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**INCLUSION AND LOCAL  
ELECTED GOVERNMENTS:  
THE PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM  
IN INDIA**

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## AUTHORS' NOTE

For sake of confidentiality the names and affiliations of people and agencies interviewed are not disclosed in this document.

# ABBREVIATIONS

BP	Block Panchayat
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFC	Center Finance Commission
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Schemes
DDP	Desert Development Program
DEA	Department of Economic Affairs
DPAP	Drought Prone Area Program
DPC	District Planning Committee
DRDA	District Rural Development Agency
EAS	Employment Assurance System
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
GOI	Government of India
GOMP	Government of Madhya Pradesh
GOR	Government of Rajasthan
GP	Gram Panchayat
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Program
JRY	Jawahar Rozgar Yojana
JSGY	Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of Legislative Council
MP	Member of Parliament; Madhya Pradesh
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institution
PS	Panchayat Samitis
Rs.	Rupees
SC	Scheduled Castes
SFC	State Finance Commission
SGSY	Swarnjyanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TAD	Tribal Area Development
ZP	Zilla Parishad



# INTRODUCTION

Laws relating to panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh entrust gram panchayats—the lowest level of elected government in rural India—with the primary responsibility for a set of administrative and development functions. Sections 49 and 54 of the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 and Sections 33 and 41 of the Rajasthan Act of 1994 indicate a list of services and programs that gram panchayats are required to provide in each village. A limited amount of authority and resources have been delegated to gram panchayats for many years while, following the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (1992) and subsequent State Acts and Orders, other functions and resources have been given more recently. Others have yet to be handed over by state government agencies.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study was to assess the degree and nature of exclusion and inclusion within panchayat raj organizations in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. This was examined using a database assembled for a group from six districts—three in each state. The districts in Rajasthan were Ajmer, Bhilwara and Dungarpur, and Neemuch, Mandsaur and Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh. The villages selected for study included some that sit astride major roads and others that are located some distance away and are relatively hard to access. Villages both large and small, as well as single-caste-dominant and mixed-caste villages are represented in the study. Also represented in the study are villages where the post of sarpanch is open to all, and others where the sarpanch is female, or from a scheduled caste (SC) or scheduled tribe (ST).

The central question addressed was whether a person's social and economic attributes determined their participation in gram panchayat activities. Our original hypothesis, which was based on documentation and rural experience, suggests that those who are present and heard during panchayat meetings tend to be the better educated

males and those who are wealthier, more articulate and of higher caste than the general population. Our analysis indicates that certain groups—mainly women and tribal people—have very limited participation, but that assumptions relating to caste and wealth as determinants of exclusion do not hold true.

We define as excluded a person who is deprived of their right to access or use the opportunities or benefits available to other members of society. Exclusion may *occur* (exclusion as a cause) as a result of a person's social, educational, economic, political or physical attributes. Exclusion may also be *manifested* (exclusion as an effect) in different domains of a person's life.

In this study we examined only one of these domains—the political, and the factors which exert an influence on inclusion in that sphere—and further restricted our analysis to that of inclusion in gram panchayat, rather than other PRI, activities and decision making. Rates of participation are used as an indicator of inclusion. The study seeks to understand how intensively villagers in general participate in activities associated with gram panchayats; why there are differences in participation levels; and which groups of people participate disproportionately in the activities and decision making of PRIs.

In addition to briefly examining existing mechanisms of accountability and their perceived effectiveness, the study also examines the distribution of benefits (goods and services) associated with the gram panchayat and the relationship between vulnerability and access to/use of benefits. We also consider the impact of inter-village differences arising from structural features such as size of panchayats, distance from market and administrative centers, and the presence of other organizations on elected representatives' participation in PRI activities and decisions.

Following the summary of findings, we recommend

policy interventions to improve inclusion and spread benefits more equitably among village populations. As decentralization is a relatively new process where theory and practice are both still evolving, moving ahead without recurrent analysis risks discrediting the process. Potentially successful strategies and tactics will need to be adapted continually to deal with emerging trends. While this study does not attempt to provide an overview of decentralization in India, it can contribute by assessing trends empirically and suggesting changes in course and direction.<sup>2</sup>



# METHODOLOGY

The selected villages were studied using two integrated methodologies—one an extensive questionnaire based survey and the other an intensive anthropological investigation. Both were undertaken simultaneously in July and August 1999. In the extensive survey, a stratified random sample of men and women were interviewed in all 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—each caste group in the village constituted a separate social group—as well as by religion, tribe and gender. A random sample of households was selected from each social group and the number of households selected from each group was proportional to the group's representation in the entire village population. A total of 2,013 persons were interviewed using a pretested list of questions. Men

and women were selected for interviews in equal numbers from among households in the sample.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, 315 persons holding official positions in PRIs, both current and past, were interviewed in these villages by trained village investigators.

The intensive survey was conducted in eight gram panchayats, covering 25 revenue villages, and sought to draw out from respondents their understanding and interpretation of how and why exclusion or inclusion occurs. The intensive survey yielded a set of information that complemented the data from the extensive study. This allowed us to reliably interpret final figures and better understand how people's social and economic positioning ultimately affects inclusion or exclusion in PRIs.

# PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE LEVEL GOVERNMENT

At the time of the study the panchayat raj system in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan comprised three main bodies: (i) the gram panchayat; (ii) the *janpad*/block panchayat; and (iii) the *zilla* panchayat. In Madhya Pradesh there were 30,924 gram panchayats, 459 janpad panchayats, and 45 zilla panchayats; while in Rajasthan there were 9,185 gram panchayats, 237 janpad panchayats, and 31 zilla panchayats.

Depending on population, a gram panchayat may include between one and five revenue villages, and contain a maximum of 20 *chaupals* or wards. The gram panchayat has both directly elected *panches* and appointed members, and includes proportional membership reservations for scheduled castes and tribes. From within the gram panchayat, a sarpanch (president) and an upsarpanch (vice-president) are elected by the members. Once elected, the gram panchayat remains in power for five years.

The janpad panchayat is comprised of approximately 20 members elected from the janpad level constituencies. Members of the State Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Members of Parliament (MP) whose constituencies fall either in whole or in part within the block are eligible to attend the meetings.

The zilla panchayat is comprised of approximately 21 directly elected members from the district level constituencies. Members of the State Legislative Assembly and members of Parliament whose constituencies fall either in whole or in part within the district are eligible to attend the meetings but have no voting rights. In the zilla parishad, the president is elected by the other elected members.

An important element of the gram panchayat is the *gram sabha* or village-wide assembly, in which all persons above the age of 18 are able to participate. The gram sabha is a non-executive body and is the forum where the gram panchayat presents the annual statement of accounts,

reports from the previous financial year, the last audit note, and the development plan for the coming year. The statutes in both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan require that the sarpanch call a minimum of four gram sabhas each year.

## Participation by Villagers in Panchayat Activities

Do all people participate equally in activities associated with constituting and operating gram panchayats, or do some types of people more actively influence the results of elections to panchayati raj institutions and the decisions made by these elected bodies? Are those from higher castes relatively more influential in panchayats than those who belong to scheduled castes and tribes? Which types of people are included or excluded from determining who exercises authority within panchayats?

There are a wide range of political activities that are associated with electing representatives and exercising influence within PRIs. In addition to voting, other indicators of political participation include campaigning, attending rallies and meetings, and making contact with public representatives. In order to ascertain the levels of participation in a variety of political activities, 2,013 villagers were interviewed about their political behaviors.

Among the villagers interviewed for this intensive exercise, 95 percent of eligible citizens reported that they had voted in most or all of the panchayat elections. Levels of participation in voting did not differ significantly between men and women, land owners and the landless, or among the different caste groups. While women turned out marginally less often to vote than men, all groups had voting rates in excess of 93 percent, and self-exclusion was not reported by any group in significant numbers.

By any standards these voting figures are high, but high voting figures are not necessarily indicative of broad po-

litical participation. The survey results indicate that one reason behind such large voter turnout relates to requests and pressure from contesting candidates. Of the villagers interviewed in the eight case study panchayats, 37 percent said they had voted at least once for reasons of social solidarity—the candidate formed part of their social network. Nineteen percent said they had voted one or more times because they wished to avoid later tension or conflict with the candidates. Eighteen percent maintained that they voted due to a fear that failure to vote might result in deletion of their names from the list of future beneficiaries for anti-poverty programs or their ration cards might be cancelled and they would no longer be able to purchase staple grains at subsidized rates.

High voter turnout in gram panchayat elections is not fully indicative of high levels of broad political participation or interest. Participation in political activity in fact falls off quite sharply when we consider the other activities that are associated with electing representatives and exercising influence within PRIs. For example, slightly more than 29 percent of those interviewed stated that they had worked on behalf of a candidate or political party, and slightly less than 35 percent of those interviewed stated that they made contact with any panchayat representative during the past year. Contact with janpad or zilla panchayat members was significantly lower. However, what is perhaps most disturbing from the stand-

point of accountability and transparency is the very low levels of attendance reported at gram sabha meetings where budgets, finances, and development plans are discussed.

In all 53 villages in the extensive study, the vast majority of villagers (65 percent) did not attend a single gram sabha meeting during the previous year and barely seven percent of villagers attended meetings regularly.<sup>4</sup> The 10 percent quorum requirement stipulated by law in both states for gram sabha meetings is very often hard to meet in many villages, and sarpanchas resort to diverse stratagems in order to record a quorum on paper.

### Are Panchayats Valued?

Even though nearly all villagers participate in voting, far fewer—between 20 and 40 percent—are involved with the other activities that are associated with influencing decision making in PRIs. Why do so many people feel that it is not worth participating in the panchayat system? Is this because there is little to be gained materially or, as Box 1 indicates, is it because they have no control over decisions made?

