeguard measures.

Structural improvements have encompassed primarily reserving electoral offices in local government for low-participating categories, especially women and scheduled tribes. However, reservations have not so far resulted in significantly improving participation by either of these categories (Tables 6 and 7). Participation rates by women and scheduled tribes are not significantly different between reserved and unreserved *panchayats*.

Reservations have been in force for only seven years so far, and it is possible that continuing with reservations for a longer period might have the desired effects. There is no assurance, however, that this is likely to happen. A hope, shared with many others (including



Mathew and Nayak 1996 and Mayaram 1999) is that by providing them with access to office, the reservations policy might indirectly strengthen among women and scheduled tribes the desire to participate more fully in politics at the local level. Particularly since the purported trade-off between equity and efficiency was found to be absent in practice (Table 8), continuing with reservations should have relatively few costs in terms of performance and public satisfaction, and it may even have some benefits in terms of equitable participation.

In addition to reservations, other structural factors will also need to be considered. It was found, for instance, that residents of villages located at greater distances from *panchayat* headquarters participate significantly less, on average, and that *sarpanchas* (chiefs) tended to dominate decision making to the expense of other elected representatives (Tables 5 and 9, respectively). Structural reforms that have the effect of locating general assembly meetings in individual villages, rather than only holding these meetings at the headquarters villages, will assist participation by a larger number of ordinary villagers. Such reforms have been enacted in West Bengal, with very positive effects on participation rates, as described by Leitin (1996). Similarly, allocating authority more equally within these elected bodies, and not concentrating it so much in *panchayat* chiefs alone, will also encourage other members to participate to greater effect.<sup>25</sup>

But these structural effects tell only a small part of the story. They might help raise participation generally among the bulk of the rural population, but something more specific will

---

<sup>25</sup> Making mayors and chief executives more accountable for their actions to elected local councils was found by Crook and Manor (1998: 292-3) to be an important factor associated with legitimacy and effectiveness of local governments.

be required to raise participation rates among women and scheduled tribes, the two categories that fare consistently poorly in diverse activities associated with local government, as we saw above. Reserving elected positions for these categories presently constitutes the only deliberate strategy intended to enhance equity and participation by these groups. But the effects of reservations are as yet unclear, and something more will need to be done for promoting equity and participation in local governments.

Approaching the issue of safeguards at the individual rather than the structural level might be more helpful. Education and information are consistently associated with high participation rates. Public policies that help to universalize elementary education and which can make information freely available to all will be important for making decentralized local governments more equitable and more representative.

Participation by women and scheduled tribes is low on account of a number of historical and cultural factors, but education and information are also critically implicated as reasons for low public engagement by these categories. Women who are educated and well informed are better able to tide over social differences associated with gender. Table 10 below shows how participation rates among women rise considerably with higher access to information.

-- Table 10 about here --

Women who have access to a larger number of information sources participate to a much larger extent than other women who derive information from fewer sources. Women who have

access to two or fewer sources of information fare the worst. Similarly, women who are educated also have higher participation scores.<sup>26</sup>

“To make democracy work, people need to be well informed” (UNDP 2000: 54). Public policies that help villagers become well informed – particularly policies that make them aware on a continuous basis of rights and privileges and of programs and benefits associated with local governments – can go a long way toward assuring equity and equal participation in decentralized local governments. The effect of structural change is less assured. It is necessary and useful to prepare the populace for taking part in decentralized local governance.

---

<sup>26</sup> The data show that a woman who has, for example, ten years of education and who can access six sources of information is able to neutralize the difference in participation scores that arises on account of the gender variable.

