

# Making Social Science Matter – II

## How the Rural Poor See the State in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal

*Part I of this paper, which appeared last week, described the patterns of participation of the rural poor in state-sponsored schemes and the characteristics of political society in each of the blocks and districts studied. It also provided evidence on the scale and significance of rent-seeking behaviour, and a preliminary mapping of what has been called 'the anthropology of the everyday state'. We turn now to a discussion of an 'action research' project that followed on from our 'academic' research. This project involved the research team in a prolonged dialogue with different groups of actors in Malda and Bhojpur districts that we had identified as 'failing' districts from the point of view of effective pro-poor governance. We comment briefly on the background to this research and describe how we organised the action research process before proceeding to present the main findings of the workshops that we held in these two districts. These findings speak of the ways in which different groups of stakeholders, and members of the rural poor most especially, see the state in Bhojpur and Malda and how they would like to see certain practices of the state abolished, extended or reformed.*

STUART CORBRIDGE, GLYN WILLIAMS, RENE VERON, MANOJ SRIVASTAVA

### I Introduction

In a previous paper we presented some of the results of a research project that looked at patterns of state performance in five districts of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. State performance was assessed mainly from the perspective of the rural poor, and with respect to four major functions of the state. We studied the developmental function of the state in terms of the workings of the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and the empowerment function of the state in terms of that scheme's provisions for participation as well as the rate of uptake of primary education. The research project also collected evidence on the protective function of the state (how or if poor people made use of the law and the judicial machinery), and its disciplinary function (encounters with the police, forest guards and so on). The project sought to isolate the 'political regime type' as the independent variable, and hypothesised that agencies of the state were most likely to work for the rural poor where pro-poor political parties commanded the local political society. This proved to be the case in West Bengal, where state performance in Debra block, Midnapore, a long-time heartland for the CPI-M, was visibly better than in Old Malda block, Malda district, a district where political competition was mainly among rival elites or patrons. Matters were more complicated, however, in Bihar (or Bihar and Jharkhand).<sup>1</sup> Despite the presence of an organised leftist movement in Sahar block, Bhojpur district, we did not find that patterns of state performance there were significantly better than in Bidupur block, Vaishali district, an area where the Yadavs were in the ascendancy, or in Murhu block, Ranchi district, where a mainly adivasi community was strongly represented by its mukhiya.

The earlier paper proceeded to describe the patterns of participation that we found in each of the research sites (in terms of the workings of the Employment Assurance Scheme), and the characteristics of political society in each block and district. It also provided evidence on the scale and significance of rent-seeking behaviour, and a preliminary mapping of what has been called 'the anthropology of the everyday state' [Benei and Fuller 2001]. Rather

than recap those findings here we turn now to a discussion of an 'action research' project that followed on from our 'academic' research. This project was funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), and involved the research team in a prolonged dialogue with different groups of actors in Malda and Bhojpur districts – two districts that we had identified as 'failing' districts from the point of view of effective pro-poor governance.<sup>2</sup> In the next part of this paper we comment briefly on the background to this research, and why we think it is an example of the phronetic social science that Bent Flyvbjerg calls for in his book *Making Social Science Matter* [Flyvbjerg 2001]. In the third part of the paper we describe how we organised the action research process in Malda and Bhojpur districts. In the fourth and major part of the paper we present the main findings of the workshops that we held in these two districts. These findings speak to the ways in which different groups of stakeholders, and members of the rural poor most especially, see the state in Bhojpur and Malda, and how they would like to see certain practices of the state abolished, extended or reformed. In the final part of the paper we reflect upon our own role in the action research project, and the problems we faced as facilitators of a dialogue in which we retained a significant degree of power over the timetable and the resultant script.

### I Making Social Science Matter

It has been common practice for some time for researchers to share their findings with the people and institutions they work alongside. The call for researchers to abandon the 'extractive' practices of earlier times was probably first pressed by scholars like Robert Chambers and Norman Uphoff, as well as by some NGOs and others influenced by the literatures on post-colonialism, but it is now routinely called for by most grant-giving bodies.<sup>3</sup> This is certainly the case with the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which funded our fieldwork in 1999 and the first quarter of 2000. In our original application to the ESRC, in 1997, we said that we would share our results not only with village leaders, local politicians and

members of the bureaucracy (in different languages and in different media: we had it in mind to use audiocassettes as well as brochures), but also with the leadership of the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP). The EIRFP is active in West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar (Jharkhand), and uses funds from the governments of the UK (DFID) and India in an effort to improve rural livelihoods in more than 200 villages. It also wants to encourage groups of villagers to build more supportive relationships with government officials. We thought it would make sense to share with the EIRFP some of our thoughts on the ways in which poorer people in Jharkhand and West Bengal see the state and interact with lower-level bureaucrats.

We duly forged a link with the EIRFP, but what we did not anticipate in 1997 was that we would develop close links with DFID-India in Calcutta, particularly around the issue of education (where we agreed to share insights and results), or that we could apply to DFID for funds to run a project of 'action research'. By 2000, however, DFID was willing to fund 'innovative' and even 'risk-taking' work on behalf of poorer groups within civil society, and the research team agreed to put its writing plans on hold in order to pursue this option.

Our reasons for doing so were not entirely selfless. It would be idle to pretend that academics are not under pressure to win external funding for their research. And in our case we saw that a programme

of extensive work across two of our field districts would allow us to cross check our research findings and place our initial results in a broader context. If a wide array of stakeholders found that our accounts of local state-society interactions tallied with their own experiences we could be confident that the villages/blocks that we had chosen to work in were not unrepresentative of the district as a whole. (And if this proved not to be the case, at least we would know that something was amiss and we could take some sort of corrective action.) By and large, though, what prompted us to begin the action research project was a collective belief that social science ought to matter, and that our scholarly work in eastern India should reach an audience beyond the academic community. Manoj Srivastava felt this most keenly, having served for some time in Bhojpur district, but Corbridge, Williams and Veron also felt a sense of commitment to the region that came from long years of contact.