A ranking exercise was carried out in three panchayats in order to understand the value people attribute to the panchayat as a local political and development body as

#### Box 1: Views of the Gram Panchayat

“Most people feel that they have right only to elect their representatives, not to direct or supervise their activities,” we were told by one respondent.<sup>5</sup>

“Gram sabhas are called as often as the law requires, but hardly anyone attends. What can they achieve by attending? They know that the sarpanch will do exactly as he pleases regardless of who attends and who does not.”<sup>6</sup>

“We go out among the people when we need their votes,” one elected representative said, “Once we are elected, however, our contact with the public is greatly reduced.”<sup>7</sup>

The difference between taking an interest in a bi-laterally aided project and the panchayat was reported as follows by a mixed group of villagers in Dungarpur dis-

trict: “In the project we were all called for the meetings. They even used to go from house to house to ask us to come. We knew that all households would get labor from the project and that we would get some help to develop our land. We went to the village meetings to make sure that we got our share and to know what was happening. Plans were made with many villagers present. The panchayat does not work like this. Benefits are not many. We never got any. We will not get benefits by going to the meetings. You have to have the right connections.”

In one of the panchayats, a group of elder villagers clearly articulated the message heard many times over in villages, “What can we or any other villagers do about this (mis-use of funds). We have to get on with our lives and earn our livelihood, and after all, the panchayat is not that important for our daily lives.”

compared to other development activities in the villages. A cross-section of 20 villagers in each panchayat were asked individually to rank the existing development activities in their village based on which one they think is “better”.<sup>8</sup> The outcome of the exercise indicates that the activities which are valued most highly are those which provide all villagers with the opportunity to benefit, such as education or the award of labor associated with resource development. Activities which were valued somewhat less highly were those that benefited certain groups in the village, such as women’s savings groups and farmer’s cooperatives. However, the least valued activity was the gram panchayat, as many villagers felt they had no influence, that there was a lack of transparency, a high level of corruption and that very few individuals had the opportunity to benefit.

### **Accountability**

The value of benefit and accountability are two key factors influencing people’s use of PRI system. How accountable are the PRIs? What mechanisms exist to hold representatives accountable, and are these mechanisms being utilized effectively by the population?

The State acts and the rules of the gram panchayat provide for certain mechanisms through which elected representatives can be held accountable for their actions. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan there are three common mechanisms by which villagers can hold their gram panchayat representatives accountable: (i) the gram sabha; (ii) the right of recall; and (iii) recourse to higher authority. In Rajasthan there is also the additional mechanism of the vigilance committee at the level of the gram panchayat.

The gram sabha is intended to be the main platform for widespread transparency and accountability. Its central function is to take stock of past developments, review expenditures, and to decide which new activities are possible within the sanctioned budget. The purpose of the gram sabha is to provide villagers with the opportunity to obtain clarification from their representatives on all aspects and activities of the gram panchayat. However, data from the extensive survey indicate that the gram sabha, with only an average of seven percent of members attending, is not yet an effective mechanism of governance.

Through passage of a bill in April 1999, Madhya Pradesh became the first state in the country to empower the

people of a gram panchayat to recall an elected representative. The right of recall can only be exercised once a panchayat member has completed half of his or her term and requires that 50 percent of the total electorate support the vote for the representative’s removal. In Rajasthan the right of recall is not vested with the electorate, but with the elected representatives. In order to be valid, a no-confidence motion needs only to be supported by one third of the representatives. In addition to the gram sabha and the right of recall at the gram panchayat level there is also scope for recourse to higher authority. In both states, the District Magistrate has the authority to remove or suspend an elected representative assessed to ~~be disqualified for the post~~.<sup>9</sup>

In Rajasthan, the vigilance committee is an additional mechanism of accountability. The purpose of the committee is to monitor and oversee the work of the gram panchayat, and its membership is comprised of non-elected representatives. Although the committee is not endowed with any formal powers, through its monitoring function it has the potential to enhance accountability by reporting its findings to the gram sabha.

Although the extensive survey has demonstrated that the gram sabha is not a sufficient mechanism of accountability, what impact do the other mechanisms have on ensuring responsible governance? When villagers experience exclusion or poor performance do they take advantage of these other provisions for holding panchayat officials accountable? The following case studies, which are derived from the extensive survey and individual discussions, document the experience of villagers and place the problems associated with taking action against PRI representatives in context.

The case studies clearly demonstrate that mounting dissatisfaction with the panchayat does not necessarily result in local action to hold PRI representatives accountable. The limited benefits distributed by the panchayat, preoccupation with daily subsistence, local dependency relationships (both social and economic), corruption, and fear of social exclusion from the community hamper the use of the existing accountability mechanisms. Villagers who have taken recourse to higher authority against their elected representatives have met with limited success as the officials have not shown adequate responsiveness to their complaints or, in some cases, have been allied with the sarpanch. The absence of effective accountability

### Case 1

B\*\* is a large village comprised of some 700 households and constitutes a panchayat on its own. Politically and economically the village is dominated by Patidars (approximately 35 percent), who are known as a progressive farming caste, now classified as an Other Backward Caste (OBC). The rest of the population forms a mixture of other OBCs, various scheduled castes as well as a small population of scheduled tribes. The sarpanch is a woman from the Patidar caste. However, it is her husband and his relatives who largely carry out her duties. In comparison with other gram panchayats, people in B\*\* are not too dissatisfied with the community works implemented by the panchayat. Gutters, roads and tube-wells have been built in various parts of the village during the last five years. However, there is a commonly held perception that individual benefits can only be accessed by people who have a relationship with the sarpanch's family. Such relationships are formed on the basis of frequent labor

work for the sarpanch and her kin, purchasing goods from shops owned by them and voting in their favor. Many of these people are dependent on the Patidars for their livelihoods. Some of them belong to the more vulnerable sections of the village, and most are from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The people who feel excluded from the individual benefits of the panchayat emphasize that they do not know what to do to change the situation or whom to turn to outside the panchayat. One scheduled tribe wardpanch said that he has no powers but that he and other wardpanches have to go along with whatever the Patidars decide in the panchayat as many of them are also dependent on the Patidars for employment. A few villagers stressed that it is not in their hands to improve the panchayat and that turning to higher officers will not help as they will say that it is not their business and direct them back to the gram panchayat.

### Case 2

N\*\* panchayat covers three villages. All of the villages are socially heterogeneous comprising members of upper castes, OBCs, scheduled castes, and a few scheduled tribes. Village and panchayat politics are governed by the Patel caste who are the main and large landowners. The sarpanch, a woman, comes from a highly regarded Patel household, and her husband is the traditional village leader of the main village. When electing the sarpanch, people had high hopes of equity and inclusion of marginal groups in the benefits provided by the panchayat. However, the sarpanch soon began indulging in corrupt practices. In particular, she sanctioned individual benefits to ward panches who supported her resource allocation and political decisions and to individuals who were more or less bonded laborers of her household. Rising discontent among the villagers re-

sulted in a decision to raise a no confidence motion against the sarpanch. However, when voting was about to take place, the sarpanch ensured that a critical group of ward panches were away from the village so that a valid motion could not be passed. The sarpanch subsequently granted certain benefits to other ward panches to ensure that such a challenge to her position would not recur. Later about 20 villagers approached the district administration to report the mismanagement of the panchayat to government officials. However, the official met was not helpful and said that there were so many complaints against Sarpanches that he could not take all of them seriously. People have now lost hope of removing the sarpanch from office. Elections are soon due and the perception is that things may improve with new representatives.

### Case 3

G\*\* gram panchayat is made up of 11 hamlets. Rawat Meena (ST), to which the sarpanch belongs, is the major social group of the gram panchayat. The present sarpanch has held this position for the last three terms

and has ensured his success by buying votes at the time of the election. While the bribes are small, they are sufficient to gain the votes of people who were otherwise disinterested in the panchayat.

#### **Case 4**

**D\*\*pura** gram panchayat is dominated by the scheduled tribe Bhil. The sarpanch is a Bhil woman elected on the basis of her husband's relatively better education in comparison to other potential candidates. People thought that he, who more or less handles all the work, would do a good job. However, soon after the election dissatisfaction with the performance of the panchayat mounted. Some villagers were upset with the fact that gram sabhas were not held and that laborers were brought from outside when community works were being executed, thereby depriving the villagers of employment opportunities. Furthermore, it was felt that the construction works that had taken place were of inferior quality

and a group of 50 villagers of mixed castes went to meet with the collector. Immediately following the meeting the situation improved. However, one year later the collector was transferred and the performance of the panchayat again deteriorated. Moreover, the sarpanch's husband and his allies took charge of other development interventions introduced in the village such as watershed management, afforestation, and forest protection. A group of villagers then went to the block development officer who told them not to waste his time as they themselves had elected the sarpanch. Now the villagers have given up trying to improve the performance of the present panchayat and are waiting for new elections.

#### **Case 5**

**V\*\*** gram panchayat is situated on the border with Gujarat. The inhabitants are from the Bhil scheduled tribe, and only a few households in the panchayat are made up of non-tribals. The sarpanch, who is a woman, was elected due to her 10 years of education and because a sizable number of households, and thus voters, in the gram panchayat belong to her husband's extended family. Being a woman, the sarpanch has no effective powers in the panchayat, and her husband who is a government teacher does not have much time to take on her responsibilities. In practice, the panchayat is managed by a few powerful ward panches who, with the passive support of the sarpanch and a few illiterate ward panches,

take decisions regarding individual benefits as well as prioritizing community works. Although this was the only panchayat out of the case studies that had an active vigilance committee, the majority of the villagers spoken to suggested that corruption was substantial. Two of the powerful ward panches were members of the vigilance committee, but the villagers had no idea that it was supposed to be made up of non-panchayat members. Other villagers and ward panches have not taken any action against the mismanagement and corruption because they believe the risk of social and financial repercussions outweighs the benefit of minimal improvement in the panchayat.

mechanisms is linked to the wider socio-political context prevailing in a gram panchayat, as well as to the need for a more neutral government system that can respond effectively to local allegations of mismanagement.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Who participates?**

Even if the villagers view the gram panchayat with a degree of skepticism, the data demonstrate that between 11 and 40 percent of villagers participated in political activities such as campaigning, contacting representatives, and attending meetings.<sup>11</sup> Given the hypothesis that social and economic attributes determine inclusion in

panchayat activities, the next question is whether or not it is the same group in each case? Factor analysis was used first to check whether the same group of persons was consistently more active with respect to participation in political activities. Regression analysis was then employed to discern the characteristics of those individuals who participated more actively.