**Table 1. Participation in Political Activities Related to PRIs**

Percentage of villagers who:	
(a) Canvassed for votes during the previous <i>panchayat</i> election	43%
(b) Attended any rally or meeting in support of a candidate	33%
(c) Worked on behalf of any candidate or political party	30%
(d) Made contact with any <i>panchayat</i> representative during past one year	35%
(e) Met with Pradhan, BDO or other <i>Panchayat</i> Samiti (Janpad) person even once in the previous year	17%
(f) Met with Zila Pramukh or some other official at Zila Parishad level even once in the previous year	11%

**Table 2. OLS Regressions on Index of Political Activity:  
100-point Index of Political Activity is the Dependent Variable**

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error (S.E.)</i>
Intercept	36.14****	6.63
<b>Independent Variables</b>		
Gender	-24.45****	1.54
Age (years)	0.001	0.05
Religion	-0.57	3.52
Caste		
-- SC (dummy)	0.86	0.87
-- ST (dummy)	-5.73**	1.79
-- OBC (dummy)	2.21	1.44
Education (years at school)	0.24**	0.11
Landholding (hectares)	0.10	0.13
Family Size	-0.13	0.27
Access to Information (no. of sources)	5.19****	0.48
State (dummy)	5.01***	1.35
N	1,536 <sup>27</sup>	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.424	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.418	
F-value	108.63	
F-probability	<0.0001	
<i>Note:</i> *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

---

<sup>27</sup> This number is less than the total number of respondents (2,013), reflecting “missing values” or non-responses by particular individuals to one or more survey items included within this analysis.

**Table 3. Exclusion and Inclusion from Different Benefits and Services<sup>28</sup>**

	<b>Feel Themselves Not Excluded (number of respondents)</b>	<b>Feel Themselves Excluded (number of respondents)</b>
Education/schools	1,995	14
Transportation	1,905	77
Health services/clinics	1,749	199
Water supply	1,715	287
Justice/conflict resolution	1,460	507
Security	1,460	502
Agricultural extension	1,256	608
Credit/finance	1,043	918
Contacts with higher officials	991	981
Job training/employment	887	1,066
Subsidy/loan programs	664	1,286
Housing assistance	626	1,315

---

<sup>28</sup> Numbers in each row do not always add up to the full complement of 2,013 respondents. These differences are accounted for by missing entries; some questions were not answered fully by all respondents.

**Table 4. OLS Regression Of Exclusion From Services And Benefits: Index Of Exclusion From Services Is The Dependent Variable<sup>29</sup>**

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Intercept	6.89****	0.54
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Gender	0.09	0.13
Age (years)	-0.003	0.005
Religion	0.05	0.28
Caste	-0.05 (0.05)	
-- SC Dummy	0.15	0.16
-- ST Dummy	0.28***	0.07
Education (years at school)	-0.06***	0.015
Landholding (hectares)	-0.03	0.04
Access to Information (no. of sources)	-0.48****	0.04
State (dummy)	0.53****	0.12
N	1,727	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.35	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	
F-value	38.41	
F-probability	<.0001	
<b>Note:</b> *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

---

<sup>29</sup> Mean for the dependent variable = 3.55, standard deviation = 2.51, skewness=0.11, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic=0.95, indicating that normality is reasonably well approximated by these data. All variables are coded in the same manner as they were for the previous regression table. Multicollinearity is low to moderate as shown by the condition index, which is 15.4. Pairwise correlation coefficients are all less than 0.5. Heteroskedasticity is not in evidence, as measured by White's general test

**Table 5. OLS Regression of the Index of Political Activity:  
100-point Index of Political Activity is the Dependent Variable<sup>30</sup>**

	Coefficient	S. E.
Intercept	49.29***	3.85
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
<i>(a) Village-Level Variables</i>		
Population (Number of Households)	0.004	0.005
Distance to Market (kms.)	-0.03	0.09
Distance to Gram Panchayat HQ (kms.)	1.25**	0.43
Distance to High School (kms.)	0.59**	0.21
Reservation for Sarpanch		
-- SC	0.82	2.97
-- ST	-6.39**	2.71
-- WOMAN	0.53	1.75
<i>(b) Individual-level Variables</i>		
Gender	-25.23****	1.52
Social Group Ranking <sup>31</sup>	-1.29	1.56
Landholding (hectares)	0.17	0.22
Access to Information	6.0****	0.48
State (dummy)	5.41*	2.44
N	1,553	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.417	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.413	
F-value	91.85	
F-probability	<0.0001	
<i>Note:</i> *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

<sup>30</sup> Multicollinearity is low to moderate for the regression model (Condition index=17.4), and heteroskedasticity is not in evidence. Individual-level variables have been coded as before.