When we put together a proposal for DFID in the early summer of 2000 none of us had read Bent Flyvbjerg's (2001) work, but when we did come across his book, *Making Social Science Matter* [MSSM], we were struck by the parallels between our own work in Bihar and West Bengal and Flyvbjerg's account of his days working as an anthropologist of the Aalborg project. Flyvbjerg's interest in this urban renewal project was prompted by his belief that the citizens of Aalborg weren't afforded much of a voice in a project that mainly

**Table 1: Evaluation of Malda Village Meeting: Selected Questions and Answers**

1) Did you like the village meeting at J. . . . village on November 12, 2000	Female	Male	All	1) Did you like the village meeting at J. . . . village on November 12, 2000	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
Yes	31	20	51	Yes	91.18	100.00	94.44
ok	3	0	3	ok	8.82	0.00	5.56
Grand Total	34	20	54	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
2) Did you come to know anything new from this village meeting?	Female	Male	All	2) Did you come to know anything new from this village meeting?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
Yes	30	19	49	Yes	88.24	95.00	90.74
No	4	1	5	No	11.76	5.00	9.26
Grand Total	34	20	54	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
3) If you learnt anything, tell us about it.	Female	Male	All		Female	Male	All
1 digging of ponds, 2 repairing roads, 3 discussion on health					1	0	1
About wage-rate, nutritious diet					1	0	1
About wage-rate, women's group					1	0	1
Wage-rate, women's group, whom to approach in the face of impending problems, or where to go if someone is sick					1	0	1
In any job contractors should not be taken on					1	0	1
To take in no one outside the village for working in the schemes, Rs 20,000 to be given to the very poor for building houses, education, literacy					1	0	1
1 The advantages of having a gram panchayat. 2 IAY 3 Grants available to farmers.					1	0	1
Women's group					1	0	1
We are not getting the government funds					0	1	1
Has made a new group with 13 women in it.					1	0	1
One has to understand the work, be united within and have information about people.					0	1	1
Making groups for generating income					1	0	1
Women through the institution of the panchayats have been mobilised to form groups					0	1	1
One has to apply for loan once the Indira Bas (Awas) starts and has to supervise work if office or school is being built.					0	1	1
About schemes					0	1	1
Panchayat should work towards upgrading the conditions of the poor					0	1	1
Importance of awareness regarding health and nutrition, women's education, role and nature of panchayat					0	1	1
Panchayat calls us for work					1	0	1
Women's group, literacy					1	0	1
If there is any problem, then in the next sansad meeting one should talk about it. If the tube-well breaks, Pradhan should be informed.					1	0	1
All people are to be called by the panchayat for the gram sansad meeting. All problems are to be informed to the panchayat					0	1	1
I came to know about the duties and responsibilities of the worker at the sub-centre					1	0	1
Governmental benefits, then about the dwra, swama-jayanti, lalji schemes					0	1	1
Grand Total					14	9	23
4) Do you remember who are to be called for the Gram Sansads?	Female	Male	All	4) Do you remember who are to be called for the Gram Sansads?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
All voters (right answer) 2	24	16	40	All voters (right answer) 2	70.59	80.00	74.07
wrong answer	2	1	3	wrong answer	5.88	5.00	5.56
Don't know	7	3	10	Don't know	20.59	15.00	18.52
NA	1	0	1	NA	2.94	0.00	1.85
Grand Total	34	20	54	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
4a) Before coming to this meeting were you aware of this?	Female	Male	All	4a) Before coming to this meeting were you aware of this?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
No	20	6	26	No	85.29	47.37	71.70
Yes	4	10	14	Yes	14.71	52.63	28.30
Grand Total	24	16	40	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

**Table 1:** (Contd)

5) You were told that at the block level there is an elected panchayat institution. Can you name it?	Female	Male	All	5) You were told that at the block level there is an elected panchayat institution. Can you name it?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
yes, panchayat samiti	15	11	26	yes, panchayat samiti	44.12	55.00	48.15
Don't Know	18	8	26	Don't Know	52.94	40.00	48.15
Wrong Answer	1	1	2	Wrong Answer	2.94	5.00	3.70
Grand Total	34	20	54	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
6) Do you remember what is the minimum wage rate fixed by the government for panchayat work?	Female	Male	All	6) Do you remember what is the minimum wage rate fixed by the government for panchayat work?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
Right Answer	27	15	42	Right Answer	84.38	93.75	87.50
Wrong Answer	1	0	1	Wrong Answer	3.13	0.00	2.08
Don't know	4	1	5	Don't know	12.50	6.25	10.42
Grand Total	32	16	48	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
6a) Did you know of the minimum wage rate before the village meeting?	Female	Male	All	6a) Did you know of the minimum wage rate before the village meeting?	Female (Per Cent)	Male (Per Cent)	All (Per Cent)
No	20	13	33	No	70.37	73.33	71.43
Yes	8	4	12	Yes	29.63	26.67	28.57
Grand Total	28	17	45	Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
10b) What if anything impedes you from attending Gram Sansad meetings?	Female	Male	All		Female	Male	All
If I commit mistakes	1	0	1		1	0	1
I am scared of the panchayat members	1	0	1		1	0	1
I am scared of the panchayat members and the pradhan	1	0	1		1	0	1
The men cannot say anything to me as I do not attend Sansad meetings.	1	0	1		1	0	1
We are scared of the panchayat members. If they retaliate or scold us	1	0	1		1	0	1
I dont know what to say off hand or suddenly	0	1	1		0	1	1
Grand Total	5	1	6		5	1	6
12) Do you have any comments about the village meeting?	Female	Male	All		Female	Male	All
That panchayat should work for the development of the village is something the villagers understood in the meeting. A rich man through a lease has usurped exclusive rights to use a pond which the villagers now understand belongs to all. So everybody to	0	1	1		0	1	1
One should think of the women in village meetings	1	0	1		1	0	1
Once a month if people get together, it will be good. And women can also attend.	1	0	1		1	0	1
The voice of the poor should be heard and their problems should be given due importance.	1	0	1		1	0	1
More such meetings will be better and division into smaller groups will be better.	1	0	1		1	0	1
More such meetings every month involving people of two three villages will be better as their woes can also be known.	1	0	1		1	0	1
If we had known about the village meeting beforehand, everybody from our village would have attended.	1	0	1		1	0	1
Loan, education, literacy	1	0	1		1	0	1
Power is needed	1	0	1		1	0	1
One should understand the matter about electricity properly.	0	1	1		0	1	1
Everybody needs to be united for work and welfare	0	1	1		0	1	1
One has to form women's circle	0	1	1		0	1	1
There is a need for such workshops	1	0	1		1	0	1
One can directly know about the role of the pradhan, the developmental schemes	0	1	1		0	1	1
We the poor are not getting any benefits while others are getting it. One should take care of that part. My name was given for the building of a house. But somebody cancelled it. Don't have winter clothes. Do not get GR. Comparatively well-off people are	0	1	1		0	1	1
Problems of road, electricity had to be addressed. One should know that women get only Rs 30. And men Rs 40-45.	0	1	1		0	1	1
I can understand certain things in the meetings. My child died 4 days ago. My 4-year old child is afflicted with polio.							
Eldest son studies in class 1. Husband is a peasant labourer. Does not get work even 7 days in a month. No shelter.	1	0	1		1	0	1
Grand Total	10	7	17		10	7	17

reflected the views of the business community. As one of those citizens himself, Flyvbjerg set to work as a sort of unofficial gadfly, using his academic expertise to 'get inside' the project in order to expose some of its pro-car, pro-business assumptions to public scrutiny. In the process, he also came to reflect on the differences between natural science and social science, and on the need for social science to defend its worth not by aping the scientism of the former but by proclaiming its practical relevance. Only in this way, Flyvbjerg suggests, will the social scientist get over the crushing sense of 'so what?' that so often accompanies the publication of his or her results. Phronetic social science, in his view, is the "antidote to the 'so what' problem" [Flyvbjerg 2001: 156]. It encourages the social scientist to "work with problems that are considered problems, not only in the academy, but in the rest of society" (ibid), and it involves the deliberate and active feeding back of "the results of my research into the political, administrative, and social processes that I studied" (ibid).

