

## **Who Participates? The “Penalty” of Caste and Ethnicity on Participation in Community Group Programs in Nepal.**

---

***Work in Progress***  
***Not to be cited***

Meeta S. Pradhan  
September 2009

### Abstract

This study examines the influence of ascribed social identity like caste and ethnicity, on participation in community group programs that aim to improve life conditions of people in poor communities. The framework of social exclusion is used to explain how historically held values, social norms and practices continue to influence life opportunities and create barriers. Analysis shows that one’s caste and ethnicity has a strong independent effect on an individuals’ participation in community group programs while controlling for educational attainment, wealth, media exposure, experiences with travel and labor force participation. This analysis provides much needed evidence of disparities in access to livelihood improvement programs at local levels in poor communities. This evidence points toward a need for a closer examination of the mechanisms that link social identity and participation in livelihoods programs in order to build better accountability in implementation of policies and programs that focus on social inclusion and poverty alleviation.

## INTRODUCTION

Social identities such as race, gender, caste and ethnicity have been known to influence and shape life experiences, opportunities and behavior. Disparities in life outcomes related to the quality of life, income, wealth, education, health, and in political representation occur in different contexts based on the economic, social, religious, political and ideological domination of some groups vis-a-vis others (Hughes and Thomas 1998; Hannum and Xie 1998; Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Stash and Hannum 2001; Buchmann and Hannum 2001; Inglehart and Norris 2001; House 2002; Burgard 2002; Greenman and Xie 2008). Discrimination based on such social identities are most often deeply entrenched in societies and they continue to pose challenges for equitable economic growth, basic human rights and social justice in many communities around the world. This study examines the disparities based on ascribed social identities of caste and ethnicity in participation in local level collective action programs which aim specifically at improving life conditions of poor and marginalized groups in Nepal.

The study draws on the theoretical framework of social exclusion which focuses on how formal and informal institutions and practices work in disconnecting groups and individuals from social relations, and create barriers for them in their ability to fully participate in the activities which would be normal and accessible for other groups in the same community (Silver 1995; Jordan 1995; Sen 2000; Power and Wilson 2000; Bennett 2008). The study examines a residual 'penalty' of social exclusion due to one's caste and ethnic identity that overrides other individual characteristics and experiences that influence one's ability to participate and access resources through community group programs in a resource scarce setting. Changes in poverty alleviation strategies over the past 50 years have moved the focus towards more decentralized decision making, good governance and on basic human rights to address some of the endemic problems related to exclusion of groups and regions. Yet the escalation of conflict on a global scale stands out as a stark reminder that the challenge of equal rights, equitable access and distribution of benefits for poor and socially excluded groups continues to exist in society.

This study first attempts to provide novel empirical evidence that caste and ethnic identities are important markers in facilitating participation in community level collective action programs. This is especially important in the context of where such identities are historically entrenched in the social milieu and where disparities and discrimination against particular groups

are “common knowledge”. While disparities in access to formal institutions, including education, health, labor force, and political power are documented through national constitutions and policies, empirical evidence of disparities in participation in collective action in the very programs that seek to minimize such disparities, are still limited in many countries. This creates a serious gap in policy feedback, formulation, and implementation especially in relation to issues of equity of opportunities and benefits at the local level. In focusing on participation in general, it is important to acknowledge the literature that has examined the nature, ideology and controversy behind the concept within the ‘development industry’<sup>1</sup>. As important as this issue is, it is beyond the scope of this present study.

Secondly, this study examines the independent effect of caste and ethnic identity in determining participation in community groups. Previous studies have focused on participation in various types of voluntary associations as a function of individual and household level characteristics such as gender, education, income, labor force participation, religion, membership in other groups, urban or rural settings (Steel et al. 2001; Weinberger and Jütting 2001; Curtis et al. 2001; Beard 2005). However, most of these studies focus on social class - the poor - and not on the experiences of different caste and ethnic groups across different class groups. In many contexts there is a strong correlation between poverty and marginalized social status. Yet the question of whether similar individual experiences of education, income, religion and wealth for instance, is sufficient to break the barriers of social exclusion as a result of ingrained and enduring values, attitudes and practices in day to day life, has any residual effects on participation in local collective action remains relatively less explored. This study also takes into account parental experiences, childhood social context, and ideational exposure through media and travel as additional factors that potential influence participation in community groups in adulthood.

This study uses the context of a south-central region in Nepal to empirically investigate the effect of caste and ethnicity on participation in community groups. The data comes from a unique combination of individual and household level surveys, and life history data collected

---

<sup>1</sup> Weinberger and Jütting (2001) discuss how the participation of the poorest groups have often been questioned due to the high opportunity costs involved and the limited existence of social network ties among such individuals. Leve (2001) presents an important critique on the reality and motives behind the “participation” and “empowerment” agenda of NGOs and aid agencies. Cleaver (1999) provides a critical analysis of the concepts underlying participatory approaches and the myths of the community as a social entity.

from men, women and children in Chitwan Valley in 1996 (Axinn et al. 1999). This combination of data makes it possible to investigate the community level exposure each individual received during their childhood, as well as their individual experiences in adulthood. This helps to better understand the enduring and powerful influence of ideas and experiences, in particular, those which can potentially influence the participation of individuals in community groups, and in particular how their caste or ethnicity influences their behavior. An analysis of these data provides evidence that caste and ethnicity have significant independent effects on participation in community groups when controlling for key individual level experiences.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study builds on the theoretical framework of social exclusion based on one's caste and ethnicity to examine its effect on participation in community group programs at the individual level. The framework focuses on how formal and informal institutions and practices work in disconnecting groups and individuals from social relations, and create barriers for them in their ability to fully participate in the activities which would be normal and accessible for other groups in the same community (Power and Wilson 2000; Bennett 2008;). Social exclusion refers to both individuals and societies, signifying “disadvantage, alienation and lack of freedom” for certain groups relative to others (Gore 1996 in Bhalla and Lapeyere 1997:415). It reflects the cultural devaluation of people based on ‘who they are’ (or rather ‘who they are *perceived* to be’) as well as ‘where they are’ (Kabeer 2000; Kabeer 2006)<sup>2</sup>. Social exclusion based on ascribed identities initiates from childhood and the barriers that they create leads towards continuing experiences of discrimination and disparities in the ability to access opportunities and influence behavior in adulthood as well.

This study examines social exclusion in a specific social, cultural and regional context so it is useful to briefly describe the overall context of caste and of community based development programs. Following this, the paper then first examines how individual experiences influence participation in community group programs and secondly, how caste and ethnicity give rise to opportunities and constraints that influence individual experiences.

### ***The Caste System: Hierarchies, Disparities and Diversity***

---

<sup>2</sup> For additional definitions and perspectives on *Social Exclusion*, refer to Sen (1992), Silver (1995) and Jordan (1996), for background of the concept of social exclusion and to Kabeer (2000) for the application of the concept to poor non-western countries since the mid 1990s.

South Asia has been home to the *caste system*, a distinct, powerful, hierarchical social structure based on the notions of ritual and occupational purity and pollution, in which one's identity is ascribed at birth. Linked intrinsically to the Hindu religious texts, the *Dharmashastras*, composed between 600 and 200 BC, this system has been the key principle for social organization and has proved to be an enduring institution, due to its ability to continually structure and maintain power relations among different groups. The caste system is linked with the four *varnas*, the historical occupational classification of society organized in terms of their relative ritual purity: the *Brahmans* (priests, teachers and scholars), the *Kshatriyas* (kings and warriors), the *Vaishyas* (traders and businessmen), and the *Shudra* (peasants, laborers and service providers). The fifth group, the 'untouchables' (low caste, occupational caste or *Dalits*) are technically outside of the *varna* on account of their ritually defiling occupations. Many castes and sub-castes (*jat*) emanate from the *varnas* (Beteille 1969; Dumont 1980; Ghurye 1996)<sup>3</sup>.

In South Asia, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, groups with distinct ethnicities, cultures, social practices and even religion, were subsumed within the caste hierarchy by the politically dominant groups as a strategy for nation building. Despite fundamental structural and ideological changes over the years of colonialism and post colonialism, and the spread of western and secular ideologies, caste hierarchies have been maintained by affirming economic and social opportunities to some groups, while creating constraints for others, under the sanctification of religion and ideology (Sheth 2004)<sup>4</sup>. Thus social and cultural segregation has been a cause of enduring poverty and inequality in the region (ibid: 11).

