



Brief 5

The World Bank - Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund *Research Partnerships on Participatory Development*

PARTICIPATION AND MATCHING IN COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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Context

Policy interest in bottom-up development is based on the premise that the active engagement of citizens in decisions that directly impact their wellbeing is necessary for equitable and effective development. In line with this, both donors and governments have invested heavily in community based development programs. But the promise of these programs rests on the quality of institutions created at the local level and till very recently, this promise was informed more by belief than by evidence. It was simply assumed that 'grass roots' community based organizations would, by their very nature, be inclusive and equitable, serve to enhance "voice" and increase the involvement of the poor and the marginalized in local decision making. Recent evidence has shown that building truly effective and inclusive participatory institutions, though it can be enormously beneficial for development, requires much greater attention to context, including in particular, attention to the implications of local inequalities of power and wealth¹.

This brief attempts to look at the challenge of building participatory organizations in rural Pakistan, a context where such inequalities are rampant. It is based on a study done with the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and its partner organization the National Rural Support Program (NRSP). The study was undertaken during the second phase of the PPAF and fed into the design of PPAF's third phase in which several important course corrections were put into place. Of particular importance, are inclusion mandates for the poor (using the National Poverty Score Card) and women in community based organizations at all levels.

The study, focused on three questions: (1) Who participates in COs? (2) Are COs cohesive institutions which bring together poor and marginalized village households with their wealthier and higher status neighbors or is there matching within COs on wealth, caste or other indicators of status? (3) Do some communities/villages fare better than others and why? Specifically, do village characteristics like land inequality, average education levels or caste fragmentation matter for the quality of participation or the degree of matching in Cos?

The question of CO composition is important because community level organizations are seen as venues where hierarchical/conflictual relationships or social distance based on ethnicity, race, caste or wealth can become less definitive, as community members from diverse backgrounds gain a better understanding of the collective interests they share with their neighbors. This enhanced social cohesion is seen as the driving force behind community willingness and ability to coordinate around the provision of public goods. If, instead, the powerful form organizations with the powerful, and the weak with the weak, it is not clear how this objective can be met—or why institutions of the weak would not simply become isolated and ineffective.

The Experiment

The data come from a household census done in 155 villages (800 settlements/habitations) across 13 districts. It provides information on household composition, wealth, zaat (caste), relationship with politically influential individuals in the village, as well as the education and occupation of the household head and other household demographics for close to 65,000 households. Some 7% of surveyed households had at least one

¹ Mansuri, Ghazala and Vijayendra Rao, Localizing Development: Does Participation Work? , Policy Research Report, The World Bank (2013)

member that belonged to an RSP CO. In settlements with RSP COs, this number was closer to 18%. The average rural village had some 500 households and about 7 zaats (castes). Qualitative data was collected in sample villages with the help of a local anthropologist to understand zaat hierarchies. This information was then used, in combination with census data, to create two broad hierarchical zaat categories: high caste (essentially all zamindar zaats) and low caste (zaats classified as service or menial). On average, 30% of households were classified as low caste using this classification system.

Results

The study finds that participation in COs is strongly conditioned by land ownership, education and relationship to traditional village leaders and local politicians. On average, CO members have twice as much land as nonmembers and almost one additional year of schooling². However, village characteristics matter. In villages with a larger fraction of household heads with some schooling, landlessness is much less of a barrier to CO membership. Conversely, as village land inequality rises, lower-caste households are less likely to belong to a CO, although this discouragement effect is dampened as the proportion of low-caste households in the village rises. It is worth noting that across the board very few CO members were women. Only 15% of all COs were female only and another 15% were mixed COs with some women members, the rest were all male Cos.

While these results tell us that CO members were systematically more likely to be male, wealthier, more educated and more politically connected than non-members, they cannot tell us much about the composition of COs. Specifically, whether COs tend to attract members that are more similar to each other than they are to non-members. To examine this we need to look at matching within COs. Since sample settlements with an RSP CO, had 2 COs, on average, we also check whether some COs in the same settlement are made up of wealthier households while others are made up of poorer households. To understand matching within COs we construct the set of all possible pairs of households in each sample settlement along the dimensions of interest (land ownership, zaat category, education and links to politically influential individuals) and check, using dyadic regressions, whether two households are more likely to belong to the same CO if they resemble each other in these dimensions.

The results indicate that COs, within the same settlement, are highly segregated by wealth, zaat category (high, low), education and connections to the politically powerful. However, some communities do much better than others. Once again, villages with higher than average schooling levels, but comparable levels of land inequality and caste composition, have much less sorting on status (education, land, and caste) than villages with a lower than average level of schooling. In contrast, sorting by land intensifies in villages that are more unequal in land wealth, and sorting by caste status intensifies in villages that have more low-caste households. Taken with the results on participation, this suggests that as the proportion of low caste households increases, they are more likely to become CO members but they form COs, by and large, with other low caste households.

Policy Implications

The results from this study suggest that in contexts where local inequalities of power and wealth are important, it is unlikely that inclusive local institutions will emerge endogenously. Instead, specific and clear mandates on the inclusion of marginalized sub-groups may be needed. At the very least, careful monitoring of the composition of community organizations is clearly warranted.

This is not simply an issue of voice, important as that is. It can also have potentially serious implications for resource allocation and development since not all spending, even on public goods and services, benefits the poor equally. Investments in primary schooling, basic health facilities, and safe drinking water are likely to yield larger benefits for poorer households, for example, than investments in higher education or hospitals. Investments in public irrigation systems may be even more exclusionary, because only people who own land may be well placed to benefit from the higher productivity and higher land values.

²Households in sample villages owned some 2.8 acres of cultivable land, on average, with 56% of households owning no land, and had about 4 years of schooling.