## I

### Planning the Action Research Project

For many students of 'development', the social science that Flyvbjerg calls 'phronetic' will look reassuringly familiar, and it is possible that his descriptions will seem obvious to some in the business of applied development. For our part, we prefer a more generous reading

of MSSM that recognises the call to sustained intellectual-cum-political engagement that we take to be at the heart of Flyvbjerg's project. Flyvbjerg's work was intended as a participatory and yet also partisan exercise that would enlarge the spaces for democratic reflection and action in the Aalborg city-region.

This is roughly how we saw our own attempts to engage different stakeholders around the theme of 'Enhancing Pro-Poor Governance' in West Bengal and Bihar. We told DFID that the main purpose of the action research would be to use our (ESRC) research findings to enable developmental actors to reflect critically on the current difficulties and successes of local government. We would then use these reflections to inform policy making and forms of social action that might impact on poverty reduction. To this end, we would seek: (a) to discuss, confirm, further analyse and reflect on problems identified by the ESRC research, with a view to representing the problems of the poor at higher levels; (b) to raise the consciousness levels of poorer participants in the research areas, with a view to enabling them to make greater and more coherent demands upon the state; (c) to engage other stakeholders (panchayat functionaries (especially in West Bengal), government officers, NGOs and political parties) in a pro-poor reform process that would address questions of accountability and of coordination with other stakeholder groups; (d) to develop 'from below' suggestions and recommendations for improving pro-poor policies and other practices of local governance; and (e) to draw lessons relevant for the possible

replication of the action research, with a view to developing linkages with partner institutions for improved sustainability.

Work on the project began in West Bengal in the late summer of 2000 with a state-level inception seminar at the campus of the State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development (SIPRD) in Kalyani. We had already decided that in West Bengal it would be advantageous to work alongside an interested party from within the state, and negotiations had taken place in the summer of 2000 to bring SIPRD into the project. Happily, SIPRD agreed to help the research team run the project and Dibyendu Sarkar was seconded to work alongside Veron and Williams as a project liaison officer. SIPRD was interested in the iterative methodologies that the research team had adopted in the field in 1999, and which called for team members to spoke in and out of core villages to meet with people at block and district levels. For our part, we were interested in working with an agency that had state-wide responsibilities for what can reasonably be described as 'participatory training-for-participatory planning-for-participatory development'.

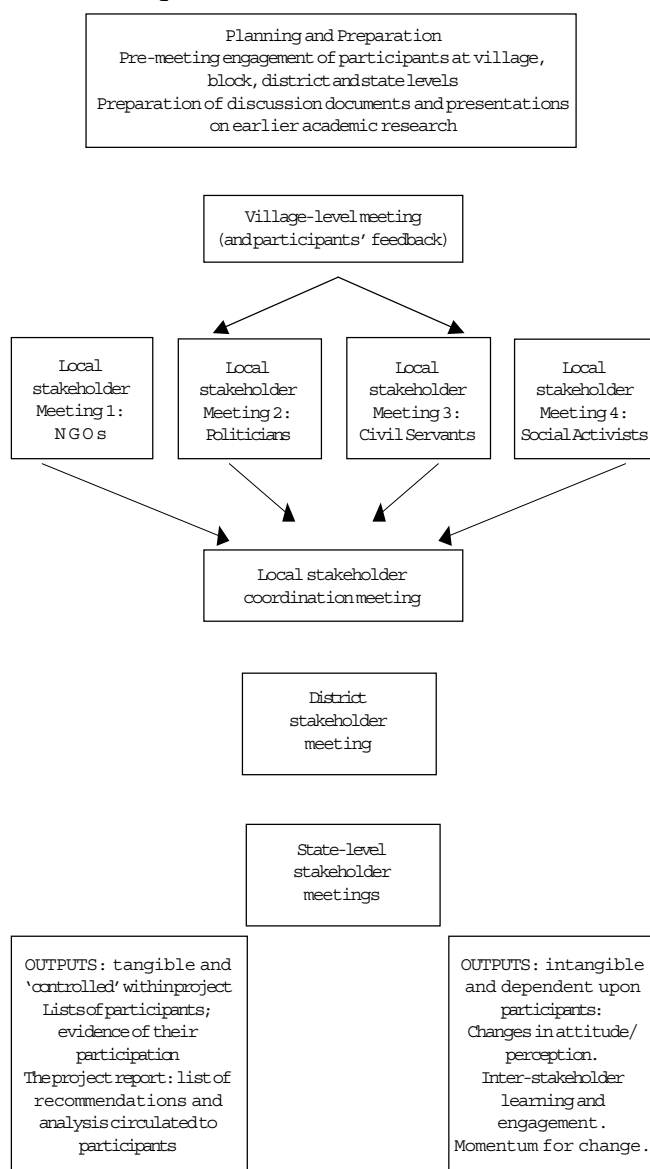
The inception seminar was held early in November 2000. It gave rise to a greater awareness on the part of bureaucrats and academics about the ESRC research project, and a much keener sense of what should be achieved, and how, in the village- and intermediate-level meetings that were now being proposed. In essence, the Enhancing Pro-Poor Governance (EPPG) project called for a series of meetings that would begin by returning some of the research team's findings to villagers in Midnapore and Malda districts. These meetings would be facilitated by members of the research team and SIPRD, and would seek to engage villagers around some of the issues that we thought were arising from the research or which they might want to raise with us. The EPPG team would then report these findings to participants in subsequent workshops in Malda that would be held (separately) at block- and district-levels with panchayat members, government officials, and NGOs and political functionaries. As before, the aim would be to engage 'stakeholders' in a participatory dialogue around issues that emerged 'from below', as well as from their own concerns. The EPPG team would then distil some of these findings prior to a state-level workshop that would bring different stakeholders together to discuss some of the recommendations for 'pro-poor governance' that were emerging from the field.