In Nepal, the promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* (the National Code) in 1854 by the Rana oligarchy solidified the caste system as the primary organizing principle and the major determinant of social identity. Orthodox Hindu values and practices were established that protected the political order and affected life opportunities of different groups of people based on their castes (Hofer 1979). Gellner et al. (1997), Pradhan (2002), Guneratne (2002) and others have discussed in varying depths, the acceptance and manipulation of cultural pluralism by the dominant upper caste Hindu ruling groups in Nepal for maintaining their political and economic

---

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Bista (1972), Hofer (1979), Gurung (1998) and Whelpton (1997) for details on the complex, cultural diversity of caste and ethnic groups in Nepal including different accounts of the Nepali *varna* system and classifications of different *jats*.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Dirk (1989) and Bayly (1999) for discussions on how colonialism was instrumental in strengthening caste divisions in India to consolidate economic and political power by the British.

stronghold. Socially, culturally and linguistically distinct ethnic groups were subsumed within the caste hierarchy based on their degree of similarity and differences with the cultural practices of the so called upper caste Nepali-speaking Hindus (Pradhan 2002). This hierarchical ordering and the resulting social status allotted to the groups provide the rationale for the process of Hinduization<sup>5</sup> of the indigenous ethnic groups as they assimilated within the caste system. The 1990 Constitution after the restoration of democracy in Nepal categorically abolished any form of discrimination based on religion, race, caste or ethnicity. A ten year Maoist insurgency culminated in 2007 in the declaration of a secular state, effectively removing the association between the “Hindu” nation and the dominant caste system. Lawoti (2005) argues that the political exclusion of gender, caste and ethnic groups was a major cause for the “genesis and growth” of the Maoist insurgency. The current social landscape of Nepal is thus distinguished by cultural diversity and complexity attested by the census of 2001 which recorded 102 different caste/ethnic groups (CBS 2002)<sup>6</sup>. This historical hierarchy, dominating social norms, patrilinear and patrilocal system, and the ongoing everyday life practices has left an enduring legacy of deep seated gender, caste and ethnic differences which perpetuates in the present 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Collective Action at the Local Level***

The inadequacy of the ‘top-down’, ‘trickle-down’ and ‘modernist’ approach to social change and economic growth globally brought on support for a more locally embedded, “development from below” approach that focused on the promotion of local governance and increased decentralization, together with the participation, decision making, capacity building and collective action of individuals and groups at micro and meso levels (Kabeer 1994; Escobar 1995; Leys 1996; Axinn and Axinn 1997; Peet and Hartwick 1999; Dasgupta and Beard 2007). In poor countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America this approach, often beginning with the strategy of “social mobilization”<sup>7</sup> has become an entry point for distribution of resources,

---

<sup>5</sup> “Hinduization” is the more contemporary term used to emphasize the adoption of Hindu norms, values, practices and forms by the non-Hindu population. The concept is a derivation from M. N. Srinivas’s (1966) introductory concept of inclusion/exclusion called “Sanskritization” a theoretical framework for caste mobilization which denotes mobilization within the system through the adoption of ritual values, norms and practices of upper caste Hindus, and rejection of attributes considered ritually polluting.

<sup>6</sup> In 2001, nationally *Bahun* and *Chettri* (the *Brahman* and *Kshatriyas* in Nepali) groups constituted 40%, followed by 13% of indigenous Tharu, and seven percent each of Gurungs and Tamangs. This study focuses on these caste groups in Chitwan Valley.

<sup>7</sup> Biggs et al. (2004) describe social mobilization as “an attempt to harness and enhance human capacity; i.e. the willingness and the potential of local people to help themselves”.

capacity building and consolidating collective action and social capital (Coleman 1988) as a means to access fundamental human rights. This approach has been widely adopted by donors, governments and non-governmental organizations. In 2004 the World Bank had a portfolio of US \$7 billion invested globally using the community-based approach (Mansuri and Rao 2004).

This study focuses on local community based groups established through the sponsorship of poverty alleviation programs, which are separate from customary ethnic or religious organizations. They focus on different “sectors” such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, health, education, income generation, credit, etc. Based on their individual needs and interests, and the program objectives and criteria, individuals within a community or village are organized into different “groups”. Such groups are either homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of the sex, religion, caste, ethnicity, or age of the participants. External inputs in the form of specific technical training and tools are provided by the program whose staff also provides orientations about organization and management.

In Nepal, civic organizations for mutual support have long existed and have been organized, recognized and valued by communities. Most of the customary groups were based on kinship or ethnicity (e.g. the *guthis* of the Newars, the *rodi* of the Gurungs) while others were based on neighborhood ties that often centered on shared or common resources (e.g. the agriculture labor exchange custom of *parma*, indigenous groups managing local forests, pastureland and irrigation systems). In more contemporary times, Biggs et al. (2004) estimate the existence of close to 400,000 ‘sponsored’ micro-level groups established to facilitate basic service delivery, poverty alleviation and social justice, since the inception of the concept in government policies in 1977 (Shrestha 1999). Community groups vary in objectives, membership criteria and group size. Membership in “users groups” for instance, is based on the type of service or resource that individuals and household use, such as drinking water, irrigation facilities, or community forests. Members are expected to work collaboratively to design and implement mechanisms to operate, manage and conserve these resources with technical assistance from the government service agencies or non-governmental technical staff. These groups can range from membership of anywhere from 15 to over 100 households depending on how many access the resource. For instance, a Community Forest User Group will constitute of representatives of all households that harvest a particular patch of forest for household usage (fuel, fodder, building a house and other household items) and will participate in the

conservation and management of that forest, based on guidelines. A savings and credit group on the other hand, can be initiated by at least five individuals who will save a sum of money on a weekly or monthly basis. Members take turns to take loans from the group funds; group cohesion, collaboration and peer pressure substitutes formal assets for collateral for the loans.

Critiques of community based efforts have focused on problems with the processes of group formation, limited access for women and the poorest segment of the population, the nature and ideology behind the framework of participation, elite capture<sup>8</sup> and inequity in the distribution of benefits (Cleaver 1999; Leve 2001; Adhikari 2005). This study provides insights into how the exclusion of people based on their social identities that occur through social and cultural institutions and behaviors, continue to endure despite changes in the multiplicity of their identities (such as being educated or less poor) and affect participation in community level actions.

### ***Individual Experiences and Participation in Community Group Programs***

This section discusses how individual experiences such as obtaining education, being exposed to media and travel, labor force participation and the accumulation of wealth influences participation in community groups. In general membership in community group programs depends on the objectives of the program, yet at the aggregate level, there is growing recognition that most of such programs are not able to reach all segments of the population.

Analysis of who is most likely to participate in community group programs has focused on individual and household level characteristics of participating members. There is limited empirical evidence of caste as an important factor in influencing participation in community groups. Programs record caste and ethnicity disaggregated data in terms of group membership but systematic analysis of which caste/ethnic groups are *not* participating and *why* is hard to come by. By contrast, gender differences in participation have received much needed focus, and factors related to women's status, measured through their mobility, decision making capacity and of domestic violence, support of spouse and other household members have been identified in different contexts (Beard 2005; Steele et al. 2003; Weinberger and Jütting 2001). Participation in community groups can also be influenced by both structural and ideational factors. Individual

---

<sup>8</sup> The dominance of the agenda, programs and activities by the economically, socially and politically powerful group within a community has been a major challenge for social mobilization efforts. Evidence of the elite groups in the community usurping group activities and benefits for themselves, their families and friends have often disrupted the equitable sharing of benefits (Cleaver 1999; Beard 2005; Biggs et al. 2004).



experiences such as access to education, media, labor force participation, accumulation of assets can be guided by structural conditions, opportunities and barriers. Yet the ideational influences through the diffusion of new ideas, exposure to alternate ways of living and of living standards, and thereby an increase in the aspirations for improving life conditions are also important explanatory factors which influence participation in community groups as a mean to achieve such goals.

Education: Studies have demonstrated that education improves access to information and knowledge about community level programs. Individuals with very low levels of literacy are less likely to have knowledge about community programs and other voluntary programs which affect their participation rates (Verba and Nei 1972; Curtis et al. 1992, 2001; Weinberger and Jütting 2001; Steele et al. 2003; Beard 2005). In the case of women, education also increases their bargaining power within the household to make decisions about participating or not in community group programs (Weinberger and Jütting, 2001). Yet in a context where community mobilization and organization is targeted towards the poor and marginalized communities, there is evidence that individuals with higher levels of education have lower levels of participation (Beard 2005).

Media and Travel Exposure: Exposure to media and experiences of travelling outside of one's community to larger urban areas has the potential for influencing participation rates. Messages that come across radios, televisions, print media and cinema are not only a source of information but are also a source for the diffusion of new ideas. Radio and television programs in Nepal and India for instance, focus on rural farming households and spread knowledge and information about agriculture and livestock programs, new technologies and means to access those services. Such exposure becomes an important source of information for individuals about community group activities. The exposure to a different life style, standards of living, wider opportunities and choice of consumer items that occurs when travelling outside of one's neighborhood, especially to larger urban areas, potentially give rise to aspirations for a better life for oneself and especially for one's children. This exposure combined with the aspirations it gives rise to can become an influencing factor in increasing rates of participation since community group programs present an opportunity for improved economic conditions.

