

Research Question:

Does Community Governance Increase the Voices of the Poor?

Wennink, B., Nederlof, S., & Heemskerk, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Access of the poor to agricultural services: the role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion. (Bulletin 376). Amsterdam: KIT Publishers.*

This bulletin is produced through a collaboration between farmers' organisations, NGOs and the Dutch Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) researchers. It opens by introducing the significance of the roles that farmers' organisations play in poverty alleviation in rural Sub-Saharan Africa. The bulletin examines a number of case studies in order to determine the role of such organisations in facilitating the inclusion of the poorest of the poor in accessing and benefitting from agricultural services. The study found that there were generally two types of farmers' organisations: exclusive and inclusive. The exclusive ones were made up of mainly fewer but wealthier commercial farmers, whereas the inclusive ones comprised of poorer subsistence farmers. However, there were still poorer farmers who were not part of the more inclusive farmers' organisations because they were female farmers or belonged to ethnic minority groups or households affected by HIV. The study concludes that in order to achieve sustainable rural development that stands to benefit all categories of rural households (even the poorest), opportunities for development that are most suited to the different needs of rural farmers must be identified. Furthermore, farmers need to be made aware of these opportunities. This could be made possible through making available socially inclusive research and advisory services that are reflective of the different needs and priorities of the farmers. Analysis of the case studies found that farmers' organisations can play strong advocacy and service provider roles but will first need assistance in capacity development, especially in articulating farmers' needs and demands and building social capital.

This bulletin is recent, cited by 15 other sources since 2009 and is very relevant to the research question and context. The lessons from the case studies of farmers' organisations demonstrate, as well as suggest, how assistance from outside organisations (aid donors, NGOs or even the public and private sectors) can be a tool that facilitates development that is relevant and inclusive for different groups of people. However, this assistance must be targeted at activities that can enhance the inclusion of the poor and are reflective of their needs, primarily by building the capacity of farmers' organisations so that they can pursue activities such as the provision of information for the different agricultural services that exist; to advocate on behalf of their members, among others. The bulletin exclusively discusses the role of farmers' organisations in the inclusion of the poor and makes no mention of whether local organisations that work in other sectors such as health, governance and so forth could take a similar approach towards including the poor in their development programs. However, it is possible that some of the approaches taken by these farmers' organisations can be applied by local organisations in other sectors as these approaches are essentially about including the poor in development as well as endeavouring to account for their different needs.

Publicly accessible at:

<http://www.kit.nl/smartsite.shtml?id=SINGLEPUBLICATION&ItemID=2360>

Kepe, T., & Silva, S. (2010). An examination of 'participation' and 'sustainability' in a food security project among the rural poor in Northwestern Tanzania. *African and Asian Studies* (9), 31-54.

Using a case study of a development project in Northwestern Tanzania, this article seeks to investigate how the language of participation at the global and government level impacts on the level of participation by different groups of the rural poor in agricultural food security projects. The methods used for data collection were questionnaires, interviews, participant observations and PRA tools. The results were brought together in four key conclusions. First, programs on the ground are shaped by the (higher level) ideals of 'participation', 'sustainability' and 'capacity building' in development discourse, hence may not necessarily correlate with understandings of the concepts on the ground. Second, the term 'community' portrays false assumptions; even in such contexts where all rural farmers are not wealthy, there are many disparities among them. Third, the poorest of the poor are usually unable to participate due to time and labour constraints, a fact that is often overlooked by outsiders. Finally, poor people continue to rely on outsiders for development in spite of the stated goals of self-reliance and capacity-building. The authors suggest that this may be an indication that development project goals of sustainability, empowerment and self-reliance have not moved beyond rhetoric to practice, in many projects.

Two of the conclusions made in this study are similar to what Wennink, et al (2007) identify as constraints to the inclusion of the poor in development programs: the false assumptions pertaining to the concept of 'community' and the numerous constraints that prevent the poorest of the poor from participating. However, the authors take these arguments a step further in cautioning against underlying assumptions that participation in development projects can lift the poor out of poverty when in fact, the criteria for participation often leaves the poorest on the margins. That is, the mere participation of the poor in development projects does not eliminate all their problems and lift them out of poverty. There are other constraints such as gender discrimination, illiteracy, belonging to minority groups and so forth, that may need to be addressed simultaneously. The authors describe this approach as a 'healthy bias' toward the poor. This is something that development organisations working with the poor could adopt.

Blair, H. (2004). Civil Society and pro-poor initiatives in rural Bangladesh: finding a workable strategy. *World Development* 33 (6), 921–936.

