

# The Anatomy of Failure:

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An Ethnography of a Randomized  
Trial to Deepen Democracy in Rural  
India

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# Context



- It is generally believed that increased participation in local governance, specially by the poor, gives them better access to resources and a greater voice in decision making leading to better governance outcomes at the local level. But can civic participation be induced? Can policy intervention deepen democracy?
- Impact evaluations of such interventions provides mixed results with quantitative surveys showing little or no impact and qualitative research showing better outcomes.

# Research



- Against this context, the paper evaluates an intervention to Deepen Democracy by inducing people's participation in rural Karnataka, India using both quantitative and qualitative methods over a period of 5 years (2007-2011).

# The Intervention



- ❧ Resource Persons(RPs) visit the village and facilitate participatory planning with different communities through ward sabhas and this is prioritized and consolidated at the Grama sabha in consultation with villagers.
- ❧ Regular follow up visits to monitor if the plan is being implemented as agreed at the Grama Sabha.
- ❧ Formation of Self Help Group(SHG) federation at the village level and getting them to participate in Grama Sabha and village development more actively.

# Area of Study



- ❧ The study was carried out in the poorer districts of Karnataka.
- ❧ The quantitative sample was chosen from 5 districts – Gulbarga, Raichur, Bidar, Davangere and Chitradurga.
- ❧ The qualitative sample was a 10% subset of quantitative sample and drawn primarily from Gulbarga and Raichur districts.

# Analytic Design

## Quantitative Analysis

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- Total sample of 100 Gram Panchayats (Local government) randomly selected from 20 poorest blocks from the 5 districts, out of which 50 were randomly assigned for treatment (RCT) and 50 were control.
- From each GP, 2 villages were selected for the survey resulting in 100 control and 100 treatment villages from 50 control and 50 treatment GP.
- 20 households were randomly chosen from each village giving a sample of 4000 households.

# Quantitative analysis (contd.)



- ❧ Two sets of surveys were conducted.
- ❧ Baseline survey was carried out in 2007 prior to the intervention. However in some villages due to poor coordination the intervention had already begun when the survey was being conducted. We have corrected for it in the analysis.
- ❧ Second round of surveys were conducted in 2009.

# Qualitative Analysis



- ❧ Qualitative sample was 10% subset of the quantitative sample from 2 districts.
- ❧ A pair of control and treatment GPs( 2 villages from each GP) from each sample block from each district were picked for detailed ethnographic study.
- ❧ The ethnography was carried on for a period of 5 years with detailed process documentation resulting in monthly reports. Field investigators resided either on the village or near the village and visited it everyday there by becoming part of the community.

# Qualitative analysis( contd).

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- ❧ For each GP nearly 60 monthly reports were generated. Special reports covered issues like village, state and national elections that occurred during this period of 5 years.
- ❧ In addition the principal researcher visited the villages once in 4 months regularly both to monitor as well as to collect data.

# Quantitative Results



- ❧ The Quantitative results demonstrates that there was increase over time in both control and treatment areas in knowledge of and participation in village government, and a concurrent improvement in the delivery of village government services.
- ❧ However when we analyse if People's planning intervention had any significant impact we find that results **show no impact** from the intervention.

# Ethnographic Analysis



- ☞ Very rich and detailed...Focus here on understanding processes and mechanisms that explains observed lack of impact in quantitative data. Emphasis on recurring patterns and repeated observations and not outliers.
- ☞ Challenging context... low literacy, entrenched power structures and a culture of violence that can be traced back to feudal roots.

# Dissecting the 'failure'



## ❧ Lack of top down support –

Qualitative analysis shows that in this challenging context initiating and sustaining people's participation requires corresponding top down support to neutralize the local challenges. This was not always available to the RPs. The study reinforces that for participatory efforts to be successful, a parallel top down support leading to a 'sandwich' approach is critical.

# Dissecting the 'failure' (contd.)

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## ❧ Variation in the quality of Facilitation –

While all RPs were required to perform the same set of protocols, the manner in which they implemented the intervention was variable. Some were very active and committed, while some others were mechanical and still others were indifferent. There was also a high turnover of these RPs in some GPs leading to losses in consolidating the rapport and trust built by previous RPs.

# Dissecting the 'failure' (contd.)

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- ⌘ Challenges of measurement – Training and facilitations programmes can result in outcomes that are difficult to capture in survey instruments for at least 3 reasons
  - They manifest themselves in variable, context specific processes
  - The impact is often unexpected
  - Complex interventions such as these do not have predictable trajectories of change and full implications of the intervention may not manifest themselves within the time frame of evaluation.

# Intangible Impacts



- ❧ Mediation of Disputes related to poor service delivery – In control such discontent led to flash points of strikes whereas in treatment the RPs succeeded in channeling this discontent into sustainable strategies leading to a positive response by the GPs.
- ❧ Creation of SHG federation leading to increased participation of women in Grama Sabha and village development activities.
- ❧ Imparting a culture of participatory planning.
- ❧ Better functioning of GPs.

# Conclusions



- ❧ The intervention failed due to challenging context, lack of sandwich approach and variability in facilitation. But the study also points to the limitation of purely quantitative tools to completely capture outcomes in such complex interventions aimed at deepening democracy.
- ❧ Complex interventions require both quantitative to assess impacts and qualitative methods to understand and track the process of change over time.

# Thank you



Full paper available on The World Bank website  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19368>