Labor Force Participation and Wealth: Experience in the labor force, as well as economic status are also important characteristics that can influence individual's participation in

community groups. Studies have shown that it is primarily the middle class group which has the highest propensity for participating in community organizations and this is true in both rich, western countries and in other relatively poorer countries (Curtis et al. 2001; Beard 2005). Explanations for the influence of one's wealth, assets and income on participation in community group programs have focused especially on the opportunity costs for poor individuals. Participation in community group programs has high opportunity costs for poorer individuals due to their limited resources in terms of time for groups meetings, and money for membership fees, monthly savings or for loan reimbursements. Due to the persistent overlap of caste status with poverty, as in other economic, social and demographic life outcomes, there has been a tendency to attribute much of the differentials to class rather than to caste status or ethnicity per se (Subramanian et al. 2006), though it is possible that caste could be the underlying predictor of participation.

Previous studies mentioned above have looked into the intersection between gender and class in participation in community group programs since many programs attempt to target poor women. The intersection between caste and class (and gender) in influencing community group participation has yet to receive similar attention however. The social identity and the cultural devaluation of groups of people based on "who they are" or "who they are perceived" to be plays a strong role in influencing an individual's behavior, even among those who are on the same economic strata (Kabeer 2000).

### ***Caste and Individual Experiences***

The institution of caste has strong influences in the access to and attainment levels of education, and impacts labor force participation and thus economic status of individuals and families. as well as how the exposure to media and travel experiences become dualistic in nature.

Education has been one of the influential factors driving social and economic change in South Asia. Aggregate level data from settings where the social structures continue to be based on historical norms and practices of discrimination based on gender differences, and caste and ethnic hierarchies, demonstrate how such divisions continue to have an effect on educational enrollment, attainment and dropout rates (Hannum and Xie 1998; Hannum and Stash 2001). The affirmative policies of the government of India for government jobs and educational opportunities have contributed to improving the education gap but achievement continues to vary significantly along caste and ethnic lines (Sheth 2004). The provision of free education at

different levels of school has been an attempt to mitigate class differences and increase access to educational opportunities in both India and Nepal. But ethnographic evidence from these countries have shown how the discriminatory behavior by teachers is a critical deterrent preventing low caste children from continuing their schooling<sup>9</sup>.

Media and Travel Exposure: The mere exposure to one's exposure to media and experiences with travel gives rise to the interesting phenomenon of the duality of experiences (Pigg ). Pigg refers to the influence of 'modernization' on marginalized rural population as they are confronted by differences in what they watch and see, and what goes on in actual life, which makes them accept discrimination as 'taken for granted truth', similar to what Bista (1991) might attribute to a 'fatalistic attitude'. The exposure to a rich, egalitarian, 'western' or 'modern' life as seen in the television programs and cinema, are a wide distance from what they experience in real life. Rural families in India and Nepal who do not own a television often go to a neighbor's house in the evenings, yet in most instances they are expected to observe the rules of purity and pollution by maintaining physical distance from other upper caste individuals while being seated. Similarly, while opportunities to travel to urban areas might be difficult due to the high transaction costs involved, for those who do travel the experience of seeing the relatively less overt caste discrimination in urban settings is far from their own experiences of discrimination within their own social context. Such experiences of social exclusion help to shape and deepen self perceptions of being socially isolated and disadvantaged.

Labor Force Participation: Caste and ethnicity also influence access to types of occupation in the context of South Asia. The historic and often exclusive access to educational opportunities and wider social and political networks have led to proportionately higher access to salaried jobs for upper caste individuals. Such jobs are more stable and are attributed a higher status. The lack of necessary social and cultural capital in the form of education and social networks create barriers for low caste and marginalized ethnic groups to access a salaried job and are thus relegated to daily wage work. Caste groups with specific occupational skills such as tailoring, shoe making, and blacksmithing, have historically faced social and cultural discrimination due to the dirty and impure nature of the work. Yet even such skills are

---

<sup>9</sup> Scholars have analyzed how the spread of "western" education during the colonial and post colonial times actually helped in the reinforcement of hierarchical caste differences since the upper caste, socially and politically dominant ethnic groups had the easiest access to an English education (Bayly 1999).

increasingly being economically displaced by the mass production of such consumer items which are more attractive and are available at lower costs in local markets. Other more demeaning jobs, such as manual scavenging, cleaning sewers, and disposing of animal carcasses are not only highly exploitative and dangerous but are highly stigmatized.

### ***Caste and Participation in Community Groups***

The nature of the ascribed status of caste groups, complete with ‘rules’ and ‘roles’ associated with each group along the hierarchy, thus has historically governed the opportunities available and the barriers that must be faced by individuals and groups. The persistent exclusion of individuals and groups in the social, economic and political arena can be attributed to three key factors: (i) the inadequate implementation of the legal and policy measures, (ii) the continuation of ingrained and enduring informal institutions of social norms, values, beliefs and practices related to caste in day to day life, and (iii) the internalization of experiences of disadvantage and exclusion by discriminated individuals and groups.

Formal institutional measures in the form of legal prohibition of caste discrimination and protectionist and affirmative policies, especially in education and jobs, have improved the situation in South Asian countries to some extent. Protectionist policies and affirmative action measures for “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes” and “Other Backward Castes” in India, have been initiated since the mid 1950s, for government jobs and educational opportunities. Affirmative policies in Pakistan focused on the ethno-cultural and feudal hierarchical identities of communities, while those in Sri Lanka focused on severe rural-urban and ethnic imbalances. Yet in both cases the inadequate implementation of such policies led to more strife than towards a culturally and politically inclusive state (Sheth 2004). Nepal initiated scholarships for *Dalit* children for primary education and for girls up to secondary schools in the late 1990s. The Nepali Local Self Governance Act of 1996 provides quotas for women and *Dalit* groups at local levels of government, but full implementation of this policy has been severely impacted by the Maoist insurgency. Yet the conflict environment in Nepal has provided a more conducive context for increased demands for more inclusive and affirmative policies for low caste and marginalized ethnic groups in the country. More recent decentralization programs have introduced quotas for women and other disadvantaged groups in local government entities in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (Dani and de Haan 2008).

Governments in India and Nepal have not been able to enforce the legal measures instituted to abolish caste discrimination. Strong beliefs and continuing practices in day to day social lives of the predominantly Hindu population have changed very slowly. It is especially hard in situations where the individuals responsible for upholding laws against caste based discrimination (such as the police, educators) continue to believe in it and practice it in their daily lives. Informal systems of behavior and values based on relations of kinship, party affiliation, business interest, caste, ethnicity and gender, persist especially at the meso and micro levels of the bureaucracy (Bennett 2008). Marriage practices among the Hindus that follow strict rules of caste endogamy, for instance, has been one of the strongest factors that has helped in the perpetuation of the system. This situation, combined with what Bista (1991) posits as a fatalistic attitude towards one's life and one's future have helped in the internalization of such centuries old discrimination among the low caste and marginalized ethnic groups. The pace of change in cultural practices, social norms and values has been extremely slow in the wake of blatant impunity for discriminatory behavior.

Given this context this study will focus on examining how caste and ethnicity, as social identities, have an influence on participation in community group programs which is net of their individual experiences. Do historically ascribed identities, roles and 'rules' prevent and restrict people from participating in community group programs?

### ***The Chitwan Valley***

In the mid 1950s, the isolated Chitwan Valley in the southern plains of the country provided the opportunity for increased land revenue for the government and productive land to the increasing hill population. With the promulgation of a resettlement plan in this valley, migrants from the hills and mountains of Nepal and from neighboring border states of India settled into the area, making it one of the most multiethnic, multicultural, multi-linguistic settlements in the country (Bista 1972; Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 2000). Subsequently it became one of the most *Nepalized* of all districts of the Tarai belt with a cultural tradition that is distinct from the Indian plains<sup>10</sup>. The influx of migrants of multiple caste and ethnic groups very quickly marginalized the indigenous Tibeto-Burmese population of Tharu, Darai and Kumal who

---

<sup>10</sup> *Nepalization* refers to the assimilation process of internalizing and adopting the cultural practices of the dominant Bahun-Chettri ethnic groups from the hills; the process of nation building or national integration in Nepal. Gaige (1975:216) refers to it as the process of identification with the culture of the dominant upper caste groups. In the context of Nepal the terms Sanskritization, Hinduization and Nepalization have similar interpretations.

traditionally practiced shifting cultivation and a gathering economy. The lack of exposure to a money economy and to the value of land they owned, and ill-defined landownership policies led the Tharu population to be heavily exploited by the incoming migrants. Thus many of the Tharus ended up becoming bonded laborers on the land they once freely roamed (Muller-Boker 1999). Many still identify themselves as “forest dwellers”<sup>11</sup>. Hence in the context of Chitwan, the Tharu ethnic group and collectively the low caste groups are the most marginalized in the communities.