Villagers were asked to respond to six different survey questions relating to the participation variables of campaigning, attending rallies, supporting a candidate, influencing voters, contacting public representatives, and attending gram sabhas. The factor analysis shows that indi-

viduals who score highly on any one of these variables tend to have high scores on each of the other five variables. Low scores are similarly correlated. Those who are “high participators” campaign vigorously for political candidates, influence other villagers’ choices at election time, attend gram sabhas regularly, and are in frequent contact with panchayat representatives. In contrast, those who are “low participators” are not active in election campaigns, do not usually attend political rallies or meetings of the gram sabha, and have less frequent contact with panchayat representatives than other villagers.

### **Association between Participation and Gender, Wealth, Education, and Social Group**

A single underlying quality or set of attributes seems to be at work that makes some persons more active and more included than others. In order to identify these attributes and to distinguish more active from less active villagers, a broad Index of Political Activity, ranging from zero to 100, was constructed.<sup>12</sup> The most active individuals can achieve the maximum score of a hundred on this index, while the least active will score zero. The 100-point scale is split into three parts, denoting high, middle and low participation scores.<sup>13</sup>

Among the attributes of gender, wealth, education, and social group, one factor which separates the comparatively more active from the comparatively less active is gender.<sup>14</sup> For example, 42 percent of men are highly active compared with only 11 percent of women. As 52 percent of women fall within the least active political category compared with only 30 percent of men, women are relatively excluded from participating and influencing decision making within PRIs.

Wealth, as measured by landholding, does not appear to be closely related with participation in political activity.<sup>15</sup> For example, 41 percent of individuals with more than six hectares of land are “low participators”, as are 46 percent of those who are landless. While the landless are relatively less active than those who own some land, persons who have some land, even a tiny amount, exhibit participation levels that are about the same as households with larger landholdings. Owning even a small parcel of land is associated with activity levels that are comparable to those of large landowners. Activity levels do not vary consistently by landowning category, as they did, for example, in the cases of gender. Those who are landless are somewhat less active

than others, though these differences of five to eight percentage points are not nearly as significant as those associated with gender.

In addition to gender, another important correlate of participation is education. The percentage of “low participators” decreases as the level of education increases. Only 16 percent of those who are entirely uneducated are “high participators”, while 46 percent of those with 10 or more years of education fall into this category. Of those individuals with one to five years of schooling, 38 percent are “low participators”, compared with 33 percent of those with six to nine years of schooling, and only 28 percent of those with ten or more years of formal education.

The association between social group and participation in political activity was not found to be significant. While a somewhat smaller proportion of scheduled castes (22 percent) and scheduled tribes (25 percent) are “high participators”, compared with OBCs and upper and middle castes (29 percent), these differences are far less significant than the differences in participation rates that are associated with gender and education.

### **Which Attributes are Most Significant to Participation?**

Which of the factors identified above—gender, education, wealth, and social group—was most significant to participation? Regression analysis was used to determine the level of significance of various attributes using the broad Index of Political Activity as the dependent variable. As with our original factor analysis these findings were checked by also regressing against a narrower index constructed from the survey items related to frequency of contact with public representatives and participation in gram sabha meetings. The detailed results of the regression analysis can be found in Annex 1, and are summarized below.<sup>16</sup>

- **Gender:** Women participate to a much smaller degree than men. Controlling for other factors, women score, on average, 24 points lower than men on our 100-point scale of political participation.

- **Social Group Rankings** are not significantly associated with participation level. Among the different caste groups, only scheduled tribes have a significantly different participation levels. 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—see discussion below.

- **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 tends to increase participation by more than five 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 Madhya Pradesh districts. Whether or not this difference holds true between the two states as a whole cannot be determined using this limited six-district analysis. Age and religion are consistently not significant given any alternative specification of the regression model

An interactive variable was included to assess the interaction between gender and caste. In particular, we examined whether belonging to a scheduled tribe *and* being 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 was significant (at the 0.05 level) and the size of its coefficient was also large (-6.45). The variable ST loses significance when the interactive variable is brought within the analysis, but the overall gender variable continues to remain significant and high. What this implies is that participation in political activity is low not so much among all scheduled tribes but mostly among the women of this social group. While all women participate less than men, participation levels among scheduled tribe women are on average 6.45 percent lower.

When the original factor analysis was regressed against the narrower index, a very significant gender difference was found. In quantitative terms, this difference amounted to 25 points on the broad index of participation with a higher magnitude of difference observed on the narrow index where women scored about 60 points lower than men on average. However, this degree of difference is not surprising to those who have observed meetings of gram sabhas in Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh and know that these meetings are attended mostly by men.

The other variables which were found significant in association with the narrow index include education and access to information. The magnitude of influence attached to education and information is greater in the case of the narrow index. Each additional year of education is associated with a difference of about two points, implying that a person with 10 years of formal education scores 20 percent higher on the narrow index, all other things being equal, than a person who has no education at all.

Similarly, the influence of information is also quantitatively higher in the case of the narrower index. While each additional information source accounts for a difference of about 5 percentage points on the broad index, this difference is in the range of 10 to 12 percentage points on the narrow index.

**Gender, education, and information** are the three factors that, across the entire population and using both the broad and narrow index of participation, are most closely related to participation in PRIs. The data also suggest that tribal origin, landlessness and religious group may, in pockets of the study population, play an important role in determining who is party to various activities associated with the gram panchayat. The data do not allow full testing of this hypothesis but they do allow us to state that an excluded person, is likely to be an illiterate scheduled tribe woman, who is relatively poorly informed and not well acquainted with the public representatives of her village.

Education and information, the other significant influences on participation rates, were not found to be closely related to landholding or higher social rank, as education is not the exclusive privilege of those with large landholdings and information is reasonably symmetrically distributed among high- and low-caste villagers. Findings of other studies, however, have indicated a strong association between wealth and education.<sup>17</sup> Far from replicating differences in wealth and caste status our data suggest that education and information tend to mitigate and equalize differences in political participation among villagers in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.<sup>18</sup> The discrepancy between the findings of this study and of others on the relationship between education and wealth may reflect rapid changes occurring in rural areas, but due to methodological differences between studies these findings may warrant further study.



### **Attributes of Participation Associated with Elected Representatives**

The eight panchayats that were intensively studied had a total of 132 elected representatives, 30 percent of whom had been elected in unopposed elections. Whether the election was unopposed or contested, the following factors related to personal abilities or skills were listed by villagers as significant in the selection of representatives.

Education was perceived by 63 percent of the people to be a very important asset that influences the effectiveness of an elected representative. The importance given to education implies that many respected elders who have established positions in the community and could be fair and just representatives are often excluded due to lack of formal education. The uneducated traditional village leaders that were interviewed stressed that the skills needed to be in the panchayat were different from the skills that they possessed, and that they had not therefore made any attempts to be elected. Young, well-educated (10th class or above) and unemployed men were found as representatives in the panchayats, with as many as 27 percent of the elected representatives coming from educated but unemployed youth. In three of the eight panchayats the position of the *upsarpanch* was held by educated young men who were the sons of traditional village leaders. In the absence of other more remunerative alternatives, the panchayat offers such people an opportunity to put their education to use.

Education alone, however, is not sufficient to win an election. Personal qualities such as good analytical understanding, fairness, frankness, and ability to speak with others were taken into account by 37 percent of the people. Where there are female reservations for women, 28 percent of those interviewed felt that the education and personal qualities of the women's husband played an important part in the election.

Age was found by 22 percent of those interviewed to be relevant for the election of women. Elder women have a somewhat liberated position in the village and can afford to mix socially with men of their village. Young daughters-in-law who have recently come to live in their husbands villages are generally not elected as this would violate the ideals of seclusion. A group of women and men in Dungarpur district in Rajasthan maintained this practice was unfortunate as it was mostly the young

women who are educated and could make better representatives.

Other factors which influence the election of representatives, but are not related to personal abilities or skills include the social reputation of the candidate's household, the number of extended male kin in the village or panchayat, and the involvement of village patrons. In one village in Madhya Pradesh where the patron-client relationship was regarded as mutually beneficial, a group of female laborers working for the *upsarpanch* explained that, "We depend and rely on him for everything. He ensures us employment for 12 months; he gives us loans when we need them; and he supports us at the time of any crisis. Our life would be very difficult if it was not for him. If anybody is going to give us any benefits from the panchayat it will be him."

Livelihood security is also a significant attribute of elected representatives. People who need to think of their daily subsistence have no time, little interest, or power to be part of the panchayat. On the basis of vulnerability ranking it was found that only 4 percent of the elected representatives belonged to the vulnerable sections of the community. Two of the representatives maintained that they hardly participated in the panchayat at all and one said that he was not interested in becoming ward *panch* but that the others had insisted as his personal qualities were highly regarded by other villages.

Bribes in the form of cash or liquor are sometimes used at the time of election to "top up" the other factors mentioned above, especially when the competition between candidates is expected to be close. For two out of eight *sarpanches*, this strategy was crucial.

Clearly, there is no single factor that makes an elected representative. While education is a crucial attribute that may have partly altered traditional power politics, personal characteristics and social and economic positioning in the community were all contributing factors in the election of office bearers.

In the extensive survey instrument administered to the 315 PRI representatives include four questions covering participation, attendance at meetings, and different aspects of decision making and deliberation within PRIs. In each case the respondent was asked to make a self-assessment about how actively he or she participated compared with others.

Factor analysis shows that representatives who participate actively in one set of activities associated with PRIs are also highly likely to participate actively in each of the other activities. Once again, there is an identifiable subset of the sample who participate more actively than others in influencing the decision making within PRIs.

Individuals who have traditionally been included in village decision making—i.e., those who are of high caste and wealthy—could be expected to portray themselves as more effective and more involved in the work of the PRIs. The data, however, draw some very different conclusions.

Regression analysis was used to discern the features that distinguish highly active representatives from less active representatives. A summary measure of participation. Similar to the Index created for ordinary villagers was put together by combining responses to the questions asked and re-scaling the measure to have a range from 0 to 100. The resulting variable was regressed upon a number of demographic and other variables. Table 1 of Annex 2 reports these results.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the variables considered in the previous analysis, this analysis of participation among different categories of PRI representatives included dummy variables for sarpanch and upsarpanch.<sup>20</sup> Results from the sample of PRI representatives are broadly similar to those derived from the larger sample of individual villagers.

