

Building Inclusive Institutions of the Poor: Evidence from Rural Pakistan





Community driven development (CDD) projects have become an important tool for governmental and non-governmental aid agencies to foster economic and social development in poor countries. The World Bank's Social Development Department estimates that over the 1999-2011 time period, total lending for community based and community driven development was \$54 billion, of which \$7.8 billion was allocated in 2010 alone. Proponents claim that such projects can make development more inclusive, improve the targeting of poverty programs, enhance the sustainability of public investments and improve access to public services. They are seen as a vehicle to make governments more responsive and to strengthen the capacity of citizens for undertaking self-initiated development activities.

What remains unclear however is precisely how and under what conditions community participation yields the returns claimed by its proponents. In particular, we need to understand the gains from the investments in social mobilization undertaken by CDD initiatives. This is of particular importance where there is substantial inequality and systematic exclusion of specific groups. Community empowerment in such contexts must explicitly reverse power relations in a manner that creates agency and voice for excluded groups, allowing them to have more control over development assistance and greater influence in local decision-making.

Past results with community mobilization under PPAF I & II suggested that it was unlikely that inclusive local institutions would emerge endogenously in community mobilization efforts in rural Pakistan. Instead, specific and clear mandates on inclusion of marginalized sub-groups may be needed. At a minimum, there existed a clear need to monitor the composition and evolution of community organization conceived as a result of CDD efforts, since these organizations can potentially have serious implications for resource allocation and development. Given that all public spending does not benefit the poor equally, the distribution of public resources over competing public expenditures can have strong implications on redistribution.

This study is designed to test two mechanisms through which community empowerment could shift power relations and enhance prospects for more inclusive development. The first is mandates on the inclusion of women and the poor in the COs and in the VSO. The second is to allow the full community to have a say in the allocation of village funds through a secret ballot ratification process. It thus tests whether electoral participation is enough to induce inclusive development or whether the direct participation of the excluded in governance is needed, at least for some period of time, through mandates or affirmative action programs.

Impact Evaluation Design

This study evaluates the core program of the National Rural Support Program, which revolves around social mobilization and developmental investments. NRSP helps organize villagers into grassroots groups of 15 to 20 members called Community Organizations (COs). The program also creates a village level institution, the Village Support Organization (VSO) that provides a variety of services on a sustainable basis. Developmental activities are planned and implemented by the VSO through a community investment fund (CIF), a flexible funding mechanism. The CIF can be used for any productive purpose or for the general benefit of the entire community including physical infrastructure, health, education, training and other livelihood activities. The average grant per village was about \$27,000.



To test the effectiveness of the CIF, a field experiment was implemented in a total of 158 villages, of which 108 villages were randomly assigned to ‘treatment’. Treatment villages were randomized in two respects. First, whether or not program introduction and CO formation deliberately mandated the inclusion of the poor and women, hereafter referred to as the ‘inclusion’ treatment. In villages with the inclusion mandate among CO members, at least 50% of male and female CO members must be from poor households¹ and 40 percent of members must be women. Second, whether or not the list of sub-projects to be funded by the CIF – referred to as the Village Development Plan – were ratified by the village at large through a secret ballot². Thus, villages are assigned to the inclusion mandate and the ratification exercise using a 2x2 design.

	Secret Ballot Ratification		Control
	Yes	No	
Inclusion	Yes	27	50
	No	27	



Secret Ballot Ratification Process

¹ Identified through a poverty scorecard administered to every household in the 158 study villages.

² The analysis of the impacts of ratification will be presented separately



Measuring Impact

Phase 1 of the study is concluded at midline, prior to the disbursement of the CIF to communities. This allows us to distinguish the pure impact of mobilization with participation mandates from the 'grant effect' of the CIF. The grant effect will be captured by the phase 2 (endline survey), following the disbursement of the CIF funds and implementation of all Village Development Plan activities.

The key outcomes evaluated at midline are: 1) participation by women and the poor in Community Organizations (COs) and the Village Support Organization (VSO), 2) leadership by women and the poor in Community Organizations (COs) and the Village Support Organization (VSO), 3) attitudes towards women as leaders, and 4) parental aspirations for their children.

The structure of the evaluation will also allow us to investigate village level outcomes, such as changes in village leadership quality; women's political participation; impacts on targeting of other poverty programs, such as BISP; alignment of the CIF with the (baseline) preferences of women and poor households; impact of the program on poverty; impacts on social cohesion and on collective action beyond the program. These avenues of inquiry are on-going and their results will be shared as available.

Participation by women and the poor in Community Organizations (COs) and the Village Support Organization (VSO)

In inclusion villages there are a far larger number of women only COs as compared to non-inclusion villages. We find that:

- Household participation in COs is higher in inclusion villages
- COs from inclusion villages are also significantly more likely to have female members and members from poor households
- Inclusion villages have nearly 3 more female COs on average, relative to non-inclusion villages.

VSO membership is also affected by assignment to inclusion treatment, insofar as:

- Participation in VSOs is larger in inclusion villages
- Inclusion VSOs have a significantly larger number of poor members relative to non-inclusion VSOs (54% poor members relative to 44% in non-inclusion)
- Inclusion VSOs also have a significantly larger number of female members relative to non-inclusion VSOs (53% in inclusion versus 30% in non-inclusion).

These features of CO and VSO participation demonstrate that the inclusion mandates were overwhelmingly successful insofar as achieving greater representation of women and poor in community and village level decision making bodies.

Leadership by women and the poor in Community Organizations (COs) and the Village Support Organization (VSO)



Did the effects of inclusion extend beyond the explicit mandates on participation? We can determine this from the impact of inclusion on composition of VSO leadership, since no rules were instituted regarding VSO leadership and people were free to choose their own leaders, even within inclusion villages.