This article by Blair argues that how the poorest groups are represented is shaped by their relationship with local power holders (patron-client ties), as well as by wider processes of economic development. Change in the economic arena may also lead to change in the political arena. This article therefore argues that any approach to benefit the poor in the long run must include the non-poor right from the start. This paper argues that there are such forms of civil society advocacy groups and these can begin to secure forms of representation that can lead to pro-poor policy outcomes. The paper further suggests that such an advocacy approach can help the poor move away from patron-client relationships. One particular strategy is for such advocacy groups to join non-poor groups in pressing for broad-based agendas such as health and education to gain wide-spread support before pushing for policies that specifically target the poor. The author concludes that such an approach requires a lot of time and effort to initiate and also cautions of the negative impacts that such approaches may have if not handled with care.

This article is more relevant for advocacy organisations as it emphasises a strategy for gaining broad support for pro-poor policies. The study is more specific to the Bangladesh context, where the survival of the poor is dependent on a vicious cycle of client-patron relationships. However, the strategies outlined in this study could possibly be trialled in other contexts where similar client-patron relationships exist. The article emphasises the important roles that civil society has played and could play in breaking down this cycle, but argues that service delivery alone is not enough. There is an equal, if not greater need for advocacy to challenge structures that keep people in poverty.

Publicly accessible at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X05000422>

Hicks, J. (2011). Bringing women into local governance: a review of enabling mechanisms in South Africa. *Community Development Journal*, 46 (3), 351–364.

This article looks at participation mechanisms in South Africa to see if progress has been made in engaging women in governance. In order to establish the level of progress made in this regard, the author assesses the existing policy framework for public participation, and draws on literature and case studies relating to different approaches and models for strengthening women's participation. The author found that the current design and operation of ward committees did not enable meaningful citizen participation, let alone, women's participation. Hence the author concludes that careful thought and consideration must be given at the design level to ensure that participation mechanisms will allow for women's participation. Hicks also found that where mechanisms do allow for the participation of women but were not utilised by women, one leading cause was the dominance of men. The author proposes women-only forums to overcome this. In addition, the author suggests the identification of ways to incorporate deliberations in these women-only forums, and how these deliberations can be incorporated into decision-making processes within the local government. This too requires careful planning from the design stage onwards.

The author makes a similar argument to Kepe and Silva (2010) that higher level development policies such as participation play out very differently on the ground. Although this article looks specifically at the plight of women as far as participation in local governance is concerned, the suggestion to give careful thought as to how women could be included in local governance could be applied more broadly in development interventions. Development organisations should give careful thought as to how best they can include different groups of people, including the poorest, in their interventions. These mechanisms for participation should be thought through carefully right from the design stage, if there is to be any hope of including the marginalised.

Publicly accessible at:

<http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org/content/46/3/351>

Joseph, S. (2008). *Ubudehe: Creating Spaces for Citizen Participation*. Ubudehe Seminar, September 6, 2007, Kigali, Rwanda. (found at Inclusion of the Poorest Dgroups Library).

Ubudehe is a Rwandan term which means local collective action. The Rwandan government adopted *ubedehe* as a national policy, which taps village (cell) residents in community development committees (CDCs) through various activities such as the following: cell households discuss poverty issues; residents learn to prioritise local problems and are given assistance to take action on a chosen problem using their own institutions [enhancing local governance]; and, chosen households are given resources to pursue preferred livelihood strategies, with advice from local elders. The author believes that the *uebedehe* is a community-level effort which has potentials for community managed poverty reduction, if supported over the coming years. He maintains that autonomy of this collective action should be maintained, with less interference and requirements from support institutions.

Joseph presented various working models for citizen participation. While the models clearly showed how participation can be elicited from the grassroots, he did not disclose the effectiveness and impact of these models in addressing poverty. We are of the impression that his presentation was more to comply with donor agencies' requirements than to present real experiences and the complexities of implementing participation. None of the complexities, such as power interests pre-existing in these communities prior to these initiatives were mentioned. Despite this, the activities reported by this article, i.e. encouraging village residents to talk about poverty issues and local problems may be utilised by the DCR Network as part of its strategy in increasing the voices of the poorest.

In addition, the use of local institutions and traditions in addressing poverty was also mentioned by the author, though he did not elaborate its effects on the community and their capabilities to help deal with poverty issues. It is noted that several authors (Lyons, Smuts & Stephen, 2001, Chambers, 1997, 1996, 1994, Friedmann, 1992, among others) have found the importance of using local solutions to local problems/issues. Hence, the use of local traditions and institutions by communities is widely acknowledged in the existing literature, since it brings relevant information and knowledge.

Gaventa, J. (2002). Towards participatory local governance: Six propositions for discussion.

This article presents a theoretical approach in expounding participatory local governance. This piece, while not providing information on participatory governance in practice, may provide good material to help decide on approaches/strategies in creating participatory local governance. Gaventa raises six propositions to enhance participatory local governance, which mainly pertain to enhancing the capacities of both government and civil society, finding ways to engage citizen's voices in the political process and within government institutions relevant to the poor. Interestingly, Gaventa refers to the findings of other authors that despite the disillusionment of the poor with their governments, the poor still value the important role of governments to provide services and promote equal rights amongst its citizens.