<sup>31</sup> This variable reflects the omnibus effect of caste status, and it is calculated by assigning ranks (from 1 to 5) to each caste related to its position within the caste hierarchy. This assignment is somewhat arbitrary, no doubt, however, the results did not change when we worked, instead, with caste dummies.



**Table 6. Participation Rates Among Women in Reserved and Non-Reserved *Panchayats***

<b>Participation Scores:</b>	<b>(1) Women in 9 villages with female sarpanchas (n=176)</b>	<b>(2) Women in 44 villages without reservation for sarpanchas (n=825)</b>
Lower Third	83 (47%)	436 (53%)
Middle Third	75 (42.5%)	298 (36%)
Upper Third	18 (10.5%)	91 (11%)

**Table 7. Participation Rates Among Scheduled Tribes in Reserved and Non-Reserved *Panchayats***

<b>Participation Scores:</b>	<b>(1) STs in 8 villages where STs are <i>sarpanchas</i> (n=171)</b>	<b>(2) STs in all 53 villages (n= 301)</b>
Lower Third	44 (26%)	100 (33%)
Middle Third	77 (45%)	125 (42%)
Upper Third	50 (29%)	76 (25%)

**Table 8. OLS Regression of *Panchayat* Performance (considering eight activities):  
100-point Index of Satisfaction is the Dependent Variable**

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>S. E.</i>
Intercept	-37.68*	17.03
Independent Variables		
Population (Number of Households)	0.02	0.015
Distance to Market (kms.)	-0.21	0.31
Gram <i>Panchayat</i> HQ (dummy) <sup>32</sup>	-3.78	5.38
Reservation for Sarpanch		
-- SC (dummy)	-6.75	7.15
-- ST (dummy)	-9.58	9.76
-- WOMAN (dummy)	-4.27	5.83
Access to Information (average sources for village)	22.17***	5.68
State (dummy) <sup>33</sup>	1.29	6.31
N	52	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.528	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.472	
F-value	6.35	
F-probability	<0.0001	
<i>Note:</i> *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

---

<sup>32</sup> Dummy variable, coded as follows: 1 if the village is located at gram *panchayat* HQ, zero otherwise.

<sup>33</sup> Coded as before: MP=0, Rajasthan = 1.

**Table 9. OLS Regression of Participation by PRI Representatives: 100-point Index of Participation by Representatives is the Dependent Variable<sup>34</sup>**

	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>S.E.</b>
Intercept	37.18***	10.93
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Gender	-14.99***	4.16
Age (years)	0.17	0.11
Religion	6.86	5.48
Caste		
-- SC (dummy)	-1.57	1.75
-- ST (dummy)	-5.36	5.61
Education (years at school)	1.35**	0.42
Landholding (hectares)	0.41	0.38
Access to Information (no. of sources)	2.70***	0.78
Sarpanch (dummy)	12.37**	4.20
Up-Sarpanch (dummy)	4.81	4.13
State (dummy)	7.2**	3.15
N	190	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.424	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.396	
F-value	14.15	
F-probability	<0.0001	
<i>Note:</i> *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

---

<sup>34</sup> The mean for the dependent variable = 59.6, standard deviation=21.9, skewness= -0.65, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic=0.95.