Gender is once again strongly associated with participation. Female representatives of gram panchayats participate to a considerably smaller degree—more than 15 percentage points less than males. This reflects women's low participation in public life in India generally. Of the female ward panches spoken to in the eight case study panchayats, 75 percent held that they rarely attended the panchayat. Only 11 percent of the women representatives spoken to felt that they could put forward issues and actively participate in the panchayat. This reticence originates in the social custom that women, and particularly younger women, are not supposed to speak in front of the men of their husband's village.

The lack of women's participation was clearly observed during a monthly members' meeting in a panchayat in Ajmer district of Rajasthan, where three female ward members were found sitting veiled and in a corner. In three of the four panchayats with a female sarpanch group discussions and informal interviews revealed that the

activities of their office were basically carried out by their husbands. However, a well-educated female sarpanch of Ujjain district in Madhya Pradesh was found to be in total control of all the activities of her panchayat.

Religious or social groups are once again *not* significantly associated with participation by representatives in panchayats' activities across the study population. Even when the sample is analyzed specifically for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes representatives, no significant differences in participation levels are apparent. Representatives elected from among these reserved categories do not participate any less actively on average compared to representatives from general (unreserved) categories, all other things being equal.

Wealth also does not have any discernible association with participation. However, representatives who are landless participate to a significantly lesser extent than those who own some land. As the landless are likely to be more dependent economically, they are therefore less likely to raise dissenting opinions against their potential employers in the village—a conclusion that is also supported by the case study data.

Education and access to information are also variables that are significantly associated with participation among elected representatives. Every additional year of education tends on average to raise representatives' participation by more than two-and-a-half percentage points. A representative who has ten years of education scores on average 27 percentage points higher on this scale compared to another who has no formal education. Similarly, higher access to information is associated with greater participation among representatives by almost three percentage points, on average, for each additional source of information that they consult.

Not surprisingly, sarpanchas are revealed to have a much higher average participation score—13 points higher—than either Upsarpanchas or ward panches. As sarpanchas dominate the activities of gram panchayats, other elected representatives participate to a considerably lesser extent. Additionally, case study data indicate that most ward panches and even Upsarpanchas feel that they can do little, if anything, to challenge or modify the decisions taken by the sarpanch.

Interactive variables considered in the previous analysis of political activity among ordinary villagers were also considered here, but none of these variables achieved significance under any alternative specification.

# WHO SHARES IN SERVICES AND BENEFITS?

In the first part of this section, we record the outcomes of our intensive survey. In the second part we use survey data for all 53 villages to examine patterns of exclusion in relation to activities and functions commonly performed by gram panchayats in both states.

## Which Households Perceive Themselves as Excluded from Benefits?

On the basis of information gathered during the intensive study, an assessment has been made of which types of households are likely to be excluded from benefits. This investigation focused on the two major economic benefits of the panchayat, the housing scheme (*Indra Awas Yojana*) and subsidized loans.<sup>21</sup> In the intensively studied panchayats, it was found that certain categories of households were systematically excluded from these two benefits.

All 20 *female-headed households* interviewed were excluded from these benefits in all the eight panchayats. A household's access to information and political integration into community life in rural India depends on men. The absence of a male household head directly affects a woman's access to benefits.

"My husband died about 15 years ago. I have two young sons and a daughter. I and my son go out for labor work early every morning and return late in the evening. I have no idea of what happens in the panchayat and how they take decisions. I have approached the ward panch several times for a loan, but nothing has happened. We have nobody to tell us the right way. Had my husband been alive he would have mixed with the other men and found out".

*A widow from a scheduled caste in Ajmer district, Rajasthan*

Out of the 35 *migrating households*<sup>22</sup> interviewed 31, or 88 percent, had never received any individual assistance from the panchayat. Like female-headed households they lack, but to a lesser extent, influence and extensive networks in the village due to their frequent absence.

"I am uneducated. I do not know how the panchayat is run. I go out of the village for labor work for about six months and so do my close relatives. People who are in the panchayat call me for work in their fields when I am here – not to the panchayat. I never got any benefits from the panchayat. You have to be here and have time to be involved in village affairs to gain something".

*A migrating blacksmith from Ajmer district, Rajasthan*

Households that have few (male) *extended kin* were often deprived when it came to the selection of beneficiaries. The absence of relatives who could inform people about benefits and help them increases exclusion. Although only 11 percent of those interviewed mentioned the lack of extended kin as a cause of their lack of benefits, the reason reoccurred during group discussions and as the interviews progressed.

"I have tried to get a house from the panchayat for many years. I am one of the few people in the village who live in a rented house. This is my deceased wife's village. I know people here, but not very closely. She also had few family members here. I have no links with any elected people. They will never give me a house."

*A daily wage laborer in Neemach district, Madhya Pradesh*

Households that do not have a *good relationship with the sarpanch* are also commonly excluded from individual benefits. A relationship with the sarpanch is built on a variety of factors, including blood relationships, sharecropping, labor relationships, a broad patron-client relationship, or simply belonging to his (or her husband's) circle of friends. Of those interviewed, 33 percent stressed that the relationship with the sarpanch was crucial to receiving benefits.

"I used to work in the fields of the sarpanch a few years back. Then I got a job as a tractor driver for another big landowner. I had applied for a loan to purchase buffaloes. When I worked for the sarpanch he said he would get it for me as he had done for other people who worked on his farm. I never got a loan while others did".

*A tractor driver in Ujjain district, Madhya Pradesh*

"People who have big households always have one member who has some time and money to spend on drinking with the sarpanch – they are the ones who get benefits. They got houses and loans. We have few household members who are all busy in managing our livelihoods".

*A group discussion in Neemach district, Madhya Pradesh*

The comments above highlight the importance of social and political relations within the gram panchayat. These relationships provide access to networks at the inter-household and community level and are important for obtaining benefits from the panchayat. Households that lack these vital ties tend to be excluded.

### **Are the Excluded Households the most Vulnerable?**

Poverty is usually thought of in terms related to wealth and income.<sup>23</sup> However, such measures are rarely able to adequately reflect the struggle waged by many of the poor in securing their livelihood. The concept of vulnerability is used to assist in understanding the situations in which livelihood stability is frequently endangered. High levels of vulnerability are commonly associated with households that are defenseless against cyclical fluctuations in natural processes or unforeseen expenditures and where a modicum of physical security and adequate coping mechanisms are lacking.

The aim of development interventions is not only to reduce poverty by increasing income-earning capacity, but also to lessen vulnerability by reducing risk and uncertainty while strengthening the capacity of the poor to deal with fluctuations in their external environment.<sup>24</sup> Both the wealth and vulnerability aspects of poverty are considered in the present analysis. Vulnerability is considered in this section with the help of evidence obtained from the intensive study. Wealth and income are considered in the next section, which examines the survey data compiled for all 53 villages.

### **Vulnerability as the Criterion of Poverty**

*Poverty and Exclusion from Benefits.* To understand which households are classified as poor in terms of vulnerability, a ranking exercise was carried out with villagers of different socio-economic backgrounds. Each individual was asked to rank the households of the village according to a simplified definition of vulnerability used across all the gram panchayats—i.e., households who have problems managing their livelihoods or daily subsistence, or who have problems coping with any crisis such as drought, crop failure or the serious illness of a family member. Following this exercise, the respondents were asked to explain the indicators of vulnerability for the household categories: very vulnerable, vulnerable, livelihood secure, and very livelihood secure.<sup>25</sup>

While there is some commonality among the factors that cause households in the various localities to be either vulnerable or livelihood secure, it should be emphasized that the degree of vulnerability varies between the panchayats depending on the larger livelihood context. For example, a household considered to be very livelihood secure in tribal Dungarpur, in Rajasthan, may be less livelihood secure in the context of agriculturally progressive Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh.

The indicators identified by the respondents for very vulnerable households included:

- landless households that are dependent on daily wage labor;
- female-headed households without regular income and marginal land;
- those where most members migrate due to the scarcity or insufficient productivity of land;
- those where one of the main earners is physically or mentally disabled;

- those who lack family or extended kin;
- elder households without sons who can or are willing to contribute economically; and
- large households with few working members, little productive land or any additional regular supplementary income.

The indicators identified for the very livelihood secure households included:

- those that had one or more members with income security from jobs with government or the private sector;
- those with large businesses or where at least one of the members was a shopkeeper; and
- those households who had abundant irrigated productive land or had inherited property.

Between both ends of the spectrum were vulnerable and livelihood secure households. New households who had lost access to productive assets as a result of property division, large households without enough earning members, female-headed household with productive land, men without wives, and young people with less farming experience, lack of supplementary income and little rain-fed land, were some of the characteristics used by villagers to classify households as vulnerable. Livelihood secure households were identified as those who had productive land, had members who were self-employed or regularly employed, and those with very productive land who had access to good irrigation sources.

In examining the relationship between vulnerability and individual benefits, the data from the case studies suggest that a mixture of vulnerable and non-vulnerable households are receiving benefits. Of the 169 individuals interviewed for this exercise, 87 were ranked as belonging to households that were vulnerable or very vulnerable. Of these 87 households, 46 percent received benefits such as a housing or loan subsidy from the panchayat. Among the 82 households that were classified as non-vulnerable, 38 percent received benefits. When the social and political profiles of some of the beneficiary households were explored, it was evident that these were households that were generally socially and politically well-integrated into the village and panchayat. None of the households were female-headed or migrated seasonally, and many of them had large extended kin in the village, while several also had a good relationship with the sarpanch.

In order to get a more holistic view of vulnerability and individual benefits, the vulnerability status was further explored in all households in one panchayat in Dungarpur district in Rajasthan, that had benefited from a house or loan subsidy between fiscal years 95-96 and 98-99. Of 95 beneficiaries identified by District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) during this period 50 (52 percent) were identified as belonging to vulnerable categories. The results indicate that there is not a dramatic difference in the distribution of benefits across households. Among the vulnerable or very vulnerable households, 50 received assistance compared with 45 of the livelihood secure or very livelihood secure households.