Not everything went to plan, of course, and we did face occasional problems in organising village-level meetings that could resist the efforts of middle-class villagers or political functionaries to take them over. For the most part, though, the EPPG team was successful in staging well-attended meetings in two villages in Midnapore and Malda districts (held in November 2000), and in following up these sessions one month later with evaluation meetings that asked villagers about what they had learned in the workshops and how they had received them. (See Table 1 for a summary of the evaluation meetings held on December 7 and 10, 2000 in J....village, Malda district). The team was also successful in organising meetings with government officers, and NGOs and politicians, in early-December 2000 and in staging a district-level inter-stakeholder meeting on December 16. Field-based work on the West Bengal side of the project was concluded on January 6, 2001 with a state-level workshop at Kolkata which brought together 34 participants, including the director of SIPRD, two representatives from DFID-India, and the principal secretary of the department for panchayats and rural development. Very much in keeping with our aim of increasing awareness of the major issues raised by the workshops (see next section), we closed that meeting with a press briefing.

Work on the Bihar side of the project began in earnest in Spring 2001, just as the team was finalising its reports and recommendations to DFID and SIPRD regarding West Bengal. DFID-India had initially been reluctant to fund our work in Bihar. It took the view that Bihar was not one of DFID's 'partner states' in India (unlike West Bengal), and doubts were expressed about the capacity of the state in Bihar to effect any recommendations that we might put forward. We recognised the force of these arguments, but were able to convince DFID that a dialogue around the theme of pro-poor governance was worth initiating in Bihar, if only to bring different parties together.

After receiving the green light from DFID, the team began to

**Figure 1: The Action Research Process**



prepare for an intensive round of consciousness-raising and stakeholder workshops that would take place before the onset of the summer rains. As in West Bengal, the plan was to begin in the villages, in this case in the ESRC study village in Bhojpur district. But in Bihar the research team (with notable assistance from Vishwa Ranjan and Pramod Verma) was better able to prepare different groups within the village for the upcoming workshop, and it circulated an 'issue paper' written in Bhojपुरi to explain the main aims of the action research project.<sup>4</sup> The team also encouraged written submissions from villagers before and after the workshop that was held in the village in June 2001, and which began with the performance of a play that articulated some of the key themes in our academic research. (Over 700 villagers attended the rural drama, and written submissions were received from 33 groups of villagers.) Thereafter, the team worked to a tight timetable to prepare the workshops that followed with NGOs, politicians, social activists and block- and district-level civil servants. At all of these workshops we presented our thoughts and findings on the workings of the Employment Assurance Scheme and the Bihar Employment Project, and we tried to facilitate intensive discussion and group-based work (including role-playing) around questions of good and bad governance. In each workshop we took care to highlight the incentive

structures that seemed to militate against good governance in central Bihar. At the same time we sought to motivate participants to explore the possibilities that might exist for improved or even pro-poor governance. As in West Bengal, the consultative process ended with a state-level seminar in the state capital (Figure 1). In Patna, that seminar featured contributions from ministers in the union and state governments, as well as from stakeholders we had consulted before, and it culminated in a press conference and reasonably extensive press coverage. Unlike in Kolkata, however, it did not end with a carefully defined list of recommendations for consideration by government. In Bihar, as we said before, our aims were more modest.

#### IV Learning from Grass Roots

The lessons that we learned from these extensive exercises in participatory research – exercises that involved more than 2,000 people from Bihar and West Bengal – cannot be summarised here in anything like the detail they deserve. In Malda district, for example, where we first informed people of how much better government seemed to be working in Midnapore, villagers expressed a good deal of interest in minimum wage rates and in the illegality of contractor involvement in panchayat road works. Some young men challenged their elected representatives on both these issues. But villagers in Malda, along with other stakeholders, also expressed their views about matters of less immediate concern, including the purpose and powers of the panchayat samiti (as opposed to the gram panchayat), or ways to strengthen the participatory nature of the gram sansads. Indeed, some very specific proposals emerged around this last matter, where it was widely acknowledged that the poor would need greater incentives to induce them to devote time and effort to attending village meetings.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the place, however, to run through the 37 specific proposals that were forwarded to the state-level seminar in Kolkata (see Williams et al 2001), or the full list of recommendations that emerged in Bihar (see Srivastava et al 2001). We think it will be more useful to summarise some of the wider issues and policy proposals that emerged from the EPPG project, before concluding the paper with some reflections on the production of these insights and recommendations.

##### (a) West Bengal

It is widely recognised that West Bengal's experiments with panchayati raj since 1978 have included many ground-breaking initiatives, and have resulted in significant achievements, including, most notably, the increased participation in politics and local government of previously marginalised groups (and most notably women). Unlike in Bihar in the 1980s and 1990s, where democratic local government fell into disrepair, the panchayats of West Bengal achieved a good measure of popular legitimacy and authority. Elections are well entrenched in the popular consciousness, local transfers of power from one party to another within a panchayat are usually smooth, and bureaucratic support for the institutions and ideals of panchayati raj is widespread. Over and above their official responsibilities, panchayat leaders are also often treated as authority figures who villagers can turn to for support and advice.

These are important achievements, and they are worthy of restatement. Our academic work, however, suggested that panchayat institutions were working much less effectively in Malda than in Midnapore, and that even in Midnapore 70 per cent of the poor households we surveyed were unaware of the distinctive features of a major anti-poverty programme like the Employment Assurance Scheme. The question of awareness, then (of wage rates, of the roles of contractors, of rights to employment and so on), was one key issue that we wanted to discuss with villagers and other stakeholders within the framework of the EPPG workshops. We also wanted participants to consider the possibility that block and district councils are still relatively remote institutions for the vast majority of the rural poor, even where popular identification with gram panchayats

and their leaders seemed to be strong (as it was in Midnapore). Why was this, and what could be done to improve matters? Finally, in terms of our own agenda, we wanted to initiate a discussion around the possible empowerment roles of panchayat institutions. Since their inception in the late 1970s, panchayat institutions at all levels have had increasing responsibilities for the delivery of centrally-sponsored development programmes. In practice, though, they have rarely moved beyond this role: debates on panchayat activities in the localities of the ESRC project often focused around who should get what from the panchayat system, rather than on any wider consideration of what the panchayat could or should be doing more broadly. This popular perception of the panchayats as a delivery mechanism might be considered damaging for the long-term future of pro-poor governance, especially if it placed poorer people in a 'patron-client' relationship with the state. What did participants make of this suggestion?

