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Civil Society and Good Governance: (Re-) Conceptualizing the Interface

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Summary. — Civil society action is thought to be a prerequisite for good governance, as well as an indicator for it. The assumption of a positive correlation has guided many development interventions. However, considering political synergies, frameworks of accountability and mobilization of communities to claim their entitlements as key elements of how civil society and governance interface, we find this hypothesis to be problematic. Evidence from two contiguous regions in rural north India suggests that where community organizations are assertive, the governance structures and institutions are not necessarily better oriented to their demands. Rather, where such organizations are able to exploit intra-elite conflict and forge alliances with a section of the elite, they are better able to influence service-delivery. However, even this strategy does not help to expand the political spaces available to poor people.
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The thesis which asserts that men become conscious of fundamental conflicts on the level of ideology is not psychological or moralistic in character, but structural and epistemological.

(Gramsci, 1996, p. 265)

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CIVIL SOCIETY–GOVERNANCE INTERFACE

The discourse of governance inheres cooperation between civil society and political society, and between the state and citizens. Osborne and Gaebler (1992), while articulating the principles of what was then "new" public management, propose that governments would be more effective if they acted as steersmen rather than as oarsmen. Distinguishing between government and governance, Stoker (1998) asserts that whereas government refers to the formal institutional structure and location of authoritative decision-making, the essence of governance is the "interactive relationship between and within government and non-governmental forces" (Stoker, 1998, p. 38). In an important study that compiles and compares empirical data from 16 countries, Hyden, Court, and Mease (2004, p. 16) argue that governance refers to "the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which the state as well as economic and societal actors interact to take decisions." Swilling (1997) further simplifies the definition of governance: it is about how power structures and civil society inter-relate to produce a civic public realm. [1]

Civil society has been described as a third sector, outside the market and the state, by scholars such as Cohen and Arato (1992). Discussing the re-emergence of the concept in eastern Europe and Latin America, they contend

that it could become the primary locus for the expansion of democratic and civil rights. This conception draws intellectually from the liberal tradition that views conservative governments and organized business interests in unison (Oommen, 2003, p. 128). Hall (1995) points to the positive role performed by civil society during the transition of eastern Europe from authoritarianism to parliamentary democracy. For Latin America, Nonan-Ferrell (2004) highlights how civil society contributes to the mechanisms used to control the powers of the government.

A positive correlation between civil society action and good governance outcomes is forcefully argued by a number of development theorists and practitioners. In many of these writings, civil society is said to comprise various dimensions—such as, social networks and resources, community institutions, civic associational engagement, decentralization, pluralization, and so on. Uphoff (1986) is among the earliest authors to describe through case studies how social networks determine governance outcomes. He asserts that the more autonomous communities are of the bureaucratic apparatus, the better they are able to influence development processes. Ostrom (1990) proposes "grafting" of institutions among rural communities to enable them to organize better for control over property rights. Formalization of hitherto informal associations is deemed to strengthen civil society action. Putnam (1994), while pointing to the disparities between northern and southern Italy, identifies the existence of social capital as a key causal factor for economic development in the north and the lack thereof in the south. Narayanan (1997) cites a range of cases—housing in El Salvador, natural resource management in Egypt, tubewell irrigation in Nepal, primary education in Balochistan, sanitation in Indonesia, rural water supply in Sri Lanka—to support her claim that forming and strengthening community organizations lead to improved service-delivery. Krishna (2001) finds that collective engagement helps households in six districts of northwestern India to prevent the downslide into poverty. [2]

2. UNRAVELING THE AGENDA

Evidently, both governance and civil society have come to occupy a crucial place in the development literature. They are imbued with many positive attributes; are positively correlated with each other and with sustainable development, poverty-eduction, and empowerment; and are conceived as solutions to most of the world's problems—local, regional, global. However, an increasing body of literature has already begun to unravel the apolitical donor-driven governance and civil society agenda.

(a) Problematizing "civil society"

According to Howell and Pearce (2001), an instrumentalist perspective guides the entire discourse on civil society. They throw light on three most crucial factors for the advancement of the civil society agenda: (1) constricted financial portfolios of donors, such as USAID; (2) minimalist perspective of the state by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank; and (3) concern in the west, especially the United States, about declining social capital, leading organizations such as the Ford Foundation to support activities that build engagement among people. In the enormous literature on the subject, civil society is presented as neutral rhetoric, whereas actually it serves to promote the tenets of market liberalism, by restricting the size and scope of the state (Rieff, 1999). Even in eastern Europe, the cradle of civil society's resurgence, the usefulness of the concept in explaining the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and subsequent attempts at improving services for the poor through mechanisms such as decentralization is being challenged. It has been argued that the important changes of the late 1980s were not so much the result of people's power as is romantically portrayed, but influenced by roundtables between the authorities and the dissidents (Tucker, 2000). Particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic, the "non-political politics" of the dissidents meant a "de-politicized" model of civil society which ultimately benefited the emerging market forces (Brannan, 2003). Such a model did not prepare civil society to meet the onslaught of other non-state actors, particularly markets in the Ukraine, religious orthodoxy in Bulgaria and resurgent authoritarianism in Tadjikistan (O'brien, 1998).