This sub-section indicates that vulnerability, understood as a state of poverty, is not entirely well targeted when it comes to individual benefits. Livelihood secure households often receive the benefits of these schemes at the expense of more the vulnerable households. Rather than being strictly informed by poverty, social and political connections affect the way benefits are distributed. Despite being stated in official policy as an important criterion for identifying beneficiaries, the vulnerability position of households is given limited attention in practice.

From considering poverty in terms of vulnerability, we now consider it in its more conventional sense—in terms of wealth. For the purposes of the extensive survey land was assumed to be the key indicator of wealth in these rural areas and landholding is used as a proxy measure to consider how benefits from poverty reduction schemes are distributed among households.<sup>26</sup>

### **Wealth and Exclusion from Benefits**

The targeting of panchayat-based delivery systems is usefully placed in perspective by considering broader patterns of inclusion or exclusion. Before considering exclusion specifically in relation to the benefits of poverty reduction schemes, analysis has been done on the more general patterns of exclusion and inclusion with respect to a broad group of 12 goods and services. These goods and services are commonly provided in all villages by agencies of the state, a subset of which, gram panchayats are responsible for providing.

In the extensive study, each of our 2,013 respondents was asked whether all village residents availed themselves equally of these services, and whether they felt that they

themselves were relatively excluded. 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 85 percent or more of the respondents. School facilities and transportation are at the top of this list, and in both cases, less than five percent of respondents reported feeling any sense of personal exclusion.

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

Majority or severe exclusion is reported 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 PRIs. In each case, between 50 and 80 percent of the respondents felt that they and their families had been excluded from these core services.

The issue to examine, however, is *who* is excluded. What demographic and socioeconomic dimensions are most significantly associated with exclusion from loan and subsidy programs, housing assistance, and wage employment in public construction projects?<sup>27</sup> Although some government departments, such as the Forest and Irrigation Departments, provide a few employment opportunities through small-scale projects implemented in the village the gram panchayats are the primary source of wage employment and are solely responsible for providing housing and loan subsidies. However, at the time field work was undertaken the Jawahar Rozgaar Yojana (JRY) was the major funding source for generating wage employment opportunities in villages. Eighty percent of JRY funds were earmarked for gram panchayats and transferred directly into their bank accounts.

When asked which of these three benefits they themselves felt excluded from, 41 percent of the respondents felt excluded from all three of the poverty reduction schemes.

However, women felt considerably more excluded than men. Gender, which was significant in the analysis of participation in panchayat activities, continues to be significant when exclusion from poverty-reduction benefits is considered. Wealth and caste, however, were not found to be significant.

In addition to gender, holding an outside job, scheduled tribal status, education, and access to information are the four independent variables that are significant for the analysis of exclusion from poverty-reduction benefits. Age, religion, wealth, and state are not significant, even among alternative specifications of the regression model.

While women feel excluded to a considerably higher extent than men, among social groups only Scheduled Tribes feel that they are significantly more excluded. On average, scheduled castes, other backward castes and other middle and upper caste persons do not feel themselves, on average, to be more excluded than other village residents.<sup>28</sup>

The finding that wealth is not significant for this analysis is hardly encouraging. Poverty-reduction schemes are intended exclusively to benefit the poor, so one would expect to find a significant *negative* association between wealth and exclusion from benefits. The absence of any such relationship lends support to the apprehension, often voiced by observers, that the poor are not the exclusive beneficiaries of these schemes. Lacunae in targeting have resulted in a wider dispersion of program benefits, and some less poor villagers have also been able to avail themselves of loans, subsidies, and employment assistance. Combined with our earlier findings—that the most vulnerable villagers often get no benefits and less vulnerable households are advantaged to a greater extent—the observed lack of a negative association between wealth and exclusion from benefits provides another indication that the poorest and most deserving households may not be receiving the benefits intended for them.

Education and access to information continue to be an important influences on exclusion. More educated persons feel less excluded from poverty-reduction benefits and there is a negative association with exclusion among individuals with access to a large number of information sources.

Holding an outside job with a government or a private sector agency is also associated with lower exclusion from

facilities. A likely reason for this association has to do with the greater information that is available to persons who regularly make contact with the world outside the vil-

lage. Being better informed, households that have even one member in regular contact with the outside world are able to exercise their rights more vigorously than others.

# EXCLUSION AND PERFORMANCE IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF VILLAGES

Is exclusion significantly greater among people who live in villages that are less well connected by roads and other infrastructure facilities? Does the size of the village population have an impact on exclusion? Do reservations reduce exclusion of traditionally marginalized groups? Does the presence of other development related or governance organizations have any effect on participation in panchayat activities?

Features related to individual respondents—gender, social group, wealth, education, information—have been examined to assess their impact on inclusion in the activities of the gram panchayat. This section considers the effect of *village* characteristics on inclusion in panchayat activities. We address this in three ways: first through regressing village-level and demographic features against our broad index of participation for the entire population; second, through assessing whether those villages having reservations for women or SC/STs have higher rates of inclusion of those specific social groups; and third, by assessing the effect the presence of other village level organizations has on participation in panchayats.

## Impact of Demographic Features

Data already presented demonstrate that in our study population 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. The following analysis is based on the original broad 100-point index of political activity and introduces village-level variables.<sup>29</sup>

Education and access to information continue to have a significant influence on participation for the reasons discussed previously. Population size, social group rank-

ing, and infrastructure, with the sole exception of school facilities, do not have a significant influence on participation in political activity.<sup>30</sup> However, distance from gram panchayat headquarters is significant.

The data indicate that people who live in villages which are also panchayat headquarters, all other things being equal, participate more actively than residents of villages that are located some distance away from panchayat headquarters. A village that is located ten kilometers away from panchayat headquarters tends to score 12.5 points lower than a village 2-9 kms on the political activity scale, giving an indication of the handicap that people face when panchayats are composed of scattered villages.

The regression analysis also enable us to assess the impact of the reservation policy on participation levels in different villages. Among the reservation variables, gender and membership in a scheduled caste achieved no significance. This implies that levels of political activity among the general population is not likely to be significantly higher or lower in panchayats where the position of sarpanch is reserved for women or for SCs. However, participation in political activity is significantly lower in panchayats where the position of sarpanch is reserved for scheduled tribes. Villages belonging to such panchayats tend to score, on average, between six and seven points lower on the 100-point 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. A dummy variable for Dungarpur district in Rajasthan was included within the analysis to determine whether STs participate to a greater extent in villages and panchayats where they are in the majority, but this variable was not separately significant.

Analyzing the distribution of benefits produces results that are no different from those provided here for partici-



pation. As we saw earlier in the case of individual-level analysis, the variables that are associated with higher participation rates are also associated in the analysis of service distribution. A similar situation exists when the distribution of services and benefits is examined with the help of village-level data. The factors that are significantly associated with participation levels—distance to gram panchayat headquarters, distance to secondary school, and ST—are associated significantly with service distribution.

### **Are Reservations Effective?**

Given that the overriding concern of this study is inclusion of marginalized groups, it is interesting to consider how participation rates among these groups—scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and women—have been affected as a result of the reservation policy. Do participation rates among women increase significantly when the position of sarpanch is reserved for a woman? Do STs participate more actively when one of their own is the sarpanch? The variables, gender and ST, have been consistently significant for all aspects of exclusion considered so far—indicating that women and STs make up significant parts of the relatively excluded population. To what extent has the policy of reservation succeeded in reversing these historical liabilities? We consider this question by comparing two subsets of villages—those where the position of sarpanch is reserved for women or for STs, and those where no such reservation is in place.<sup>31</sup>

No dramatic changes in participation are apparent when the two samples are compared. A relatively smaller proportion of women fall within the “low participator” category in the nine reserved villages—47 percent—compared with 53 percent for the 44 unreserved villages. However, the proportion of women in the “high participator” category is almost the same (approximately 11 percent) for each of these two sets of villages. Similarly, there is no significant difference when we compare the participation rates for STs in reserved and unreserved villages, indicating that these differences are not large enough to indicate that the reservations policy has so far produced any statistically significant effects.

Reservations are a useful corrective for situations 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 par-

ticipation in public decision making. However, five years of reservations have not had a considerable impact on customary patterns of exclusion.

In addition to examining the impact of reservations on inclusion, the impact of reservations on differences in performance between representatives from reserved groups and those from the rest of the population was also examined.<sup>32</sup> The variables, population and average education among village representatives, are not significant in this analysis of public satisfaction with sarpanch performance. The variable that is significant is access to information. Public satisfaction 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 general panchayats and those reserved for women, ST and SC candidates, respectively. More than reservation type, some other characteristics of sarpanchas, particularly education levels, are relevant for understanding relative performance levels.

### **Presence of Other Organizations**

Another characteristic of a village, which may affect participation in panchayats, is the presence of other organizations. We sought to test the hypothesis that where other village organizations were present panchayats would display higher rates of political and social inclusiveness, higher rates of social cohesion and an increased propensity for collective action. Therefore, the intensive study examines the impact of both self-evolved village organizations, e.g., religious groups and traditional village councils, and also externally invoked village organizations, such as those that were set up in the course of implementing particular sets of development activities (watershed committees, women’s savings groups, and education committees).<sup>33</sup>

In each of the eight gram panchayats studied in the intensive survey, multiple local organizations of both types were found to be prevalent. However, the presence of other such organizations had no impact on more broad-based social or political inclusiveness in the panchayat. The reason for this is by and large related to the earlier

explanation that the panchayat is not valued as a useful organization by villagers. Most people have few stakes in the panchayat, thus participation levels are low in nearly all cases. The text box below gives insights into the discussion and explanations given by the people.

Unlike the panchayat, invoked or self-evolved village organizations have not been established with the intention of improving village inclusiveness and unity specifically, or mobilization more generally. They have been set up or evolved around their own limited purposes and objec-

tives and there is currently no expectation that collective action invoked by any one of these organizations can be usefully transposed into the setting of the panchayat. Villagers have no expectation that the cohesiveness found within a women's religious group or a women's savings group will be reflected in the increased participation of women in the panchayat. Similarly, the presence of an equitable traditional village council or a village land development committee does not automatically or immediately translate into more broad-based participation in the panchayat.<sup>34</sup>

## **Box 2**

A group of women in a village in Ujjain district in Madhya Pradesh discussed the fact that they did not participate in the gram panchayat but did participate in a religious group: "We've had a religious group for women for the last five years. It is for all castes. We assemble at festivals and other occasions at the village temple. It is nice to maintain and spread religious ideas. We also get a chance to gossip with other women. The panchayat is not for us. Nobody has asked us to attend the panchayat. Men take care of all that. We are also not very interested. We have other things to do. Women in our village are not supposed to move here and there. We cannot sit with all the men. There is no purpose for us also to go to the panchayat. If really there are any benefits the Upsarpanch will tell us".