Discussion of these questions was enlightening in several respects. In both districts there was broad agreement that the research team had identified some key failings in local state-society relationships, and a large number of participants in Malda were interested to find out more about how local government worked in Midnapore. More importantly, the discussions that took off from these questions led participants towards some of the broad observations and agendas for change that we summarise below, and which in turn gave rise to some of the 37 policy proposals we mentioned earlier. The summaries that follow are made up of our readings of the views of most, but by no means all (Section V), of the participants in the different workshops:

##### *Promoting Sustainable Popular Participation*

- *Awareness-raising and political education:* It was suggested that mass campaigns to raise awareness of the role and importance of gram sansads and panchayat members could be an important first step in correcting a lack of knowledge about panchayat institutions and their designated activities. Ideally, these would involve government personnel working with cross-party groups of grassroots political workers. Involvement of all local party workers in such a campaign would be important both logistically and in demonstrating cross-party support for the institutions. Such activities could at first be focused on blocks where gram sansad attendance is poor or declining; in future, implementation of community-based planning should be accompanied by similar prior mass mobilisations. SIPRD could play a role in developing activities and materials for awareness-raising, and evaluating the effectiveness of these measures.
- *Developing realistic expectations of participation:* It was agreed that direct participation should not be seen as a universal solution for any and all of the problems of the panchayat system. Financial and time constraints will remain important limiting factors on the participation of the rural poor. Educational and skills constraints may also limit the usefulness of popular participation within the planning process. Realistic goals for participation have to be set that recognise these constraints, as well as existing configurations of power.
- *Demonstrating the outcomes of participation:* For mass participation in the gram sansads and engagement with panchayat activities to be sustained, real benefits to the participants have to be demonstrated: a point that was made repeatedly in the concluding state-level seminar. The drawing up of schemes that are not implemented, or of lists of beneficiaries for whom there are no resources, only undermines participation in the longer term. Broadening the role of panchayats beyond the implementation of centrally-designed schemes is important here, but within gram sansads, panchayat members should also explicitly demonstrate the action that has been taken in line with previous decisions.

##### *Building a Supportive Political Culture*

- *Supporting the authority of elected members:* The ESRC research project provided evidence that key decisions surrounding panchayat activities were sometimes taken out of elected members' hands, and instead were made by local units of a member's political party. Advice from political parties is advantageous to elected members,

and close monitoring of panchayat activities by the parties can help to build accountability. It was suggested, however, that the removal of decision-making powers can undermine the authority of elected members and ultimately the accountability of the panchayats as a whole. Especially within the CPI-M, senior party figures need to monitor elected members to ensure their political accountability, but should resist the temptation to control their activities on a day-to-day basis.

• *Engaging experienced politicians in panchayat positions:* It was suggested that these problems are reinforced when parties decide to field candidates who occupy a relatively junior position within the party. Due to the reservation of seats, this is sometimes inevitable, but all parties should agree as far as possible to field experienced candidates for key panchayat posts. This would be an important public demonstration of cross-party support for the position and authority of these institutions. The presence of such experienced political figures is also likely to be beneficial for the parties involved. Experience suggests that rural electorates are often aware of the seniority of party workers: fielding a candidate who is seen as credible and effective will enhance the standing of the party as a whole.

#### *Addressing Capacity Constraints*

• *Information resources:* Decentralised planning is unlikely to be effective without proper information management. The experience of the ESRC research project is that data on development schemes are hard to come by, and that comparison across schemes or areas is difficult. Particularly at the block level, it was felt, investment in data production and dissemination is important. Computerisation of records needs to be accompanied by the development of data storage systems designed to meet the needs of integrated local planning.

• *Staffing resources:* It was beyond the scope of our project (or the academic research that preceded it) to consider in detail the appropriateness of levels of staffing within the various tiers of local government. It was clear, however, that there was support for a continued devolution of scheme implementation to the lower tiers of the panchayats, and this has obvious staffing implications. Experience suggests these constraints may now be particularly acute at the gram panchayat level, where the number and skills of staff are very restricted.

#### *Innovation and Expansion of Panchayat Activities*

• *Local empowerment through untied funds:* Our work on the Employment Assurance Scheme indicated that local innovation within centrally-sponsored schemes is low. Guidelines from New Delhi are often interpreted very rigidly, regardless of whether they are appropriate for local conditions. It was agreed that experimentation with untied funds to the panchayats would help to ensure that the flow of existing funds to panchayats would meet local needs, and give real decision-making power to the grass roots.

• *Resource mobilisation:* It was suggested that panchayats could better meet existing resource constraints by exercising their tax-raising powers or experimenting with income-raising activities. Both activities were visible in Debra block, Midnapore (levies on shallow-tube wells, use of government land as a plant nursery), but such activities appear to be limited at present, and could benefit from wider replication. Provision of matching funds from the government of West Bengal for resources raised would be one possible mechanism here: more simply, wider publicity and discussion of existing examples of good practice (including their incorporation within panchayat training activities) would be an important first step.

• *Playing a wider role in local governance:* As noted above, panchayats already have a degree of support and legitimacy from their electorates, and they could exploit this to a far greater degree than at present. Under the 73rd amendment of the Constitution of India, panchayats are now a fully-fledged key third tier of government alongside the states and the centre. At present in West Bengal, the day-to-day functioning of panchayats in no way exploits this constitutional provision to the full. It was felt that greater use of

these powers, channelled through appropriate institutional structures, would improve the delivery of local services (especially education and health), and engender local responsibility for these.

Taken together, these recommendations amounted to a call for a significant broadening of the role of the panchayats. Taken seriously, they would require a rethink of the structure of government within West Bengal, including a change in the relationship between line departments, ministries and the panchayats. Most stakeholders agreed that Panchayati Raj still has the potential to be a radical motor for empowerment and pro-poor governance in West Bengal. But this potential needs to be realised quickly: the panchayats should not fossilise into sterile delivery mechanisms, and the poor need to have concrete experiences that confirm that their direct participation in local government is both relevant and effective. A number of stakeholders also made it clear (in Malda district especially) that the poor could not be expected to participate effectively in local governance until education provision was brought under their control, at least in part (through panchayat education committees), and while many of them continue to suffer the effects of poor healthcare provision. But this in turn would require a change of attitude on the part of politicians, including many within the CPI-M. As several participants clearly recognised, the bias of the CPI-M is still towards 'production' and not 'reproduction'. This bias encourages the party to think of itself as a patron (albeit a benign, pro-poor patron) rather than as a catalyst for change by and for poorer people themselves.

#### **(b) Bihar**

In Bihar, of course, the idea that a ruling party would seek the empowerment of the poorest is still hard to imagine. Laloo Yadav's first government made efforts to empower its key supporters from within the 'creamy layer' of the Other Backward Classes, and there is some evidence to suggest that the lower layers of the OBCs did well in the panchayat elections that were finally held in Bihar in the summer of 2001 [Gupta 2001]. For the most part, though, the labouring classes are excluded from positions of power in Bihar, and in Bhojpur these communities also have to face the consequences of pervasive state failure in the wake of continuing violent conflicts. Against this backdrop, our main objective in Bhojpur was not to come up with a list of detailed policy recommendations; rather (and this was also the case in Malda), our first objective was to get different groups of people talking, both among themselves and to others with whom they have little contact.