We find that:

- VSOs have a significantly larger share of women leaders in inclusion villages
- However, inclusion VSOs are not more likely to have female presidents, relative to non-inclusion VSOs, with only 6-7% female VSO presidents across all villages
- There is no significant difference in the number of poor VSOs leaders or poor VSO presidents between inclusion and non-inclusion VSOs, therefore the mandates do not translate into greater leadership for the poor even when their political participation is expanded
- The probability of local influentials being elected as VSO presidents is dramatically lower in inclusion villages, with only 4% of VSO presidencies being held by local influential (versus 19% in non-inclusion villages)

Hence, inclusion mandates are effective in increasing overall participation rates of the women and poor in community organizations, but in the case of the poor this does not translate into greater leadership roles in village level organizations, despite their larger representation. It does, however, yield some dividends for women with greater leadership roles being filled by women, owing to the mandates, and does lower the elite capture of village level organizations overall which may yield indirect benefits to the marginalized.



VSOs in villages with inclusion mandates



Attitudes towards Women as Leaders

Besides increasing the participation of women in community organizations, did inclusion mandates have any effect on perceptions regarding women as leaders or political representatives?

Overall, it appears that adult males have pro-male preferences for public officials and leaders. These pro-male preferences are much stronger amongst men who are members of the VSO. Women in VSOs, on the other hand, have a significantly weaker preference for men in public office, relative to adult males and adult females who are not serving in VSOs.

- Preference for dealing with males in the roles of school teachers, NRSP/NGO staff, doctors or councilors:
 - Overall, adult women show a slightly lower (but statistically insignificant) preference for dealing with men in the aforementioned roles in inclusion villages
 - Women in VSO's are significantly less likely to have a preference for interacting with men in these roles in both inclusion and non-inclusion villages
 - However, adult men in the same villages have a strong positive preference for engaging with other men in these roles in inclusion villages relative to non-inclusion
 - Moreover, men in VSO's have an even stronger preference for male functionaries relative to the average male respondent
- Perceptions of why women are underrepresented in leadership roles:
 - Adult females in inclusion villages are significantly less likely to cite that the primary reason for the presence of fewer women in Pakistani politics is that women are not 'tough' or that they do not make good leaders.
 - This opinion is also less likely to be held amongst women in VSOs, in inclusion and non-inclusion villages. However, men in VSOs in both types of villages are more likely to cite this as a major reason for low representation of women in politics.
- Perceptions of who is better in public office, across a range of issues such as standing up to pressure, honesty, ability to compromise, ability to represent, etc:
 - Women in VSOs are significantly less likely to cite men as being better public servants. Men in VSOs, however, are significantly more likely to express positive preferences for men over women in public office. The general population appears not to have any particular gender bias in this response.
- Most effective way of contributing to change at the village level:
 - Women in VSOs in inclusion villages are significantly more likely than the average woman to believe in the power of voting for better representation. This is most likely a selection effect, of more politically engaged women joining VSOs.
- Reservations for women in government or village level organizations



- Strikingly, male and female VSO members are concordant in only the belief that there should not be female reservations for public office, whether in the national or local government. Assignment to inclusion has no effect on this preference.

Therefore, inclusion mandates appear not to have made any noticeable impact on the perceptions of adult men and women, with no significant differences between inclusion and non-inclusion villages overall.

Interestingly, while adult perceptions appear unchanged, the attitude of male children (age 13-18) towards women improves significantly from assignment to inclusion villages. Therefore:

- Young boys in inclusion villages are significantly less likely than boys in non-inclusion villages to blame low representation of women in politics on women being poor leaders or being 'weak'.
- Young girls in inclusion villages are similarly less inclined to consider women poor leaders
- Young boys in inclusion villages are also overwhelmingly in favor of reserving seats for women in public office, a sentiment which is absent amongst comparable boys from non-inclusion villages.

It would therefore appear that inclusion mandates, while relatively unsuccessful in creating attitude shifts amongst adult men and women, succeed in creating a more favorable view of women amongst younger children, particularly young boys.

Parental aspirations for Children

- Both mothers and fathers appear to have lower aspirations for their daughters relative to their sons:
 - Both mothers and fathers desire over 2 years fewer of education for their daughters relative to their sons
 - Similarly, both mothers and fathers cite a lower desirable marrying age for daughters relative to sons (over 2 years difference)
 - Mothers and fathers are significantly less likely to state that their daughters can choose their own spouse, relative to their sons
 - They also express a strong aversion for their daughters working or standing for local government elections, relative to their sons
- Remarkably, however, mothers who are VSO members express relatively progressive aspirations for their daughters:
 - They cite a higher desired age of marriage for their daughters
 - They are more likely to be amenable to their daughters choosing their own spouses, and significantly more likely to allow their boys to choose their spouses, relative to the average mother
 - They are also significantly more likely to allow their daughters to work and contest local government elections



- However, despite their more progressive aspirations for their daughters, even these women exhibit higher aspirations for their sons on average.
- Father who are VSO members are similarly more inclined towards having higher aspiration for their sons and daughters:
 - They are more likely to support their daughters in their choice to work or contest elections for local government, relative to fathers who are not in VSOs
- Mothers from inclusion villages are no more likely to hold positive aspirations for their daughters than the average mother

These results are suggestive of a setting where adults with more progressive preferences are selecting into VSO membership, which is reflected by their higher aspirations for their children. However, this selection effect itself may substantively affect women's welfare in the longer term by way of more inclusive and gender-positive decision making on the part of the VSO. Inclusion mandates appear not be affecting aspirations at large at this stage.