Similarly, in tribal Dungarpur district two women said that they did not go to panchayat meetings but did belong to a women's savings group. They commented that:

"The savings group has a purpose. All women meet to deposit money and to decide on who can take loans. We will get benefits. There is no work for the individual in the panchayat, and especially not for women. What will we gain from participating there? Whether we go or not does not make a difference".

A landless daily wage laborer in Neemach district in Madhya Pradesh discussed the role of the panchayat and why the traditional village council continued as a separate and more influential organization: "Our old way of solving conflicts still work because people have little faith in the police and other outsiders. If anyone calls me to assist in solving a conflict it is my duty to go and help fellow villagers. The panchayat-what will it do for us! Why should I waste my time! I will not gain by going there. If at all I will gain from the panchayat it is only by knowing the certain people".

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary is presented as a series of points, each drawing on the data and analysis of the preceding section.

## **Low levels of interest in the Panchayat as an instrument of democracy and development.**

Villagers voted in high numbers in panchayat elections but high voter turnout was not indicative of an overwhelming interest in the democratic processes of local government. Social solidarity, avoidance of tension within the village, bribery, fear of exclusion from below poverty line lists—and often simply the thrill of participating in the festival of elections—are factors that influence people’s decisions to vote. People’s choice of candidate was based on even more complex concerns. These took into account both personal attributes (education, trustworthiness, age, gender—if female) and broader considerations such as the candidates household’s overall economic and social position, the strength of economic relations between the candidates household and the voters household and bribes paid. The clear message is that while elections do occur and while people do vote, the reasons for doing so are multiple and complex.

There is a disturbing indication that villagers are at present more concerned with consolidating existing economic and social relations rather than using the democratic process to change inequitable rural societies. Gram panchayats are seen as “political” bodies, i.e., as organizations dealing with power, not with development. Participation in other political activities related to gram panchayats is substantially lower than participation in voting. However, the levels of participation observed in this rural Indian context are not significantly different from those recorded by other observers using similar survey techniques in the United States or in other developing countries.<sup>35</sup> Nearly all studies on participation, including the present one, utilize people’s self-reported assessments of

involvement in political activities.<sup>36</sup> There is clearly reason to be conscious of upward biases in respondents’ self-reported assertions but not to expect that over-reporting will be systematically higher for any particular village or group of respondents.<sup>37</sup>

Discussion with villagers indicated that they had very little interest in, and a high level of disillusionment with, the promises made following the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment that envisioned the gram panchayat becoming an instrument of local governance and participatory development. Gram panchayats were not valued as an organization as they brought very few benefits to villagers. People felt they had little influence in decisions made over the few benefits the gram panchayat did have control of and there was no faith in the mechanisms available for holding representatives accountable to the electorate.

## **Males, well informed citizens and educated people are included**

Individual villagers who participate highly in one activity related to panchayats are likely to participate in other activities. Those who are heavily involved in campaigning, for example, are also likely to attend gram sabha meetings regularly, and a distinct subset of villagers is more heavily involved in constituting and influencing decision making by gram panchayats. Correlating respondents’ attributes against a broad index of participation demonstrated that being male, well educated and well informed were attributes associated with consistently high levels of participation in panchayat activities.

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 PRIs. With the important exception of landless representatives, differences in landholding and caste membership are not associated with any significant differences in participa-

tion levels. Apart from gender, which accounts for a large part of differences in participation scores, education and access to information are the two most significant influences associated with relative inclusion and exclusion. The spread of education and the proliferation of radio, television and newspapers, especially over the past two decades, appear to have been accompanied by significant changes in village-level patterns of influence and political participation.

Ascriptive status based on caste or land ownership appears to have weakened as a source of authority in villages, compared with acquired status that is based on education and better information. Exclusion based on caste and wealth appears to have diminished as poor and low-caste persons have acquired education and information, a phenomenon that has had the effect of eroding some advantages previously held by upper caste and wealthy villagers.

### **Landless people, tribals and women are excluded**

People who own even a small amount of land participate in activities associated with the gram panchayat. However, members in a household without land are politically less active. Our qualitative investigations and secondary sources indicate that households without land tend to also be migratory, and those who migrate are often either not present when political events take place or have very little interest in engaging in a process from which they are unlikely to benefit.

Across the board, tribal people (both male and female) participate less than any other group. Reservations for tribal people may be a useful way to counteract the exclusionary trend over the long term. However, over the short span of five years since reservations have been implemented no directly visible impact has resulted either in terms of participation rates or distribution of benefits.

Gender is a key factor in determining who's included in gram panchayat activities. Women participate significantly less than men, and the social factors which limit women's involvement in public affairs, are also reflected in the generally low levels of education and information that prevail among women.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, however, education and information also suggest ways of reducing the gap between men and

women that arise from social and traditional norms. Women who are educated and well informed are often able to bridge social differences associated with gender. 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. Those women who have access to two, or fewer sources of information fare the worst among all women.

### **Reservations alone have limited impact**

*"Development has been set back by at least a decade in villages where a female has been sarpanch for the last five years."*<sup>39</sup>

Reservation of elected positions in PRIs has been supported on the grounds that it will equalize power differentials between historically privileged and under-privileged castes, as well as between men and women. Critics of this policy allege that efficiency and performance have suffered as a result of reservations. It is claimed, especially by the upper-caste males interviewed, that well-qualified persons are prevented from holding public office merely because they happen to be of the wrong caste or gender, and that as a result, the pool of eligible candidates becomes narrowly defined. Reservations for women have caused considerable consternation, in particular among upper-caste males who occupy or who used to occupy leadership positions.

Data from our study villages show that levels of inclusion in activities associated with PRIs are not higher for either women or tribal people when a position is reserved for a person from that category. At the time of the study there had been only one round of elections in each state since the reservation policy was implemented and it would be overly optimistic to expect an immediate mass behavioral response as a result of legislation. Thus our finding is not particularly worrying, although it suggests that it will be very useful to track the impact of reservations on inclusion in the future.

Although it may be too early to definitively assess the impact of reservations on inclusion, we attempted to explore the argument that efficiency is undermined by pro-inclusive policies using another approach. The basis for this was provided by an Index of Public Satisfaction, which compared villages with and without reservations, and relates to people's perceptions of how well or how

poorly different services are being provided in their village.

The sarpanch, as the official position holder in the village, interacts more readily and more often with government officials of all departments. Consequently, villagers expect their sarpanch to play more than a direct-provision role by keeping other government agencies and officials accountable to the village. When the water supply fails or buses do not run on time, villagers do not go directly to the sub-district or the district office of the concerned government agency. Instead they go to their sarpanch, who they expect will contact the responsible government agency on their behalf. In addition to delivering benefits and services for which he or she is directly responsible, villagers also expect their sarpanch to mediate interactions with other government agencies on their behalf. While the sarpanch can refuse to do so—and le-

gally he or she is not bound to discharge such functions—such behavior reflects itself in the level dissatisfaction among villagers who assess their sarpanchas' effectiveness in terms of direct delivery as well as their effectiveness as mediators.

Eight sets of activities that gram panchayats are responsible for in both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were considered. From these a 100 point index was constructed and regressed against a series of independent variables (See Annex 6.) This analysis indicated that public satisfaction is higher in villages where residents have access to more sources of information. None of the three reservation variables was significant in regression analysis indicating that average satisfaction levels are not significantly different between general panchayats and those reserved for women, ST and SC candidates, respectively.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations focus on:

(a) gram panchayats as instruments of democracy, development and service provision i.e. *what gram panchayats do*, and

(b) increasing inclusion of women, tribals and the landless in gram panchayat activities.: i.e. *who is involved*.

## **Gram panchayats as instruments of democracy, development and service provision**

The majority of rural people do not regard panchayats as particularly relevant to their lives. The reasons behind this low valuation suggest a need to examine current expectations of the roles that gram panchayats can play in the short and longer terms. Insofar as people participate in activities associated with electing representatives, the gram panchayat does work as a democratic entity. However, the tendency to regard elections as an opportunity to consolidate often inequitable social and economic relations implies that panchayats are not currently local bodies which can be used in the short term to challenge or directly change the status quo. The continuing existence of locally elected bodies sets the organizational pre-conditions for change. If people are to begin to perceive these entities as instruments of change, actions that combine increased accountability to constituents with improved opportunities for gram panchayats to achieve results, need to be taken.

### **Improving Accountability.**

Accountability mechanisms exist but lack credibility. Measures to strengthen these mechanisms need to both increase the use of a given mechanism and ensure that its use is effective. Actions could include:

- Improving constituents knowledge of accountability mechanisms through better distribution of information about panchayats purposes, responsibilities and control;
- Using district administrators to enforce the use of gram sabhas and establish of vigilance committees;
- Monitoring—for a limited period—the functioning of gram sabhas, vigilance committees, right to recall and use of recourse to higher authority. Monitoring instruments could include: spot checks by district administrators, state appointed monitoring teams (private or public), or by local NGOs, and giving constituents effective access to electronic and written media (including newspapers or state/district bulletins to assist in a “panchayat watch”);<sup>40</sup>
- Establishing mechanisms to ensure timely reporting of breaches in the use of mechanisms of accountability and effective response.

Additionally, a study of effective accountability mechanisms in local organizations is required to further understanding of how to improve the performance of local units of governance. The study would need to cover both local level organizations used for a variety of activities in India, and other country experiences with decentralized governance.