As things turned out, the Bihar workshops were more successful than we had any reason to expect. It is true that Liberation (the extremist left group) was only prepared to enter into dialogue with the research team itself, and it came as no surprise that the MCC was disinclined to engage with the project. But other groups did respond to our invitations to participate in various workshops, and a large number of participants took the trouble to respond in writing to our efforts to engage them around the issues that emerged in the workshops. Most interesting for us, however, was the fact that many participants displayed a willingness to think imaginatively in the workshops and to describe 'ideal type' changes that they probably would not adopt in practice, given existing institutional and incentive structures. For example, several of the politicians who attended the state-level seminar were prepared to describe in detail how and why they took 'commissions', and why this system was pernicious, even as they made it clear that they would continue to act in this manner. By the same token, some representatives of the NGO community were prepared to think about the ways they might encourage villagers to hold government to account, or to claim various entitlements from the state. Prior to the workshops many of these NGOs had preferred to seek the empowerment of the poor directly, and perhaps in opposition to the state.

The format of the workshops evolved in much the same way as it did in West Bengal. On the basis of our own presentations, and our sense of what was being discussed by the villagers in the initial meeting, we took the view that people's empowerment and participation, the reform of government, and political-cum-social change were at the heart of most people's concerns. Accordingly, we

organised the block, district and state-level workshops in such a way that participants would be directed to some of the questions listed in Table 2. What emerged was an extraordinary and unexpected list of 101 specific recommendations, some few of which we are able to reproduce here (see Srivastava et al, 2001, for a full listing):

*People's empowerment:* There was universal recognition that there is a major information deficit in Bihar. Existing sources of information are limited, information provision is often arbitrary, and the form and content of information supplied is often not appropriate or accessible. But groups also recognised that information is only useful to people if they can put it in context, understand its significance, purpose and potential, and come to act upon it. It is thus important that they have alternative sources of information, so that they cross-reference or even interrogate information supplied to them by the state. With these points in mind, 23 recommendations were made by participants, including the following:

- Give legal force to information flow from government, both through a freedom of information act and through legal direction to supply information.
- With the revival of panchayati raj institutions, make the mukhiya and ward commissioner responsible under statute for information dissemination at panchayat and ward levels.
- Equip district offices with websites that provide information on programmes, general spending patterns, and other relevant data sets (including lists of BPLs, etc). NGOs and others should have assured access; government to charge a user fee, if necessary. Low technology solutions also to be employed: notice-boards and wall-writing, folk dramas and street plays.
- NGOs and social activists should aim to provide a potent alternative channel for information dissemination. There should be an act or policy to direct district and block offices/zilla parishads and panchayat samitis to enact regular and credible coordination meetings with this sector.

*People's participation:* Even when governments are effective in diffusing information, poorer people sometimes have little incentive to participate in the selection or execution of development programmes, or they may find themselves being excluded by more powerful villagers. This is especially the case with poor female villagers. It was suggested that participation would increase only when people

had built up greater confidence in government, and when schemes provided benefits that are either properly targeted and/or consumed collectively. Most villagers opposed the suggestion, made by some government officers, that increased participation would promote conflict around scarce resources. They argued that conflict was more likely to emerge when the process of participation is perceived as unfair, closed or exclusionary. 19 recommendations emerged from these discussions, and they were grouped under three headings: changing conceptions of development; resisting the capture of development; and creating alternative opportunities through wider linkages. Listed below are two suggestions from each sub-heading:

- The dissemination of developmental success stories from outside the locality would help to motivate people to see the benefits of collective action.
- Development committees should be formed within each village. These should include poorer villages as committee members, and should discuss 'development' in its broadest sense, and not just in terms of government-sponsored programmes.
- True control over village-level schemes should be kept within villages. People do not want their priority listings changed at higher levels.
- Make a panel of executing agents in good standing, and select from among them in ward-level open meetings. Provide them with a licence.
- Enhance the knowledge base of villagers about a variety of livelihood options which may or may not be understood locally (e.g. pig-rearing, poultry, handicrafts, opportunities in local markets, market-price information).
- Provide information on and access to training centres that would provide villagers with transferable skills. NGOs should help to run such centres.

*Government reform:* Policies that would increase the empowerment/participation of poorer people would put more pressures on government. The workshops, however, indicated that government is already unable to meet existing demands, and that many government staff need to be retrained to deal with people as clients rather than as subjects. Attention would also have to be given to the culture of mistrust that affects many government departments in Bihar. Above all, perhaps, there would have to be serious efforts to improve

**Table 2: Generic Discussion Topics for Bhojpur Workshops**

Main Issue for Discussion	Sub Theme/Specific Points under Each Main Issue
<i>1 People's empowerment and participation</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 How can the knowledge base of people be improved?</li> <li>2 How can an active and effective people's participation in the design and implementation of government programmes be ensured? How to ensure that the poor do not lose trust in the participatory process due to exclusion of their just demands by the powerful in the society? How to change the conception of development that views it in terms of discrete projects for personal gain and thus limits the scope of participatory processes? How to overcome dysfunctional conflicts around the control and capture of government resources?</li> <li>3 How can linkages be built with higher level government departments and institutions, and with the market, to draw down the opportunities on offer from these arenas through acquiring skills, technology and market support for sustainable self-employment?</li> <li>4 How can a network of pro-poor forces be built to support these initiatives, build pressure in their favour, and publicly oppose and intervene effectively in situations that lead to the exclusion of common and poor people?</li> </ol>
<i>2 Government reform: moving towards pro-poor governance</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 How can government's institutional capacity be enhanced in a pro-poor direction? How to build/improve pro-poor skills in government functionaries? How to minimise problem of overload on the field staff?</li> <li>2 How can the interaction and interrelationship between different layers of governance be improved, and creativity and innovation in government functioning be promoted?</li> <li>3 How can institutional changes be made in the current practices of government to provide support and recognition to the good intentioned efforts of field staff, so that they do not have to yield to negative pressures in the field?</li> <li>4 How can the accountability of government staff be improved? How can the 'culture of corruption' be challenged effectively?</li> </ol>
<i>3 Political change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 What can be done to ensure that politics plays an important role in raising people's awareness of their rights and entitlements in respect of government programmes? How can such a role be made rewarding for political representatives and activists?</li> <li>2 How can the negative nexus between political leaders/representatives and local fixers or 'dalaals' (middlemen) be broken? How can politicians directly connect to common people to help their empowerment?</li> <li>3 How can development (social and economic) be brought to the top of the political agenda? How can this displace caste as the main issue for political competition?</li> </ol>
<i>4 Social change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 How to change the negative but all pervasive culture that regards the 'capture' of government programmes for personal benefits as an end in itself, and considers it a zero-sum game? In other words, how can change be effected from a zero-sum to a positive sum logic?</li> <li>2 How can society take advantage of the entrepreneurial qualities of fixers by changing the incentive structure to motivate them to perform positively in society?</li> <li>3 How can pressure be applied to political representatives to hold them more accountable to their voter-clients? How can the intervening period between two elections be used strategically to achieve this?</li> </ol>

the credibility of government, given widespread corruption and an evident lack of accountability. Workshop participants recognised the seriousness and apparent intractability of these problems, but still managed to come up with 36 separate recommendations for change, including the 12 suggestions that follow:

- Lower-level government officers/PRIs representatives should have a greater sense of 'ownership' of various schemes, and must be made fully aware of the overall purpose, or mission, of a programme. They should be given some leeway to adapt a scheme to meet local needs and realities (perhaps emphasising watershed development in one panchayat and roads in another).
- Government staff and panchayat representatives at all levels should learn people-management skills that show proper respect for their clients, and which emphasise the importance of consultation and negotiated solutions. Training programmes should be revised to ensure this.
- There is a need to think imaginatively about how state personnel can best be deployed: staff working in departments where there is little activity should be redeployed to others facing an overload of duties, perhaps on a flexible or temporary basis.
- There should be encouragement for and recognition of exceptional work done by public servants: for example, special ceremonies on August 15 or January 26, or people's certificates of appreciation.
- No public representatives with a criminal record should be allowed to stand for election at any level.
- An open dialogue between different layers of the state is required to challenge the 'yes boss' culture. Making appropriate changes in the practice of writing the confidential reports of juniors by seniors will help to achieve this.
- Innovative work by juniors should be recognised by higher-level officers, and be rewarded through certificates of merit and other appropriate means.
- Salaries should be linked to clear performance standards. There should be rewards for good quality work through extra monetary benefits: for example, a certain percentage of the estimate could be held back as a reward for achieving a given standard (the idea here was to provide an incentive to government staff to desist from taking undue cuts in the form of commissions).
- Blacklisting of corrupt officers – this knowledge to be made public. Swift investigation. Severe and certain punishments to be made when corruption is uncovered and proven.
- Government servants should be made accountable to panchayati raj institutions. Provisions exist in the present Act, but the necessary rules must be made by different government departments, and powers should be devolved to the PRIs.
- Technical knowledge to be provided to skilled masons so that they can challenge the monopoly powers of Junior Engineers.
- The gram sabha should be given the power to write the confidential reports of lower-level government staff working in their area – reference was made by participants to similar measures in Madhya Pradesh.

*Political and social change:* Respondents recognised that changes in the structures and practices of government will not be sufficient in themselves to improve state-society relationships in Bihar. There are many negative social and political factors that must also be challenged. Frustration with political representatives and a lack of faith in the political system are widespread. Current practices of politics were identified by workshop participants as causing major impediments to the development of a more pro-poor state-society relationship. Most politicians do not make direct contact with their electorate except during elections, and political parties are not playing an active role in empowering their voters. It is the 'dalaals' or middlemen who are listened to carefully, and not the people at large. Politicians have also been happy to let electoral competition focus around negative and divisive issues (particularly caste), to the complete exclusion of debate around the role they could be playing in promoting development. Social pressures are no less severe. Competition appears to be the defining form of social relationship within the villages. In a situation of acute social inequality, in which caste, class, and gender differences are enormous, attempts to find development pathways that will provide common benefits to all are difficult to signpost.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, participants in the workshops did manage to list 23 separate recommendations for improved pro-poor governance, and these took shape under 5 headings: encouraging political parties to increase the awareness and empowerment of the poor; changing the negative linkages between politicians and middlemen; bringing development issues to the top of the agenda; changing the 'I win, you lose' culture; and engaging local intermediaries (including 'dalaals') more constructively, and perhaps even as social animators. Listed below are two recommendations from each of these five headings:

- Improve communication/dialogue with the politicians to help them see that raising the awareness of party members of government works, and of issues relating to public welfare, could be of practical benefit to the political parties involved.
- Party-based workshops are needed to raise awareness of developmental issues and programmes among grass roots workers. Senior leaders need to share information with party members. The need for this was agreed by all parties.
- NGOs can gain strength from coordination, and sometimes might put up a people's candidate as an alternative choice for the people.
- Parties/senior leaders to recognise and reward genuine ground-level political workers rather than the usual mixture of hangers-on, fixers, and 'dalaals'.
- Bring back seriousness into the workings of the legislature. Have greater time for debates and discussion.
- Ensure that the poor have a free and fair vote at election time. This will require:
  - (i) effective control of the election process – an end to 'booth capture' and
  - (ii) proper updating of voter lists (so that the views of those currently excluded from the list cannot be ignored by politicians).
- Use participatory techniques involving all sections of society to formulate village development plans. Take care to explain how certain schemes can maximise villagewise benefits, or benefits for all villagers. Put pressure on the PRIs and government offices to approve such a plan for its realisation and demonstration effect.
- Encourage those who do good developmental work through public recognition.
- Provide extensive information to the fixers, combined with moral encouragement and social recognition to motivate them to be social animators.
- Set up 'gram kosh' (village funds) to provide financial support for legal services; ensure that fixers can be beneficiaries if they are eligible for government support.

## VI

### Making Sense of the Workshops

The research team is well aware that the tabling of recommendations in a state-level workshop is unlikely to lead to determinate changes in policy, even in a state like West Bengal where the team worked in tandem with a state agency. There is an element of ritual about these workshops that encourages well-placed participants to state a commitment to administrative reform that probably will not be continued beyond the workshop, and which, in any case, is properly a matter for the legislative assembly and other bodies. And in Bihar, of course, it is hard to believe that elected representatives will take action against the 'criminalisation of politics' or in favour of enterprising junior officers. As we indicated above, the incentive structures in Bihar are such that there is no reason for corrupt politicians to favour 'development' or to seek a more Weberian bureaucracy.

We are also well aware that we were actively managing the workshops that we ran in each state. Although we made strenuous efforts to listen to 'the voices of the poor', and to allow different stakeholders to redefine the agenda that we brought to the workshops, the architecture of each session was set by the research team and took shape with respect to our ESRC findings. It is hardly surprising that questions of information and awareness emerged strongly in both states when our presentations on the Employment Assurance Scheme and primary education highlighted these issues. And when we scaled up it was the



research team that imposed order on the discussions of the initial workshops, and which decided, for example, to ask subsequent groups of stakeholders to consider issues of participation, government reform (including corruption), and political-cum-social change. The written summaries that we provided in Section IV also tend to smooth out some very real disagreements within and between different groups of stakeholders. Senior representatives from the CPI-M, for example, did not share the view that they should monitor – but not control – the activities of panchayat-level representatives. They pointed to the benefits that the poor in West Bengal had reaped from the committed actions of a disciplined and hierarchical political party.