It was only after the late 1970s that the valley was able to break out of its isolation after being linked to two major highways of national importance which facilitated a rapid proliferation of government services, businesses, markets, and diversified employment opportunities making it one of the most important districts for the government of Nepal within a short span of time (Shivakoti et al. 1999). This opening up has resulted in vast changes in the social and economic lives of the population of the valley; for many older individuals this change has occurred within their own lifetime.

The district administration office of Chitwan records the presence of over 220 local non-governmental organizations alone within the study area of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). While most of them are local organizations, some are national and international non-governmental organizations as well. These organizations are involved in a wide array of activities ranging from youth sports activities, religious programs, income generation and savings and credit programs, women’s empowerment programs, health programs, to programs that directly support and facilitate the service delivery programs of the government agencies. These organizations receive a combination of funding from local fundraising efforts, membership fees, local government grants and support from national and international agencies. Most of the programs also use community level social mobilization and community group formation as a strategic approach for the program implementation. This study examines the participation of individuals in six different types of community groups; women’s groups, youth groups, credit groups, Small Farmers Development Program groups, agriculture groups and a range of ‘other’ specific groups such as literacy groups, health groups, ethnicity specific groups, advocacy groups, multipurpose community planning and development groups.

---

<sup>11</sup> Refer also to Guneratne (1994) for an account on how the Tharus have internalized the notion of backwardness and the marginalization they continue to face due to their limited ability to take up the ‘modern’ opportunities, especially education.

## DATA AND MEASURES

The study uses data collected by the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) in 1996 in the western part of Chitwan Valley in Nepal. The CVFS is a large-scale multidisciplinary study designed to investigate the impact of macro level social changes on micro-level individual behavior (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999; Axinn, Barber, and Ghimire 1997; Barber et al. 1997). The CVFS selected 171 neighborhoods with an equal probability, systematic sample, where neighborhoods were defined as a geographic cluster of 5-15 households. The structured individual survey component interviewed every resident between the ages of 15 and 59 with an exceptional response rate of 97%. For the purpose of this analysis, the sample is restricted to those respondents between the ages 25-54, since this group is the most likely to participate in community group activities. Respondents above 55 years in age were excluded due to the relatively small number of cases. Similarly, the sample also excluded “Newar” and “Other” caste groups since they were relatively small in numbers and in the case of the Newar, many of their social and economic characteristics are very similar to the upper caste Hindus<sup>12</sup>. Thus the analysis reported here is for 2,667 respondents with complete data. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all the measures used for this study.

---

Table 1 about here

---

### ***Measure of Participation in Community Group Programs***

The study focuses on the experiences of any lifetime participation in any community group program as the outcome and how an individual’s caste and ethnicity influence it. In the individual survey, respondents are asked whether they had “*ever been a member of any groups or associations such as a User’s Group, Mothers Group, a group organized by health volunteers, Rotary Club, or any other type of association or organization*”. This is a dichotomous variable with 18% (n=490) of the respondents having *ever* participated in any type of community group by 1996. Of these individuals, 38% (n=186) are women. Compared to 29% of upper caste Hindus who had ever participated in community group programs only four percent of the Terai-Tibeto Burmese population had ever participated in any of these groups. A follow-

---

<sup>12</sup> Analysis conducted with the addition of Newar groups (results not shown) did not make significant differences in the results.

up question is asked to identify the types of groups respondents had ever been members of. The respondents mention seven different types of groups, namely Women's Groups, Youth Groups, Small Farmers Development Program Groups, Credit Groups, User's Groups, Agriculture Groups and 'Other' kinds of groups<sup>13</sup>. Of the 490 individuals who have ever participated in community group activities, a little over 25% report multiple memberships either in the same type of group or in different types of groups. Table 2 presents a breakdown of individual participation in groups by the four caste groups.

---

Table 2 about here

---

### ***Measures of Caste and Ethnicity***

As mentioned earlier, caste and ethnicity are ascribed statuses, and the caste system is a patrilineal system where children take on the caste of their father. Women adopt the family name of their husband after marriage<sup>14</sup>. The measure of *caste and ethnicity* is derived from the question in the individual survey where each individual is asked about the caste of their father. Twenty different caste/ethnic categories are recorded and these are re-coded into five functional categories, of which as mentioned earlier, this study uses only four categories, namely the upper caste Hindu, lower caste Hindu, Hill Tibeto-Burmese and Terai Tibeto-Burmese (Axinn and Yabiku 2001). This broad caste categorization is appropriate since it closely follows the caste status prescribed by the Nepali *Muluki Ain* (National Code) where all social groups, including ethnic minorities and indigenous groups, are classified under five categories (Hofer 1979)<sup>15</sup>.

Almost 50% of the study sample is upper caste Hindu and 13% are low caste Hindu. The Terai and Hill Tibeto-Burmese population are both 19% of the sample. The upper caste Hindus

---

<sup>13</sup> The 'other' category comprise project specific groups such as literacy groups, health groups, ethnicity specific groups, advocacy groups, multipurpose community planning and development groups.

<sup>14</sup> In the exceptional cases of inter-caste marriages women will adopt the caste of their husband and the children will as well. But the prevalence of inter-caste marriages is still very low in Nepal.

<sup>15</sup> The *Muluki Ain 1854* of Nepal prescribed caste status for ethnic groups where all social groups, including both Hindus and non Hindus, were classified under five categories: (i) the *tagadharis* (the wearers of the sacred thread), (ii) the *namasinya matwali* (non-enslaveable alcohol drinkers), (iii) the *masinya matwali* (the enslaveable alcohol drinkers), (iv) the impure but touchable castes (*pani nachalne choi chito halnu naparne*), and (v) the impure and untouchable castes (*pani nachalne choi chito halnuparne*). The caste categories here diverged from the classical Vedic model; it focused on three basic divisions and five hierarchies to accommodate the ethnic groups (Hofer 1979). Gurung (2003) further points out that the *Muluki Ain 1854* was silent about the status of the Madhesi (tarai) castes about whether they were touchable or not.



comprise the *Bahun*s and *Chettris*, those deemed ritually the “purest” of the caste groups and the lower caste Hindus comprise the *Kami*, *Damai* and *Sarki*, the so-called “untouchable” occupational groups<sup>16</sup>. The Hill Tibeto-Burmese categories comprise a majority of *Gurungs* and *Tamangs*, while the Terai Tibeto-Burmese comprise the *Tharus*, *Darai* and *Kumal* groups, most of whom are the original indigenous population of Chitwan.

### ***Measures of Individual Experiences***

The study uses five measures of individual experiences of the respondents selected on the basis of the opportunities they provide for individuals to be exposed to new information and ideas which enable them to access resources and opportunities to improve their life conditions. Education has been an important change agent in this context, even though differential access to education is still tied to customary caste and gender roles especially at higher levels. The measure of educational attainment is coded as a continuous variable with values from 0-10 representing no education to more than 10 years of education. Respondents in Chitwan have very low levels of educational attainment hence the mean number of years of schooling is less than four years with a standard deviation of 3.95 years. As in the rest of the country, a gender gap in education persists in Chitwan especially in the case of high school levels where only one third of women (28%) have attended high school compared to 78% of the men (CVFS, 1996).

Exposure to media, primarily television and the cinema, experiences of travelling to Kathmandu or outside of Nepal, and experience in the labor force, primarily with salary work or wage work, are three additional individual level measures used in the study. An index is created to measure any exposure to cinema or TV and a second index measure, ever travel to Kathmandu or outside of the country. They are both coded 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no”. Any experience with salary work and wage work are also two dichotomous variables measured in 1996, with a value of “1” for any experience ever and “0” for no experience.

There has been a strong overlap in the historical and social discrimination toward castes considered lower in the caste hierarchy or ethnic groups considered less Hinduized, and in their economic status. Three measures of wealth are selected to represent the economic status of the respondents in order to examine the effect of wealth on community group participation.

---

<sup>16</sup> Occupational caste groups are clearly identified by their family names. For instance a *Kami* is a blacksmith, a *Damai* is a tailor and a *Sarki* is a cobbler. The overt identification of one’s caste through one’s family names has made caste based discrimination simpler.