### **Improving results**

Achievement of good results is primarily dependent on the quality and quantity of resources (financial, human and organizational) available to the gram panchayat. Efforts are being made to increase the level of financial resources available to panchayats, particularly through decentralization of line department budgets and channeling central government funds directly to PRIs. Panchayats currently receive financing from four sources: tax revenue, non-tax revenue, grants, and loans.<sup>41</sup> However, the untied value of money coming from external sources

is unlikely to be very high, and unless panchayats deliver goods and services, their legitimacy as generators of their own income will be undermined. While we need to await the findings of on-going studies which seek to assess what the actual quantum of finances will be available to gram panchayats, there is likely to be a need for further data collection and analysis of gram panchayats fiscal position.<sup>42</sup>

Currently, in terms of human resources, gram panchayats are largely dependent on a poorly informed and insufficiently skilled set of functionaries. State governments recognize the need for a massive training exercise, but they are faced with financial and training capacity constraints. Donor resources could be put to good use in supporting training of panchayat representatives, improving voter awareness of the representatives responsibilities and increasing state and district level training capacity.

Levels of education have been shown to greatly improve a person's chances of becoming an elected representative and of participating in gram panchayat activities. The current study strongly supports the continuation, and if possible, an increase in the investments in primary, upper primary and non-formal education in rural areas.

Perhaps one of the most urgent pieces of analytic work needed is a feasibility study of the current and expected roles of the gram panchayat. Donor and government expectations of what a gram panchayat can do are increasing, yet field evidence suggests that panchayats may not be capable of assuming these new roles. A study of this nature would need to include both primary and secondary data collection, and consider the relationships with other forms of local organization.

### **Increasing the Inclusion of Women, Tribals and the Landless**

Education and access to information proved to be key correlates of higher levels of participation of people in the life of gram panchayats. Reservations are another area which continue to warrant support.

#### **Education**

Education and access to information proved to be key correlates of higher levels of participation in the activities of gram panchayats. Increasing access to and use of

education among these groups appears to be one of the most effective mid-term strategies for achieving better rates of inclusion. This implies investing in:

- increased primary/upper-primary school availability and effectiveness for females, tribals and landless people;
- non-formal education opportunities which can be available at times which fit into adults work schedules;
- panchayat/local governance literacy drives which ensure participation of a representative cross-section of rural society.

#### **Information**

Information was strongly associated with more active participation in gram panchayats and with more equitable service distribution. However, an ordinary villager has extremely limited access to information. For example, he or she is unlikely to know what the powers of the panchayat are, how sarpanchas can be held accountable for misdeeds and how rights can be enforced. Because information is hard to access, sarpanchas are able to exert a dominating and directive influence in gram panchayats. As the case study data indicate, sarpanchas are quite often able to manipulate panchayats' proceedings to the advantage of themselves and their supporters. Donor resources could be usefully employed in supporting:

- Government design and implement a panchayat literacy strategy;
- The Right to Information Campaign, which is gaining ground in India and has so far demonstrated a positive impact on constituents' awareness of rights and responsibilities;
- A study of best information practice focussing on targeting, instruments and mechanisms, to inform future strategies and campaigns.

#### **Reservations**

Reserving positions for women and tribals is another means of addressing the socially constructed bias against these groups. However, while continuing the current policy of reservations is valid and is one way to deal with long-standing patterns of exclusion, much more time will be needed before any substantial effects will be felt. Much more can be gained, especially in the short term, if the policy of reservations is accompanied by other pro-active measures. Some of

these are articulated in the preceding sections of these recommendations. Others include:

- Improving understanding of the constraints to full and equitable participation faced by women and tribal electees through a study of reserved position representatives. The outcome of this study would be a strategy and action plan for improving effective inclusion of reserved position representatives in the activities of the gram panchayat;

- Developing special training modules and plans for reserved position representatives;
- Financing provisions for organizations able to mentor and support reserved position representatives;
- Establishing a system to monitor the effect of these various measures on the level of inclusion of reserved position voters and representatives in activities associated with the gram panchayat.



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# NOTES

1. For a fuller description and analysis of decentralization in India we refer readers to the Overview of Rural Decentralization in India produced in September 2000 by the South Asia Rural Development unit, World Bank, Washington, DC.
2. For a fuller description and analysis of decentralization in India we refer readers to the Overview of Rural Decentralization in India produced in September 2000 by the South Asia Rural Development unit, World Bank, Washington, DC.
3. Women were selected from odd-numbered and men from even-numbered households.
4. Mayaram (1999) relate to Rajasthan; Pai (1998) provides similar conclusions for Uttar Pradesh; Crook and Manor (1998) and Kurien (1999) refer to Karnataka.
5. Interview with Zila Parishad, Bhilwara, Rajasthan, July 30, 1999.
6. Interview with *Adhyaksh*, Janpad Panchayat Manasa, Madhya Pradesh, July 17, 1999.
7. Interview with Pradhan, Panchayat Samiti Raipur, Rajasthan, August 1, 1999.
8. No definition of "better" was given, but respondents were instead encouraged to explain their understanding of why some activities were better than others.
9. Government of Rajasthan, 1953, 1994, 1996; Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1962, 1981, 1990, 1993, 1997.
10. It must be noted that although the findings from this study portray a gloomy picture, they provide only a glimpse into what can prevent effective use of institutionalized mechanisms of accountability. There are reports from other places where sarpanches have been removed by the electorate as well as the collector.
11. This large drop in numbers between voting and other forms of participation is hardly peculiar to India or to panchayats. Similar figures are reported for the United States by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995).
12. The Index was constructed by taking a simple sum of scores of these six items after first re-scoring the values so that each variable has an equal weight of one in the index and rescaling 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.

13. Score ranges divide the population into equal thirds. This enabled us to disaggregate results within each third.

14. Landholding is used as a measure of wealth for these calculations. Other measures of wealth, including cattle ownership and quality of house construction, were also considered but these are closely correlated with landholding, suggesting that landholding is not an inappropriate measure of wealth in these contexts.

15. The related chi-square statistic is 11.5, which is not significant even at the 0.05 level (d.f.=6). The corresponding chi-square statistics for gender and education are 264.8 (d.f.=2) and 143.7 (d.f.=6), respectively, both significant at the 0.0001 level; while that for caste is 12.7 (d.f.=6), which is barely significant at the 0.05 level.

16. 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.

17. Of the poorest fifth of the population aged 15 and over only 26 percent have completed five years of education compared to 64 percent of the wealthiest fifth (NSS, 52nd Round published 1999).

-of the wealthiest quintile (assessed on the basis of assets) 82 percent had upper primary schooling while the same was only 20 percent for the poorest quintile (Filmer and Pritchett 1998).

-gross enrolment rates for SC/ST for children aged 11 to 14 in upper primary education in Madhya Pradesh were 34.7 percent and in Rajasthan 52.8 percent. Overage figures for the population as a whole were 66.5 and 52.9 percent respectively. (Department of Education, Selected Education Statistics 1998).

18. 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. More

than two thousand villagers were consulted in this earlier study. Respondents were selected in each of 60 villages by drawing a random sample from the voters list that is maintained and regularly updated for each village. The conclusion reported here—that education and information are distributed fairly independently of wealth and social group ranking—is thus valid for a larger group of villages in this region.

19. 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.

20. Both these variables are derived from response to question L1 of Annex 3. Question L1 includes categories of representatives other than sarpanchas, up sarpanchas, and ward panchas. In practice, however, interviews were conducted with 34 sarpanchas, 29 up sarpanchas, 245 ward panchas. Only seven members were contacted who were of “other” types (including members of *panchayat samitis/janpads/zila parishads, etc.*). These last seven observations were removed before the data were analyzed. Scores for sarpanchas and up sarpanchas are thus compared, with those of ward panchas, who constitute the base category for comparison.

21. This is formerly known as Integrated Rural development Program. Since April 1, 1999 this scheme as well as Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA), SITRA, GKY, have been clubbed into a holistic scheme titled Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana village self-employment scheme (Government of India, 1999).

22. The households interviewed in the intensive survey, 21 percent had members who migrated for work more than a week at a time and for more than a month a year.

23. In India, income level is the main criterion for participation in individual benefit schemes implemented by the panchayat. Households that are determined to have incomes Below Poverty Line (BPL), do not have a *pukka* (i.e., not *kuccha* or mud-built) house, a regular government job, or ownership of more than one hectare of land (adjusted for land quality). A list of BPL households is made up every five years. Verification of eligibility is cursory at best.

24. The guidelines for the new national village self-employment scheme (SGSY), implemented through the panchayat, mentions reduction of vulnerability as a specific goal (Government of India 1999).

25. This ranking method originates from wealth-ranking (see Grandin 1988).

26. We also considered animal wealth (numbers of farm animals) and type of house (*pukka* vs. *kaccha*) as alternative measures of household wealth. These three measures are highly

correlated, as one might expect, so results of regression analysis are reported using landholding as an independent variable.

27. The results of the regression analysis can be found in Annex 3.

28. The variable Social Group Ranking does not achieve significance.

29. The results of this analysis can be found in Annex 4.

30. We use the number of households as a proxy variable for village population. Population figures are available only for the 1991 census and 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.

31. We also conducted similar analyses 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. We focus in this section on the two components of village population – women and STs – whose participation rates are revealed to be substantially lower on average.

32. The results of the regression analysis can be found in Annex 5.

33. Village organizations are defined here as organizations where participation is not restricted to smaller social groupings such as caste or occupation but in which participation is in practice open to all villagers. Some of these organizations may, however, have a gender bias as well as reflect community politics more generally.

34. This is not to say that these organizations are fully equitable and inclusive. It was observed that many of these organizations were also entwined in local power politics, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

35. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) and Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) have used similar survey methodology for the United States, and the participation rates reported by these studies are of the same order as those we observed in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh villages. Bratton (1999) employs Verba, Schlozman and Brady’s methodology to scale political participation in Zambia, and reports participation rates that are a few points higher than those observed in the United States. Our extension of this methodology to rural India returns figures that are only slightly lower than urban Zambia but significantly higher than in the United States.

36. We examined our methodology and in that re-visited our questionnaire. Three comments, which reflect on the adequacy of our instrument, need to be made here: first, respon-

dents may have taken any discussion about candidates as indicative of a canvassing activity; second, in a small village, contact with panchayat representatives can be an unintentional occurrence totally disassociated from discussion of panchayat business; third, those canvassing may have done so because they were either paid to do so or were called upon to do so by patrons. This may result in some over-reporting. However, as such over reporting is likely to be consistent across the sample population it does not discredit the overall conclusions.