Nevertheless, we are firmly of the opinion that the action research project met its principal goals. If we shaped the form and content of the various workshops, we did so on the back of a long period of field research that was committed to learning from the people we were now engaging anew. Our emphasis on corruption, for example, or on the powers of the junior engineer, or on the need for new government training programmes, followed on from our attempts to listen to the stories of the rural poor. Perhaps more importantly, it was never our intention that the workshops should result in definite changes in government policy. A quick look back to Figure 1 will confirm that the ‘tangible’ outputs that we expected from the project – and which we promised DFID – consisted of the reports that summarised the findings and recommendations of the workshops, and a list of the participants who attended these events. From the outset we assumed that the major outputs of the project would be ‘intangible’, and would include such things as changes in attitude on the part of some participants, or evidence that people had entered into dialogue with one another.

Albert Hirschman (1977) has argued that the effects of ideas upon public policy are rarely direct. Most often they take shape through their ‘recruitment effects’, which is to say that changes are likely to be cumulative, slow and not always easy to spot. This is a good description of what we attempted in Malda and Bhojpur districts. Insofar as the project has succeeded in key respects it has done so as part of a continuing process of engagement. In this phase of the engagement we were able to bring together some 2,000 people in an extended set of conversations about issues of real concern to the public (to paraphrase Flyvbjerg), including large numbers of people who rarely get chance to make their voices heard, and certainly not in front of authority figures. We were also able to persuade a majority of the participants to think expansively about the actions that would need to be taken to promote pro-poor governance.

For us, this was the most exciting part of the process, and we are not unduly discouraged by the fact that many of these participants will have reverted ‘to type’ after the workshops were over.<sup>7</sup> Ideas have been floated and conversations initiated. DFID has a report that it might choose to act on in various ways, and so do a wide range of stakeholders in eastern India. Above all, a significant number of villagers have been made aware of some of their rights vis-à-vis the state. And the process of engagement continues, for us as well as for others. We were hoping to end this paper by reporting positively on our plans to set up an NGO that would work with small groups of the rural poor in Bhojpur district around issues of information supply and accountability. The NGO was to be directed by Manoj Srivastava until it could be turned over to local activists and leaders. Unfortunately, our proposal was shortlisted by the World Bank in its 2001 Development Marketplace competition, but not funded, as is often the way with these things.<sup>8</sup> But the idea remains with us, and with it remains a broader commitment to making social science matter. ■■

Address for correspondence:  
villastu@aol.com

## Notes

- 1 One of our research districts, Ranchi, was part of Bihar in 1999, but became a central district of the new Jharkhand state from mid-November 2000.
- 2 We are pleased to acknowledge the financial support of DFID (contract CNTR 00 1533). We should note that the arguments made in this

paper are our own and may not be endorsed by DFID.

- 3 See Chambers (1983) and Uphoff (1992). See also the discussion of the ‘ethics of participatory methods’ in Narayan, Chambers, Shah and Petesch (2000: 16-18). For the record, we do not take the view that all or even most work done in previous times was unreflexive or unconcerned with questions now discussed under the heading of ‘research ethics’. This would do an injustice to an earlier generation of research workers, some of whom were concerned to enter into dialogical relations with their ‘respondents’.
- 4 We would also like to register our gratitude to Arun Das (a senior activist within the JP movement), Rupesh (the state secretary of Lok Samiti), Akshay (Centre of Development), and Rajeshwar Mishra (A N Sinha Institute) for their excellent work in facilitating the workshops. We are in their debt, too, for many searching conversations about the project as a whole.
- 5 The key recommendations were as follows: greater flexibility in the time and timing of meetings – in particular to avoid peak harvest times; ensuring that the requirement for achieving quorum for all GS meetings is met, even for adjourned meetings; stricter adherence to the decisions arrived at in GS meetings; greater flow of untied funds to the GP and increases in its own revenues to ensure that the expectations voiced in GS meetings are properly taken care of; greater flexibility in the content of GS meetings, including more provision for the dissemination of information.
- 6 It is important to underline here that the workshops in Bihar were specifically focused on the possibility of reform in the arena of state-society relationships. The research team fully recognises that these relationships are only one source of concern for poorer people. Questions of landownership and caste are at least as important. Dialogue has to start somewhere, though, and the research team took the view that conversations around land or caste were unlikely to be productive or open to positive sum thinking. These remain matters of and for everyday political struggle.
- 7 Many, but by no means all. A large number of individuals and agencies submitted positive evaluations of the workshops, and some indicated that it had changed their thinking more permanently. One NGO representative wrote that: “Findings presented were new. Till date we as activists have engaged in bringing out processions and rallies, offering dharnas, demonstrations, but without much result. For changing the lives of poor people, government system should be strengthened, people should be empowered with improved knowledge-base, public servants in the field should be supported against pressures of vested interests. ... We must change the mindset that views ‘one’s own victory in the loss of others’ – this touched me the most. These were all new to me”. Another NGO representative declared that: “Common people remain unaware of government programmes and of their implementation procedures. This is generally known, but what was unknown and thus totally new to me was that even government officials were unaware of their own programmes”. (See Srivastava et al, Chapter 4, for further details).
- 8 A synopsis of our proposal was listed at the relevant World Bank website. In some respects, we had it in mind to set up an NGO that would function like the MKSS in Rajasthan, albeit on a smaller scale (see Jenkins and Goetz, 1999, for details).

## References

- Benei, V and C Fuller (eds) (2001): *The Everyday State and Society in India*, Social Science Press, New Delhi.
- Chambers, R (1983): *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, Longman, Harlow.
- Flyvbjerg, B (2001): *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gupta, S (2001): ‘New Panchayats and Subaltern Resistance’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 36, No 21.
- Hirschman, A (1977): *The Passions and the Interests*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Jenkins, R, and A M Goetz (1999): ‘Accounts and Accountability: Theoretical Implications of the Right to Information Movement in India’, *Third World Quarterly* 20, pp 589-608.
- Narayan, D, R Chambers, M Shah and P Petesch (2000): *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*, Oxford University Press/World Bank, Oxford.
- Srivastava, M, G Williams, S Corbridge, and R Veron (2001): ‘Enhancing Pro-Poor Governance in West Bengal and Bihar: Building a Pro-Poor State Society Partnership – A Search for Pathways in Bihar’, (Final report to DFID: mimeo).
- Uphoff, N (1992): *Local Institutions and Participation for Sustainable Development*, IEED, London.
- Williams, G, R Veron, D Sarkar, M Srivastava, and S Corbridge (2001): ‘Enhancing Pro-Poor Governance in West Bengal and Bihar: Final Report, West Bengal’, (Final report to DFID: mimeo).