Gaventa's article raises several valuable insights to promote participatory local governance, which may be relevant to DCR's work in promoting participatory approaches to increase the voices of the poorest. For one, although the author notes that enabling conditions [strong central State capacity; well developed civil society and an organised political force, with strong social movement characteristics] found in successful experiments of participatory governance to be difficult to replicate, this author makes the following recommendations: awareness building on rights and citizenship; building civil associations and social movements engaged in governance issues; and strengthening institutions of governance, both at the local and central levels. Another author (Osmani, 2000) argues for empowering supporting strategies, which involves providing economic livelihoods, social mobilisation and advocacy. Lastly, DCR can likewise take on the challenge raised by the author: "The challenge is not only how to build participatory governance at differing levels, but how to promote democratic and accountable vertical links across actors at each level. This involves a double movement from local reform upward and from national reform downward, each level of governance playing a contributing part (Pieters, as cited in Mohan & Stokke, 2002).

Publicly accessible at:

<https://www.slu.se/Documents/externwebben/overgripande-slu-dokument/popvet-dok/currents/Curr28.pdf#page=29>

Mc-Ewan, C. (2003). Bringing government to the people: Women, local governance and community participation in South Africa. *Geoforum* 34(4), 469–481.

Mc-Ewan talks about the ongoing political transformations in local governance in South Africa, from the perspectives of black women. One important policy approach is the *integrated development planning (IDP)* which requires different government departments to link their plans, objectives, budgets, auditing, monitoring, and community consultation. Interviews conducted in Khayelitsha (Cape Town South Africa) show that IDP has failed to involve not only women, but communities in general, in the IDP processes and projects. The reasons found by the author may be considered by DCR in implementing its projects/programs using participatory approaches. For one, lack of information was seen as the top most reason that restricts participation, and access to information is further constrained by the level of socio-economic development of women. This indicates that DCR needs to ensure that information reaches its target participants. Another factor found is that engaging women to participate may put women at a disadvantage if their time is already devoted to multiple tasks. The lack of capacity of local governments and institutions was also cited as a reason for the IDP's failure.

While the reasons stated above reflect women's views, they could be used by DCR in understanding how to facilitate participation amongst various stakeholders. Finding ways in making information accessible and ensuring that in requesting attendance of participants, due consideration is given that they will not be required to sacrifice the needs of their families. In addition, DCR may consider the examples of inclusion pointed out by the author in successful community-driven (women-led) development schemes from other South African cities. These schemes relied more on working with and developing existing capacities, rather than "bringing government to the people". And considering that community governance may be considered as a community asset, DCR's plan to tap community governance as a vehicle to increase the voices of the poorest may be commendable, but needs to consider the other assets existing or lacking yet needed by the community. DCR also needs to take note that in other instances, community governance is weak or lacks capacities.

Publicly accessible at:

<http://dro.dur.ac.uk/1069/1/1069.pdf>

Hitton, R. (2011). Inclusive governance: Transforming livelihood security. Experiences from CARE Bangladesh.

Research was conducted in three unions where CARE implements the Social and Economic Transformation of the Ultra-Poor (SETU) project, investigating changes in livelihood and coping strategies of extremely poor and poor households. One of SETU's approach in addressing poverty is promoting inclusive governance, which in this context means "incorporating diverse voices and bringing decision-making closer to citizens" (p. x). The focus of the research was however on the role of leaders from various levels: natural leaders, Union Parishad/UP (formal elites) and community leaders, in supporting the livelihood and coping strategies of the target beneficiaries. As a result of CARE's interventions, four out of seven households have been able to diversify their livelihoods and access support through new avenues, that is, through the leaders above-mentioned. Diversity includes equitably spreading opportunities within a household, giving women access and reducing the vulnerability to shocks of some of the households surveyed. In another article, Ellis (2000)* states that rural sector diversification increases the options of the rural poor, enhancing their ability to cope and adapt.

CARE's strategies may be considered by DCR as they refer to ways in building the capabilities of local leaders in supporting extremely poor people to cope with their needs/deprivations. However, it was not clear from this research the processes undertaken by CARE. But one CARE strategy worth considering by the DCR involves the facilitating of avenues for the poor in accessing social programmes, this strategy may be considered relevant to increasing the voices of the poorest, as it creates relationships with the poor and other sectors of society, i.e. civil society or the government.

Publicly accessible at:

<http://www.careinternational.org.uk/research-centre/governance/117-inclusive-governance-transforming-livelihood-security-experiences-from-care-bangladesh>

*Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.