Landownership is one of the most important determinants of economic status in Nepal where over 80% of households are engaged in agricultural production. Agriculture land in Chitwan (as in the rest of the country) is divided into two types: *bari* (or *tandi*) is the upland and is usually not irrigated, while *khet* (or *ghol*) is the low land which is irrigated, considered more productive and has higher value compared to the upland. Of the sample, 55% own the *bari* that they farm and 60% own the *khet* that they farm. People who do not own land usually sharecrop, work on contract or are tenants on the land that they farm. Both measures of landownership are used as dichotomous variables.

The third wealth measure used in the study to determine household wealth is an index of seven 'consumer items' that the household may have: a radio, a television, a bicycle, a motorcycle, a cart (bullock), whether they have a toilet in their home, and whether they have electricity at home. This index of the seven consumer items has a value of 0-7, where the mean number of items in the sample for the study is less than three items for each individual. Among the individuals in the sample who own at least five out of the seven consumer items, 69% are upper caste Hindus, four percent are low caste Hindus and seven percent are Terai Tibeto-Burmese. Together the three measures of land and consumer ownership present a picture of relative poverty within the study sample area.

It is evident that there is an overlap between caste and ethnicity and the individual level variables selected for the study. Yet examination of correlations between caste and educational attainment, media and travel exposure, labor force participation and wealth did not reveal values higher than 0.3 except in the case of correlations between these individual level variables and gender.

### ***Control Variables***

*Demographic Measures:* A number of additional individual level characteristics are also added to the models in order to accurately estimate the independent effects of caste/ethnicity on the likelihood of participation in community groups. These measures include birth cohort, sex, marital status, and the number of children of the respondents. These variables are drawn from the CVFS individual interviews and the Life History Calendars (Axinn, et al. 1999).

Birth cohorts of individuals are related to the timing of the changes in the social context of Chitwan Valley, especially in relation to when programs focusing on community groups were introduced in the valley. Respondents belonging to three birth cohorts are used for the analysis;

those born between 1942-51 (cohort 3), between 1952-61 (cohort 2) and those born between 1962-71 (cohort 1). The marital status of respondents is measured as dichotomous variables that comprise never married, married and single (separated, divorced or widowed) categories. Previous studies have also shown how the number and age of children people have is likely to affect their participation in community organizations. For women, having children younger than five years of age increases the burden of child care and therefore increases the opportunity costs for community level activities (Beard 2005). But Weinberger and Jütting (2001) find that having more than six children increases the benefit of participation hence those mothers tend to participate more in local organizations. Respondents with no children are coded as '0', those with up to four children are coded as '1', and those with five or more are coded as '2'.

*Childhood and Parental Experiences:* The life course perspective suggests that events early in the life course can potentially continue to influence behavior later in life (Elder 1983). Experiences of caste discrimination or domination and lack of opportunities in childhood have a lasting effect on individuals in their adult life. People not only internalize social norms and practices, but as Bista (1991) argues, in the case of Nepal a culture of fatalism marks the value system which has its roots in childhood experiences. Childhood experiences are influenced by the social context in childhood hence this study controls for selected measures of childhood context, as well as parental experiences of the respondents. Previous studies based on the CVFS data have shown how the mere presence of particular structures in childhood has independent effects on selected adult behavior. Respondents were asked retrospectively about the presence of four non-family services and infrastructure accessible within a one hour walk in the neighborhoods that they lived in up until they were 12 years of age: the presence of schools, an employer (who employed at least 10 people), a market, and presence of any infrastructure and economic programs. These variables are coded 1 for "yes" and 0 for "no".

Each respondent was also asked about the educational and work experiences of their father and mother. Two indexes were created for parental educational experience and for parental work experiences. If either of the parents had ever received any education it was coded '1' and if neither had received any education it was coded '0'. Similarly, if either of the parents had had any experience with work of pay outside of the home it was coded '1' and for those who did not, was coded '0'. Only 19% of either of the parents had had any education at all and 45% had any experiences with work for pay.

### ***Analytical Strategy***

Logistic regression procedures are used to estimate multivariate models that measure the odds of participation in any kind of community groups as a function of the individual's caste/ethnicity. Starting with a zero order model, subsequent nested models are tested, introducing individual experiences and household wealth. The following logistic regression equation given below is used for the analysis:

$$\ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = a + \sum (B_k)(X_k)$$

where  $p$  is the probability of participating in any community group,  $\frac{p}{(1-p)}$  is the odds of participation,  $a$  is a constant term,  $B_k$  is the effect of independent variables in the model, and  $X_k$  is the value of these independent variables.

The CVFS data comes from 171 neighborhoods comprising clusters of 5-15 households. This design is useful to study the neighborhood level effects on various demographic characteristic but in the case of this study which looks at individual level variances, there is a potential for cluster level effects on the estimates (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). Hence the models are controlled for cluster level effects and the standard errors are adjusted for the 171 clusters where the data is based from.

In the first set of models (Table 3) the analysis is conducted with all the control variables in order to measure the effect of those experiences on the odds of participating in community groups. Measures of individual experiences and household wealth measures are added to the subsequent models (Table 4) to test for their effect on participation in community groups in order to tease out the independent effect of caste and ethnicity on participation in any type of community group programs.

### **RESULTS**

The results from the logistic regressions that test the effect of an individual's caste and ethnicity on participation in community groups demonstrate an association between age-old, historical, economical, social and psychological exclusionary ideologies and practices, on behavior related to participation in community groups. The results demonstrate that more contemporary experiences of educational attainment, exposure to television and cinema, experiences with work for pay outside of the home and one's assets, account for some of the

effect in this relationship, but there is much more that is not accounted for. These results are more relevant when we consider the fact that most of these community group programs in this context have the objective of delivering basic services and increasing access to the poor and socially excluded populations. The results from this analysis are presented in Tables 3 and 4. They are presented as *odds ratios*, so that a coefficient of greater than one represents *higher* odds of participation in community groups, and a coefficient of less than one represents *lower* odds of participation.

### ***The Influence of Caste on Participation in Community Groups***

Table 3 presents the estimates of the relationship between caste and ethnicity, and participation in community groups. The richness of the data allows for controlling for childhood context and parental experiences, as well as their birth cohort, marital status, and the number of children they have. Compared to the upper caste Hindus, which is the reference category, all other caste groups have much lower odds of participating in community groups. Being from the Terai Tibeto-Burman group decreases one's odds by about 90%, by 81% for low caste Hindus and by 66% for the Hill Tibeto-Burman groups when controlling for other demographic characteristics, parental experiences and exposure to selected institutions in one's childhood. Of all the control measures it is particularly interesting to note that the odds of women participating in community groups compared to men is *lower* by 50%, given the context where generally many community group programs aim at increasing the participation of women.

---

Table 3 about here

---

### **Individual Experiences as Intervening Factors**

Table 4 presents the results for how individual experiences influence the relationship between caste and ethnicity, and participation in community groups. Model 1 in Table 4 presents the results after the introduction of measures of educational attainment, exposure to media, experiences with travel and labor force participation. First, the effects of such experiences on community group participation are briefly discussed followed by an analysis of the overall influence of caste and ethnicity with the individual experiences as intervening factors.

As discussed earlier, educational attainment is one of the most important predictors of participation in voluntary organizations and in community level groups even though it is not

necessarily the individuals with the highest levels of education who participate more. In western Chitwan, we see that an increase in each year of education increases the odds of participation by 16%. Additional tests conducted using an alternate coding of four levels of educational attainment (no education, primary, secondary and high school plus) showed that the highest level of educational qualifications was associated with the highest odds of participation compared to individuals with only primary level education<sup>17</sup>. The access to information about community based programs and criteria for membership, the confidence and skills needed to communicate with program staff, the wider social capital individuals gain through their educational attainment, all appear to better equip them to participate in community group programs. Another point of interest, which is not discussed in detail by this study, is that the introduction of the measure of educational attainment affects the gender differences quite dramatically. Among men and women with similar levels of education, there is no significant difference in the odds of their participation in community groups.

The influence of media exposure has one of the largest influences where the odds of participation are almost 127%. The experience of travel to Kathmandu, the capital city, as well as outside of the country, also increases the odds of participation by 36%. As discussed earlier, these influences are likely to be working through the power of exposure to new ideas and new information that individuals gain through watching television and movies, and through travelling to places that are very different from their own communities. Individuals are introduced to new ways of living, social and economic interactions and living standards that are very different from their own. This can contribute to increased aspirations for the kind of life style they see for themselves and for their children. Participation in community groups, learning to access basic services, and additional financial and other kinds of resources can provide an additional opportunity for status enhancement for all individuals, which would be a strong motivation for joining groups.

Different experiences with labor force participation have differential influences on participation in community groups. Having had any salary work increases the odds of participation by about 31% while the experience of wage labor decreases the odds though the

---

<sup>17</sup> These results are not shown here, but they are contrary to evidence from other countries where individuals with middle levels of education are most likely to participate in community groups. But in the context where poverty is a relative issue and very few individuals are wealthy, even those with more education are most likely to access additional opportunities available in the community to improve their life conditions.

latter result is not statistically significant. Participation in community groups increases the opportunity costs for people involved in wage labor. By having to participate in periodic meetings and other group related activities, wage laborers have to weigh their option between investing time in outcomes that are not necessarily immediate and that between the need for wages for their daily subsistence.