37. There is a tendency, common to surveys undertaken in different parts of the world, for respondent to over-report participation in voting. "As is always the case in surveys," state Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995:50, fn. 2), "the reports of voting are exaggerated... For participatory acts other than the vote, there is no analogue to the local records that make it possible to validate reported turnout... Because other forms of activity are both less frequent than voting and less firmly attached to notions of civic duty, [however,] it is possible that the problem [of over-reporting] is less severe for other activities than it is for voting." Bratton (1999: 556) similarly finds that "as is common in other parts of the world for political acts considered to be socially obligatory, respondents in Zambia over-reported their involvement in voting."

The expectation, in this and in other analyses, is that since campaigning, contacting and protesting are not widely considered to be socially obligatory, certainly not to the same extent as voting, participation in these activities will not be over-reported to the same extent. Further, since there are no known factors that might be responsible for causing more severe or more systematic over-reporting in some villages compared to others,

the extent of over-reporting, if any, is assumed in the following analysis to be equally distributed among villages and villagers.

38. Correlation coefficients between gender and education and gender and information were both of the order of minus 0.42, indicating that women are, on average, considerably less educated and they consult fewer sources of information than men.

39. Interview with a prominent young politician, Bhilwara, Rajasthan, August 2, 1999.

40. A recent report to the Bank indicates that while internet access is presently extremely limited and very varied in rural areas there are strong indications that this will change in the near future. (Haq, 2000) For example, in Madhya Pradesh the National Informatics Centre has reached the block level with Internet services and at least one private sector company intends opening information kiosks containing Internet access facility at each tehsil headquarter. In addition, the Department of Telecommunications has a facility under which one can access Internet through their ISP from anywhere in MP and the call will be billed as local call. This has opened up the possibility of accessing the Internet at relatively low cost.

41. There are three types of taxes: own taxes (levied by panchayats), assigned taxes (assigned by statute to panchayat but levied by state government) and shared taxes (collected by state but share goes to panchayats).

42. Internal World Bank study on decentralization (2000); study by Society for Participatory Research in India (PRIA), New Delhi (1999).

## Annex 1:

**Table 1: OLS Regressions on Index of Political Activity:  
100-point Index of Political Activity is the Dependent Variable**

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
Intercept	32.01**** (6.53)	36.14**** (6.63)	35.59**** (4.39)
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>			
Gender	-23.63**** (1.61)	-24.45**** (1.57)	-24.44**** (1.54)
Age (years)	0.01 (0.05)	0.001 (0.05)	
Religion	1.37 (3.55)	-0.57 (3.52)	
Social Group Ranking	-0.36 (0.56)		
-- SC (dummy)		0.86 (0.86)	0.87 (0.85)
-- ST (dummy)		-5.73* (1.81)	-5.70* (1.79)
Education (years at school)	0.27** (0.10)	0.24** (0.11)	
Landholding (hectares)	0.10 (0.14)		0.08 (0.13)
-- Landless (dummy)		1.01 (1.17)	0.94 (1.15)
Family Size	-0.13 (0.27)		
Access to Information (no. of sources)	5.29**** (0.49)	5.19**** (0.49)	5.20**** (0.48)
State (dummy)	4.50*** (1.34)	5.01*** (1.37)	5.12*** (1.37)
N	1,503	1,536	1,536
R <sup>2</sup>	0.413	0.418	0.418
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.409	0.414	0.414
F-value	95.59	109.37	136.89
F-probability	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001
Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001			

**Table 2: 100-point Index of Use of PRI Mechanisms is the  
Dependent Variable  
(Survey Items B6 and B7)**

	<b>MODEL 1</b>	<b>MODEL 2</b>
Intercept	17.41 (19.0)	51.04*** (19.53)
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>		
Gender	-65.19**** (4.87)	-63.41 (4.88)
Age (years)	0.33 (0.24)	0.34 (0.26)
Religion	10.60 (11.83)	10.22 (11.24)
Social Group Ranking	-4.65 (2.78)	
-- SC		3.12 (2.74)
-- ST		6.40 (6.06)
Education (years at school)	2.06*** (0.59)	1.93** (0.59)
Landholding (hectares)	-1.49 (0.89)	
-- Landless		6.28 (5.35)
Family Size	0.77 (0.87)	
Access to Information (no. of sources)	12.88**** (1.48)	14.42**** (1.53)
State (dummy)	10.06* (4.16)	12.29** (4.56)
N	1,823	1,823
R <sup>2</sup>	0.347	0.321
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.331	0.304
F-value	96.90	85.19
F-probability	<0.0001	<0.0001 Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001
<b>Note:</b> Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

**Table 3: Considering as dependent variable the narrow 100-point Index of Involvement of PRI representatives in meetings**

	<b>MODEL 1</b>	<b>MODEL 2</b>
Intercept	12.60 (12.92)	24.12* (10.99)
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES<sup>1</sup></b>		
Gender	-16.47*** (4.72)	-15.58** (4.72)
Age (years)	0.17 (0.12)	0.18 (0.12)
Religion	4.78 (6.2)	
Social Group Ranking	2.14 (1.41)	
-- SC		-0.68 (1.94)
-- ST		-5.12 (6.29)
Education (years at school)	1.66*** (0.47)	1.73*** (0.47)
Landholding (hectares)	0.25 (0.31)	
-- Landless		-8.56* (4.24)
Access to Information (no. of sources)	3.91**** (0.89)	4.06**** (0.87)
Sarpanch	15.29** (4.87)	16.14*** (4.77)
Up-Sarpanch	2.75 (4.73)	1.60 (4.71)
State (dummy)	6.78* (3.33)	7.40* (3.40)
N	191	191
R <sup>2</sup>	0.469	0.471
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.44	0.443
F-value	16.01	16.16
F-probability	<0.0001	<0.0001
<b>Note:</b> Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

<sup>1</sup>Independent variables are coded in the same manner as was done for Table 3 above.

## Annex 2

### OLS Regression of Participation by PRI Representatives: broad 100-point Index of Participation is the Dependent Variable<sup>1</sup>

	<b>MODEL 1</b>	<b>MODEL 2</b>
Intercept	31.18* (12.8)	46.75**** (10.93)
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES <sup>1</sup>		
Gender	-14.99*** (4.19)	-15.29*** (4.16)
Age (years)	0.18 (0.12)	0.14 (0.11)
Religion	6.86 (5.48)	
Social Group Ranking	0.38 (1.27)	
-- SC (dummy)		-1.57 (1.75)
-- ST (dummy)		-5.36 (5.61)
Education (years at school)	1.35** (0.42)	1.26** (0.42)
Landholding (hectares)	0.41 (0.38)	
-- Landless (dummy)		-8.45* (3.97)
Access to Information (no. of sources)	2.70*** (0.79)	2.65*** (0.78)
Sarpanch (dummy)	12.37** (4.21)	13.17** (4.20)
Up-Sarpanch (dummy)	4.81 (4.18)	3.42 (4.13)
State (dummy)	7.2** (3.11)	6.96* (3.15)
N	190	190
R <sup>2</sup>	0.424	0.44
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.396	0.416
F-value	14.15	15.77
F-probability	<0.0001	<0.0001

<sup>1</sup> The mean for the dependent variable = 59.6, standard deviation=21.9, skewness= -0.65, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic=0.95.

<sup>2</sup> Independent variables are coded in the same manner as was done for Table 3 above.



## Annex 3

### OLS Regression of Exclusion from Poverty-Reduction Benefits<sup>1</sup>

Intercept	2.24**** (0.25)
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES <sup>1</sup>	
Gender	0.27**** (0.06)
Age (years)	0.0002 (0.002)
Religion	0.07 (0.14)
-- SC (dummy)	0.05 (0.06)
-- ST (Dummy)	0.25*** (0.08)
Education (years at school)	-0.03*** (0.008)
Landholding (hectares)	-0.014 (0.09)
Outside Job (dummy)	-0.087* (0.042)
Access to Information (no. of sources)	-0.14**** (0.02)
State (dummy)	-0.06 (0.05)
N	1,867
R <sup>2</sup>	0.32
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.30
F-value	26.81
F-probability <sup>2</sup>	<.0001

<sup>1</sup> Mean for the dependent variable = 1.82, standard deviation = 1.18, skewness= -0.47.

<sup>2</sup> All variables are coded in the same manner as they were for the previous regression tables.

<sup>3</sup> Multicollinearity is low to moderate as shown by the condition indices, which are less than 16 in either case. Pairwise correlation coefficients are all less than 0.5. Heteroskedasticity is not in evidence, as measured by White's general test.

## Annex 4

### OLS Regression of the Index of Political Activity: 100-point Index of Political Activity is the Dependent Variable<sup>1</sup>

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	49.29***	3.85
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES		
<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	-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> Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

<sup>1</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.

## Annex 5

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

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	-37.68*	17.03
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES		
Population (Number of Households)	0.02	0.015
Distance to Market (kms.)	-0.21	0.31
Gram Panchayat HQ (dummy) <sup>1</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
Average Education among Public Representatives (years at school) <sup>2</sup>	0.39	2.87
State (dummy) <sup>3</sup>	1.29	6.31
N	52	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.578	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.490	
F-value	6.55	
F-probability	<0.0001	
<b>Note:</b> Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

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

<sup>2</sup> Refers to item D8 of Annex 7, and it is calculated here as an average for all PRI representatives interviewed in each village.

<sup>3</sup> Coded as before: MP=0, Rajasthan = 1.

## Annex 6

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

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	-37.68*	17.03
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES		
Population (Number of Households)	0.02	0.015
Distance to Market (kms.)	-0.21	0.31
Gram Panchayat HQ (dummy) <sup>1</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
Average Education among Public Representatives (years at school) <sup>2</sup>	0.39	2.87
State (dummy) <sup>3</sup>	1.29	6.31
N	52	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.578	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.490	
F-value	6.55	
F-probability	<0.0001	
Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *p<=.05 **p<=.01 ***p<=.001 ****p<.0001		

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

<sup>2</sup> Refers to item D8 of Annex 7, and it is calculated here as an average for all PRI representatives interviewed in each village.

<sup>3</sup> Coded as before: MP=0, Rajasthan = 1.