**Table 10. Information and Participation by Women**

	INFORMATION SOURCES <i>(out of seven)</i>		
<b><i>Participation Scores:</i></b>	0-2	3-4	5-7
Lower Third	196 (59%)	243 (54%)	80 (37%)
Middle Third	128 (39%)	176 (39%)	67 (31%)
Upper Third	7 (2%)	34 (7%)	70 (33%)

## REFERENCES

- Blair, Harry. 2000. "Participation and Accountability at the Periphery: Democratic Local Governance in Six Countries." *World Development*, 28 (1), 21-39.
- Chambers, Robert. 1999. *Whose Reality: Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediary Technology Publications.
- Cheema, G.S. and Dennis A. Rondinelli. 1983. *Decentralization and Development: Policy Implementation in Developing Countries*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Cohen, John M. and Stephen B. Peterson. 1999. *Administrative Decentralization: Strategies for Developing Countries*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press;
- Crook, Richard and James Manor. 1998. *Democracy and Decentralization in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dillinger, William. 1994. *Decentralization and Its Implications for Urban Service Delivery*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Esman, Milton J. and Norman T. Uphoff. 1984. *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Forrest, Joshua Bernard. 2000. "The Drought Policy Bureaucracy, Decentralization, and Policy Networks in Post-Apartheid Namibia." *American Review of Public Administration*, 30 (3), 307-33.

Franda, Marcus. 1979. *Small is Politics: Organizational Alternatives in India's Rural Development*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern.

Garman, C., S. Haggard, and E. Willis. 2001. "Fiscal Decentralization: A Political Theory with Latin American Cases." *World Politics*, 53 (January), 205-36.

Human Development Center. 1999. *Human Development in South Asia: The Crisis of Governance*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Huntington, Samuel P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Jorgensen, Steen L. and Julie Van Domelen. 2001. "Helping the Poor Manage Risks Better: The Role of Social Funds," pp. 91-107 in Nora Lustig, ed., *Shielding the Poor: Social Protection in the Developing World*. Washington, DC: Brookings.

Kohli, Atul. 1987. *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Korten, David C. 1990. *Getting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Krishna, Anirudh. 2002. *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming.

Kurien, George. 1999. "Empowering Conditions in the Decentralization Process: An Analysis of Dynamics, Factors and Actors in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions From West

Bengal and Karnataka, India.” *Working Paper Series No. 228*. The Hague, Netherlands: Institute of Social Studies.

Leitin, G.K. 1996. *Development, Devolution and Democracy: Village Discourse in West Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Madhya Pradesh *Panchayati Raj Adhinayam*, 1993 (Act No. 1 of 1994)

Manor, James. 1999. *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Mathew, George. 1995. *Panchayati Raj: From Legislation to Movement*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing.

Mathew, George and Ramesh C. Nayak. 1996. *Panchayats at Work: What it Means for the Oppressed*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mayaram, Shail. 1999. “*Panchayats and Women: A study of the processes initiated before and after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in Rajasthan*.” Jaipur: Institute of Development Studies, mimeo.

Mitra, Subrata K. 1990. *Power, Protest and Participation: Local Elites and the Politics of Development in India*. London and New York: Routledge.

Montgomery, John D. 2000. “Social Capital as a Policy Resource.” *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 33, pp. 227-243.

Ordeshook, Peter C. and Olga Shvestova. 1997. “Federalism and Constitutional Design.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 28-42.

Pai, Sudha. 1998. "Pradhanis in New *Panchayats*: Field Notes from Meerut District." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, May 2, 1009-1010.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. 2001. "Participatory Democracy Reconceived." *Futures* (forthcoming)

PRIA, 1999 Status of Finances of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions. Society for Participatory Research in Asia and Network of Regional Support Organizations, New Delhi

Rondinelli, D., McCullough, J.S., and Johnson, R.W. 1989. "Analyzing Decentralization in Developing Countries: A Political-Economy Framework." *Development and Change*, 20 (1), 57-87.

Rosenstone, Steven J. and John M. Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

Sachdeva, Prem. 1998. *Panchayati Raj Laws in Rajasthan*. Jaipur, India: India Publishing House.

Smith, B.C. 1996. "Sustainable Local Democracy." *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 16, pp. 164-78.

UNDP. 2000. *Poverty Report 2000: Overcoming Human Poverty*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Poverty Report 1998: Overcoming Human Poverty*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.



Uphoff, Norman T. 1986. *Local Institutional Development: An Analytical Sourcebook with Cases*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. and Brady, H. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

World Bank. 2001. *World Development Report 2000/1*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.