We can see that these measures of more recent experiences (in the context of Nepal and Chitwan) explain and reduce some of the effects of the other caste and ethnic groups compared to the upper caste Hindus on participation in community groups. These measures account slightly more for reducing the negative effects of participation for the low caste Hindus from 81% to 70%, compared to the upper caste Hindus, than for the Hill or the Terai Tibeto-Burmese categories (reduced by four and six percentage points, respectively). But the influence of caste and ethnicity on participation in community group programs overall, remains strong and significant influence of caste and ethnicity inspite of all the individual level experiences and makes the most difference. Hence even among individuals with similar educational attainment, exposure to media, experiences with travel, and labor force participation, the odds of participation in community groups continue to be influenced by their caste and ethnicity. The social and historical context of stratification of the social order by one's caste, directly identifiable by one's family name and physical features to some extent, strongly influence even those particular activities that are aimed at alleviating poverty and social inequalities at the community level.

The effective functioning of community groups is dependent on the collective action based on trust, close cooperation and communication between members. Even though historically communities were organized around a relationship of interdependence between the different occupational caste groups, due to the hierarchical nature attributed to the different occupations stigma and discrimination towards low caste (*Kami, Damai, Sarki*) and marginalized ethnic groups (*Tharu, Darai and Kumal* in Chitwan) was present. The rules and norms of ritual purity/ pollution, perpetuated by strict practices of endogamy successfully created social distances between groups, which even the groups themselves have internalized for decades. The Tharu, as Guneratne (1994) points out, have internalized their position of "backwardness" due to their limitations in the contemporary, 'modern' experiences. The *Dalits* on the other hand, developed a parallel system of hierarchy within the different sub caste groups and continue to

practice internal group discrimination based on similar principles of ritual pollution (Dahal et al. 2002).

### The Influence of Household Wealth

In Model 2 of Table 4, three measures of wealth are introduced to examine the intervening effect of wealth on caste and ethnicity and its influence on group participation. The results demonstrate that household wealth reduces the negative odds of participation for all other caste and ethnic groups compared to the upper caste Hindus, though the changes are marginal. The wealth measures account for an eight percentage point change in the odds of participating in community groups for the low caste groups compared to the high caste Hindus, while it accounts for only a two percentage point change for the Terai Tibeto-Burman groups. Hence even among individuals with similar levels of individual experiences and wealth, their ascribed identity of caste and ethnicity continues to influence their participation in community groups.

We can see that having ownership of the more productive and valuable *khet* land increases the odds of participation in community groups by about 48% while the ownership of more consumer items (out of seven different items) increases the odds by 13% for all other caste groups in comparison to the upper caste Hindus. This is consistent with previous studies which have demonstrated that participation in community group programs has not been able to reach the poorest segment of the society. Hence even among individuals with similar educational attainment and experiences with media, travel and work, as well as similar economic status, caste and ethnicity continues to have an extremely strong influence on the odds of participation in community groups<sup>18</sup>.

The upper caste Hindus – the *Bahun* and *Chettri* in this context - has traditionally had highest social status, most often overlapping with economic and political power, which has strongly influenced their access to more contemporary or ‘modern’ opportunities as well. Caste and ethnicity are not the only influential factors that affect participation in community group programs aimed at improving life conditions, but the study results demonstrate that they are important makers that affect this particular behavior as well as other life outcomes.

---

<sup>18</sup> Additional tests were conducted using different caste and ethnic groups as the reference category (results not shown), all of which demonstrates that the lower caste Hindu and the Hill Tibeto-Burman groups are not very different from each other but they are consistently different from the upper caste Hindus and the Terai Tibeto-Burman groups. Overall upper caste Hindus have the highest likelihood and the Terai Tibeto-Burmans have the lowest likelihood of participating in community group programs.



---

Table 4 about here

---

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the existence of caste and ethnic disparities in participation in community group programs in the context of Chitwan Valley in Nepal. The study examines how caste influences the kinds of life opportunities and barriers individuals and groups face in terms of educational attainment, media exposure, travel and work experiences, economic conditions and ultimately participation in community group programs. The results from this study provide important empirical evidence of the influence of caste and ethnicity in participation in local level community group programs. It presents strong evidence of a residual ‘penalty’ due to one’s caste and ethnic identity and that this influence is independent of other individual characteristics and experiences that influence one’s ability to participate and access resources. The framework of social exclusion provides an opportunity to assess how formal and informal institutions influence the life chances of groups of individuals based on their social and physical identities such as that of caste and ethnicity, and how this influence is not necessarily only characteristic of economic disparities in conditions.

It is important to acknowledge the probability of selectivity playing a role in this analyses and this context. Individuals with particular attributes may have been more likely to participate in community group activities, contributing to the strong association that has been observed by this study. This study attempts to address the potential for such reciprocal association by controlling for demographic and individual experiences, including that of the childhood context and parental experience, which could potentially have a spurious relation. To account for the temporal order of individual experiences and participation in community groups, longitudinal data would be essential.

Disparities and discrimination based on social identities have been recognized as a root cause of a conflict not only in the South Asia region but also around the world. It is also true that much of such conflict is a composite of more than just one cause of discrimination and is compounded by extreme levels of poverty in most of the poor countries in Asia and Africa for instance. The study points to the need for further investigation into the mechanisms of how caste

and ethnicity in itself can account for such a strong relationship. The differences in cultural practices of accumulating social capital among the different caste and ethnic groups might provide on level of explanation. A better understanding of the existence and processes of collective action and group cohesion that differ within the groups need to be sought so that government and non-government programs can adapt their strategies to address issues of social exclusion. Attempts to better understand these cultural differences also need to focus on a better understand of the formal and informal barriers that particular caste and ethnic groups face in taking up opportunities that are aimed specifically at equitable access to and distribution of resources.

This study also has serious implications for accountability in policy implementation by national and local governments. The effectiveness of legal and policy measures to remove discriminatory practices and behaviors towards social groups within the national context have to be continually assessed with empirical evidence, enriched with in-depth narratives from the lives of those affected. The invisible “penalty” attached to one’s social identity that affects equal life chances and life opportunities need to be identified and recommendations for measures to displace them need to be made so that the “disadvantage, alienation and lack of freedom” faced by some groups of individuals within a society can be better addressed. Measures of accountability within government structures and within international agencies that support poverty alleviation, social justice and basic human rights, need to be put to strong tests.

## REFERENCES

- Adhikari, Bhim. 2005. "Poverty, property rights and collective action: understanding the distributive aspects of common property resource management". *Environment and Development Economics* 10: 7–31.
- Axinn, George H. and Nancy W. Axinn. 1997. *Collaboration in International Rural Development: A Practitioner's Handbook*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Axinn, William G. and Scott T. Yabiku. 2001. "Social Change, the Social Organization of Families, and Fertility Limitation." *American Journal of Sociology* 106(5):1219-1261.
- Axinn, William G., Lisa D. Pearce, and Dirgha J. Ghimire. 1999. "Innovations in Life History Calendar Applications." *Social Science Research* 28(3):243-264.
- Bayly, S. 1999. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Beard, V. A. 2005. "Individual determinants of participation in community development in Indonesia". *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 23: 21-39.
- Bennett, Lynn. 2008. "Policy Reform and Cultural Change: Contesting Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal". In A.A. Dani and A. de Haan (Ed.) *Inclusive States. Social Policy and Structural Inequalities*. The World Bank, Washington DC, pp 197-224.
- Béteille, André. 1969. *Castes: Old and New, Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification*. Asia Publishing House.
- Bhalla, Ajit, Frédéric Lapeyre. 1997. "Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework". *Development and Change* (28)3: 413-433.
- Biggs, S.D., S.M. Gurung and D. Messerschmidt. 2004. "An Exploratory Study of Gender, Social Inclusion and Empowerment through Development Groups and Group-Based Organizations in Nepal: Building on the Positive". (Version 2, November), Report submitted to the *Gender and Social Exclusion Assessment (GSEA) Study*, Kathmandu: DfID and The World Bank.
- Bista, D. B. 1972. *People of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Bista, D. B. 1991. *Fatalism and Development. Nepal's Struggle for Modernization*. Orient Longman, Patna, India.
- Blaikie, P., J. Cameron and D. Seddon. 1980. *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Buchmann, C., and Emily Hannum. 2001. "Education and Stratification in Developing Countries: a Review of Theories and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27: 77-102.
- Burgard, Sarah. 2002. "Does Race Matter? Children's Height in Brazil and South Africa." *Demography*, 39 (4): 763-790.
- CARE Nepal. 2006. *CARE Nepal Strategic Plan 2006-2009*. CARE Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Central Bureau of Statistics. 2002. *Rastriya Janaganana, 2058: Jat Jati ko Sankhya*. National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal Government.

- Chitwan Valley Family Survey (CVFS). 1996. Codebooks and Questionnaires for Individual Survey and Life History Calendar. <http://perl.psc.isr.umich.edu/indivdata.htm>
- Cleaver, F. 1999. "Paradoxes of Participation: Questioning Participatory Approaches to Development". *Journal of International Development* 11:597-612.
- Coleman, J. S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital". *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 94: 95-120.
- Curtis, J. E., Edward G. Grabb and Douglas E. Baer. 1992. "Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis." *American Sociological Review* (57):139-152.
- Curtis, J. E., Douglas E. Baer, and Edward G. Grabb. 2001. "Nation of Joiners: Explaining Voluntary Association Membership in Democratic Societies." *American Sociological Review* Vol 66(6):783-805.
- Dahal, D.R., Y.B. Gurung, B. Acharya, K. Hemchuri and D. Swarnakar. 2002. *National Dalit Strategy Report*. (Prepared for the National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal. ActionAid Nepal, Care Nepal and Save the Children: Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Dasgupta, A. and V.A. Beard. 2007. Community Driven Development, Collective Action and Elite Capture in Indonesia. *Development and Change*, 38(2): 229-249.
- Dirks, N.B. 1989. "The invention of caste: Civil society in colonial India". *Social Analysis*, 25: 42-52.
- Dumont, Louis. 1980. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Translated by Basia Gulati. University of Chicago Press.
- Elder, G. 1983. "The Life Course Perspective". Pp 54-60 in Michael Gordon (Ed.) *The American Family in Social Historical Perspective*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering development: the making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press.
- Gaige, F.H. 1975. *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gellner, David N., J. Pfaff-Czarnecka and J. Whelpton (Ed). 1997. *Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom: the politics of culture in contemporary Nepal*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood.
- Ghurye, G.S. 1996. *Caste and Race in India*. Popular Prakashan, Bombay, India.
- Gore, C. 1996. *Social Exclusion and the Design of Anti-Poverty Strategy in Developing Countries*. Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies (mimeo).
- Greenman, Emily, and Yu Xie. "Double jeopardy? The interaction of gender and race on earnings in the United States." *Social Forces*, 86(3):1217-1244. 2008.
- Guneratne, A. 2002. *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Guneratne, U. A. 1994. "The Tharus of Chitwan: Ethnicity, Class and the State in Nepal". PhD Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, Illinois.

- Gurung, H.B. 1998. *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions*. New Era, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Hannum, Emily and Yu Xie. 1998. "Ethnic Stratification in Northwest China: Occupational Differences between Han Chinese and National Minorities in Xinjiang, 1982-1990," *Demography* 35(3): 323-33.
- Hofer, Andras. 1979. *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal. A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854. Khumbu Himal* Band 13/2. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag of Wagner.
- House, James S. 2002. "Understanding Social Factors and Inequalities in Health: 20th Century Progress and 21st Century Prospects". *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 43(2):125-142
- Hughes, Michael and Melvin E. Thomas. 1998. "The Continuing Significance of Race Revisited: A Study of Race, Class, and Quality of Life in America, 1972 to 1996". *American Sociological Review* 63(6):785-795.
- Inglehart, Ronald F. and Pippa Norris. 2001. "Cultural Barriers to Equal Representation." *Journal of Democracy*, July: 126-140.
- Jordan, Bill. 1996. *A Theory of Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Blackwell Publishers Inc., Cambridge, MA.
- Kabeer, N. 1994. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso.
- Kabeer, N. 2000. "Social Exclusion, Poverty and Discrimination: Towards an Analytical Framework". *IDS Bulletin*, 31(4).
- Kabeer, N. 2000. "Social Exclusion, Poverty and Discrimination: Towards and Analytical Framework". *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 31(4):83-97.
- Kabeer, N. 2006. "Poverty, Social Exclusion and the MDGs: The Challenge of 'Durable Inequalities' in the Asian Context". *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 37(3):64-78.
- Kenworthy, Lane and Melissa Malami. 1999. "Gender Inequality in Political Representation: A Worldwide Comparative Analysis". *Social Forces*, Vol. 78, No. 1, p. 235-269.
- Lawoti, Mahendra. 2005. *Towards a Democratic Nepal: Inclusive Political Institutions for a Multicultural Society*. Sage Publications.
- Leve, Lauren G. 2001. "Between Jesse Helms and Ram Bahadur: Participation and Empowerment in Women's Literacy Programming in Nepal". *Political and Legal Anthropology Review (PoLAR)* Vol 24(1): 108-128
- Leys, Colin. 1996. *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*. London: James Currey.
- Mansuri, G. and V. Rao. 2004. "Community-Based and -Driven Development: A Critical Review". *World Bank Res Obs*. 19:1-39
- Muller-Boker, Ulrike. 1999. "The Chitawan Tharus in Southern Nepal: An Ethnoecological Approach". *Nepal Research Center Publication*, No. 21, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart.
- Peet, Richard and E. R. Hartwick. 1999. *Theories of Development*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Power, A. and, W.J. Wilson. 2000. *Social Exclusion and the Future of Cities*. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, London.

- Pradhan, Rajendra. 2002. "Ethnicity, caste and a pluralist society" in *State of Nepal*, Edited by Kanak Mani Dixit and Shastri Ramchandaran, Kathmandu: Himal Books, pp:1-21.
- Sen, Amartya. 2000 "Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Scrutiny". *Social Development Paper No. 1*, Office of Environmental and Social Development, Asian Development Bank.
- Sen, A. 1992. *Inequality Reexamined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Silver, Hilary. 1995. "Social Exclusion: Comparative Analysis of Europe and Middle East Youth," *Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper*.
- Sheth, D.L. 2004. *Caste, Ethnicity and Exclusion in South Asia: The Role of Affirmative Action Policies in Building Inclusive Societies*. UN/HRD Regional Paper, Islamabad.
- Shivakoti, Ganesh P., W.G. Axinn, P. Bhandari and N. B. Chhetri. 1999. "The Impact of Community Context on Land Use in an Agricultural Society." *Population and Environment* 20(3):191-213.
- Shrestha, B.K., 1999, 'The origins and evolution of user groups as the institutional anchor for development at the grassroots', *Sahabagita: The Journal of Development and Local Government* 2(2)/3(1): 23-30. Local Development Training Academy, Kathmandu.
- Srinivas, M.N. 1966. "Sanskritization". In *Social Change in Modern India*, pp.1-45. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stash, Sharon Khatri-Chhetri, and Emily Hannum. 2001. "Who Goes to School? Educational Stratification by Gender, Caste, and Ethnicity in Nepal." *Comparative Education Review*, 45 (3): 354-378.
- Steele, F., S. Amin and R. T. Naved. 2001. "Savings/Credit Group Formation and Change in Contraception". *Demography* 38(2):267-282.
- Verba, and N. H. Nie. 1972. *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Weinberger, Katinka and Johannes Paul Jütting. 2001. "Women's Participation in Local Organizations: Conditions and Constraints". *World Development* Vol. 29(8): 1391-1404.
- Whelpton, John. 1997. "Political Identity in Nepal: State, Nation and Community". In *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*. Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

## TABLES

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for all measures used to analyze the Effect of Caste/Ethnicity on Community Group Participation, Chitwan 1996.**

Variables	Coding	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Participation in Community Groups</i>	1=yes, 0=no	0.18	0.38	0	1
<i>Caste/Ethnicity</i>					
Upper Caste Hindus	1=yes, 0=no	0.49	0.50	0	1
Low Caste Hindus	1=yes, 0=no	0.13	0.33	0	1
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	1=yes, 0=no	0.19	0.39	0	1
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	1=yes, 0=no	0.19	0.39	0	1
<i>Gender</i>	1=female, 0=male	0.50	0.50	0	1
<i>Birth Cohort</i>					
Born 1962-71(cohort 1, ages 25-34)	1=yes, 0=no	0.43	0.49	0	1
Born 1952-61(cohort 2, ages 35-44)	1=yes, 0=no	0.33	0.47	0	1
Born 1942-51(cohort 3, ages 45-54)	1=yes, 0=no	0.24	0.42	0	1
<i>Marital Status</i>					
Never Married	1=yes, 0=no	0.02	0.16	0	1
Married	1=yes, 0=no	0.81	0.39	0	1
Single (widowed/separated/divorced)	1=yes, 0=no	0.16	0.37	0	1
<i>Children (number living)</i>	2=>5 1= <4 0=0	1.16	0.53	0	2
<i>Index for Childhood Exposure</i> <sup>19</sup>	0-1=no of exposure items	2.33	1.23	0	4
<i>Index for Parents' Education</i>	1=either parent 0=no education	0.19	0.39	0	1
<i>Index for Parents' Work</i>	1=either parent 0=no work	0.45	0.50	0	1
<i>Educational Attainment</i>	0 = no education, 10=grade 10&above	3.17	3.95	0	10
- No Education	1=yes, 0=no	0.54	0.50	0	1
- Primary Only	1=yes, 0=no	0.17	0.38	0	1
- Secondary Only	1=yes, 0=no	0.14	0.35	0	1
- High School and above	1=yes, 0=no	0.15	0.36	0	1
<i>Media Exposure (Cinema/TV)</i>	1=yes, 0=no	0.93	0.25	0	1
<i>Travel Experience</i>	1=yes, 0=no	0.44	0.50	0	1
<i>Salary work ever</i>	1=yes, 0=no	0.32	0.47	0	1
<i>Wage work ever</i>	1=yes, 0=no	0.45	0.50	0	1
Ownership of <i>bari</i> (upland) farmed	1=yes, 0=no	0.55	0.50	0	1
Ownership of <i>khet</i> (lowland) farmed	1=yes, 0=no	0.60	0.49	0	1
Index for Consumer Items <sup>20</sup>	0-7= no. of items	2.46	1.54	0	7

*N* = 2,668 - 2,671

<sup>19</sup> Presence of four services (schools, market, employer, programs), within a one hour's walk during childhood of the respondent, before 12 years of age.

<sup>20</sup> Index of ownership of seven consumer items: radio, TV, bicycle, motorcycle, cart, have a toilet at home, and have electricity at home.

**Table 2: Participation in community groups ever by caste/ethnicity among men and women of ages 24-55 years, Chitwan, 1996.**

Participation in Any Community Group(s) Ever	Caste/Ethnic Groups (in percentages)				
	Upper Caste Hindu <i>(Bahun, Chettri)</i>	Low Caste Hindu <i>(Kami, Damai, Sarki)</i>	Hill Tibeto-Burman <i>(Gurung, Tamang)</i>	Terai Tibeto-Burman <i>(Tharu, Darai, Kumal)</i>	Total
“Yes” Percentage Numbers	29% (390)	7% (23)	11% (58)	4% (19)	<b>18% (490)</b>

Notes:

*N* = 2,722

Individuals are members of multiple community groups.

Of the 490 who participated in groups 38% are women and 62% are men.

Newar and ‘Other’ caste/ethnic groups not included in the study sample.



**Table 3: Logistic Regression Estimates for the Effect of Caste/Ethnicity on Participation in Community Group Programs, with control variables only Chitwan 1996.**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Model 1</u> (Odds Ratio)
<i>Caste/Ethnicity</i>	
Upper Caste Hindu <sup>a</sup>	<i>Reference</i>
Lower Caste Hindu	0.19*** (-7.03)
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	0.34*** (-6.68)
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	0.10*** (-9.35)
<i>Gender (Female=1)</i>	0.50*** (-6.22)
<i>Birth Cohort</i>	
1942-1952 (Cohort 3, ages 45-54)	1.13 (0.07)
1952-1961 (Cohort 2, ages 35-44)	1.41** (2.61)
1962-1971 (Cohort 1, ages 25-34) <sup>a</sup>	-
<i>Marital Status</i>	
Never Married <sup>a</sup>	-
Married	2.02+ (1.74)
Single (widow/separate/divorce)	1.21 (0.44)
<i>Number of Children</i>	0.96 (-0.34)
<i>Childhood Exposure</i> <sup>21</sup>	1.29*** (4.62)
<i>Parental Experiences</i>	
Parents' Education	1.20 (1.37)
Parents' Work Experience	1.10 (0.86)
<i>N</i>	2,667

Notes:

Estimates are presented as odds ratio, with Z-statistics in parenthesis.  
Standard Error adjusted for 171 clusters in neighborhood.

<sup>a</sup> Reference Category

+p<1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

<sup>21</sup> Presence of four services (schools, market, employer, programs), within a one hour's walk during childhood of the respondent, before 12 years of age.

**Table 4: Logistic Regression Estimates for the Effect of Caste/Ethnicity on Participation in Community Group Programs, with Individual Experiences and Wealth as Intervening Factors, Chitwan 1996.**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Model 1</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 2</u> (Odds Ratio)
<i>Caste/Ethnicity</i>		
Upper Caste Hindu	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Lower Caste Hindu	0.30*** (-4.57)	0.38*** (-3.68)
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	0.38*** (-4.91)	0.42*** (-4.45)
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	0.16*** (-6.44)	0.18*** (-5.99)
<i>Individual Experiences</i>		
Educational Attainment	1.16*** (7.71)	1.15*** (7.13)
Media Exposure	2.27* (2.04)	2.12+ (1.88)
Travel Experiences	1.36** (2.58)	1.34** (2.49)
Occupational Experiences		
Salary work ever	1.31+ (1.83)	1.38** (2.20)
Wage work ever	0.97 (-0.23)	1.05 (0.40)
<i>Household Wealth</i>		
Own <i>Bari</i> Land	-	0.98 (-0.19)
Own <i>Khet</i> Land	-	1.48** (2.51)
Index for Consumer Items <sup>22</sup>	-	1.13** (2.54)
<i>N</i>	2,667	2,667
<b>Control Variables Not Shown</b>		

*Notes:*

Estimates are presented as odds ratio, with Z-statistics in parenthesis.  
Standard Error adjusted for 171 clusters in neighborhood.

<sup>a</sup> Reference Category

+p<1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

<sup>22</sup> Index of ownership of seven consumer items: radio, TV, bicycle, motorcycle, cart, have a toilet at home, and have electricity at home.

**Table X: Logistic Regression Estimates for the Effect of Caste/Ethnicity on Participation in Community Group Programs, Chitwan 1996.**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Model 1</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 2</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 3</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 4</u> (Odds Ratio)
<i>Caste/Ethnicity</i>				
Upper Caste Hindu	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Lower Caste Hindu		0.19*** (-7.03)	0.30*** (-4.57)	0.38*** (-3.68)
Hill Tibeto-Burmese		0.34*** (-6.68)	0.38*** (-4.91)	0.42*** (-4.45)
Terai Tibeto-Burmese		0.10*** (-9.35)	0.16*** (-6.44)	0.18*** (-5.99)
<i>Individual Experiences</i>				
Educational Attainment	-	-	1.16*** (7.71)	1.15*** (7.13)
Media Exposure	-	-	2.27* (2.04)	2.12+ (1.88)
Travel Experiences	-	-	1.36** (2.58)	1.34** (2.49)
Occupational Experiences				
Salary work ever	-	-	1.31+ (1.83)	1.38** (2.20)
Wage work ever	-	-	0.97 (-0.23)	1.05 (0.40)
<i>Household Wealth</i>				
Own <i>Bari</i> Land	-	-	-	0.98 (-0.19)
Own <i>Khet</i> Land	-	-	-	1.48** (2.51)
Index for Consumer Items <sup>23</sup>	-	-	-	1.13** (2.54)
<i>Gender (Female=1)</i>		0.50*** (-6.22)	<i>Control Variables Not Shown</i>	
<i>Birth Cohort</i>				
1942-1952 (Cohort 3, ages 45-54)		1.13 (0.07)	-	-
1952-1961 (Cohort 2, ages 35-44)		1.41** (2.61)	-	-
1962-1971 (Cohort 1, ages 25-34) <sup>a</sup>	-		-	-
<i>Marital Status</i>				
Never Married <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-	-
Married		2.02+ (1.74)	-	-

<sup>23</sup> Index of ownership of seven consumer items: radio, TV, bicycle, motorcycle, cart, have a toilet at home, & have electricity at home.

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Model 1</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 2</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 3</u> (Odds Ratio)	<u>Model 4</u> (Odds Ratio)
<i>Number of Children</i>	-	0.96 (-0.34)	-	-
<i>Childhood Exposure</i> <sup>24</sup>	-	1.29*** (4.62)	-	-
<i>Parental Experiences</i>				
Parents' Education	-	1.20 (1.37)	-	-
Parents' Work Experience	-	1.10 (0.86)	-	-
<i>N</i>	2,667	2,667	2,667	2,667

*Notes:*

Estimates are presented as odds ratio, with Z-statistics in parenthesis.

Standard Error adjusted for 171 clusters in neighborhood.

<sup>a</sup> Reference Category

+p<1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

---

<sup>24</sup> Presence of four services (schools, market, employer, programs), within a one hour's walk during childhood of the respondent, before 12 years of age.