The clamor to politicize civil society is gaining ground. Making a case for promoting "citizenship as agency" as against "citizenship as consumption" in Brazil and Bolivia, Oxhorn (2005, pp. 31–32) emphasizes the need for a definition of civil society that more closely reflects the power relations in a given society. Another

study comparing both these countries with the Indian State of Kerala emphasizes the need for the state to closely supervise the process of decentralization (Abraham & Platteau, 2005). Yet another study compares the political economy of decentralization in Columbia with that of Chile, and points to how the determinants of institutional change are usually rooted in the region's political history and political culture (Angell, Lowden, & Thorp, 2001). Even the World Bank, recognizing the evidence from east Asia (China, Taiwan, and South Korea) and Latin America (Brazil), is forced to appreciate the positive role performed by the state in fostering community-driven models of development (Dasgupta, Grandvoinnet, & Rommani, 2003).

The concept of governance is also under scrutiny for being a charade behind which dominant powers promote their interests. It tends to construct a false dichotomy between the social and the political (Jenkins, 2002). Fisher (2003) highlights how the overarching neoliberal economic policy that has made inroads into a politically conservative state such as Nepal undermines opportunities for political equality and genuine civil society participation. Abrahamsen (2000, p. 147), in her discussion on how African states have been negotiating for development aid, concludes that one of the "main effects of the good governance discourse, despite all its proclamations in favor of democracy, is to help reproduce and maintain a world order that is essentially undemocratic." Evidently, "deepening of inequality and gigantic concentration of private power" (Ehrenberg, 1999, p. 250) mar the promise of better governance. Nonetheless, the problems with the way the concept is deployed should not blind us to its relevance. The concept is useful for analyzing and mapping the entire terrain of interaction between rights-holders and duty-bearers.

(b) *Political institutions matter*

That governance outcomes are strongly related with and determined by strengthening the relationship between citizens and the state, rather than dichotomizing them, is clear from the institutionalist approaches refined by Theda Skocpol and Peter Evans. Skocpol (1992) analyzes the political origins of American social policy and finds that federal schemes to protect women were the result of the organization of women's clubs corresponding with legislative tiers seeking alliances with persons at influential places who brought pressure on the Government. Indeed, many federally-funded social welfare programs were initiated as a result of the political efforts of the voluntary associations. As one of the most consistent critics of the preeminence accorded to depoliticized notions of civil society during the last decade, she points out that, at least in the United States, voluntary groups—often taken as a proxy for measuring the "thickness" of civil society—proliferated due to the encouragement of democratic governmental and political institutions (Fiorina & Skocpol, 1999), and not in isolation from them.

Evans (1996), in an insightful synthesis of studies from Taiwan, Kerala, Mexico, post-Communist Russia, and Ceara (in Brazil), concludes that the "synergies" which are prerequisite for positive developmental outcomes are best achieved when political competition compels policy-makers to make services available and even accept alliances with communities. This has important implications. Organizationally, coherent and dependable public institutions where officers are locally embedded, yet protected from particularist interests, are a key dimension of such competition, as evidence from Taiwan and Ceara reveals. But, the nature of political competition as determined by socioeconomic context is perhaps even more crucial, with relative social equality being a key factor in Taiwan's success. Political alliances forged by poor rural and urban groups emerge as crucial to overcoming the public–private divide.

(c) *Emerging approaches*

Drawing on Skocpol's framework for analysis of the political origins of social policy and on Evans' assertion that political synergies crucially determine the formulation of development policy, the "polity approach" seeks to explain policy-change as being determined by "the ways in which state and societal actors are constituted, become politically significant, and interact across the public–private divide" (Houtzager, 2003, p. 13). The polity approach persuades both academics and practitioners to recognize that state and civil society are not oppositional categories but mutually constitutive. [3] Evidence of collective action in the Philippines and Peru (Houtzager & Pattenden, 2003) as well as in Africa (Berman, 2004) reveals that pro-poor coalitions were most successful when a relatively coherent state was present, with a professionalized bureaucracy

and a broadly accepted authority. A recent comparative study on "Rights, Representation and the Poor" in cities of Asia and Latin America finds that poor communities are likely to try and solve their problems through existing political parties and *not* through membership associations as their better-off counterparts are. At least in urban areas, they consider the state to have an important presence in their lives (Harriss, 2005), and look to forming networks with it so as to influence policy implementation (Lavalle, Acharya, & Houtzager, 2005).

The polity approach recognizes that the relationship between the poor and national elites is closely defined by the levels of intra-elite competition and conflict over political authority and by the social basis of poor people's organizations. At the same time, it has been critiqued for overlooking political mobilization and concentrating excessively on policy-centered advocacy. It does not consider, for instance, those instances of political mobilization that may not lead to any policy-change, or are repressed or bought off or are determined by ethnic or caste loyalties. It takes the results of a given policy as its starting point, and goes backward to locate causal factors.

The notion of "political space" presents an advance over these limitations by focussing on three key dimensions: (1) the political discourse which raises poverty as a key issue; (2) the social and political strategies deployed by the poor to improve their position and condition; and (3) institutional channels through which the poor access, control, or contest policy. This approach has helped to explore the precise ways in which different political actors, institutions and discourses influence development and poverty-reduction (Bond & Zandamala, 2000 for Argentina; Villareal, 2002 for Mexico; Millastein, Oldfield, & Stokke, 2003 for South Africa; Jenkins & Goetz, 1999 for India; Paerregoard, 2002 for Peru).

(d) *India: an overview*

Within India, the world's largest democracy, the work highlighting a positive civil society–good governance relationship has tended to focus on the experience of forest protection committees in tribal-majority regions of West Bengal (Chopra, 2002) and Andhra Pradesh (D' Silva & Pai, 2003). These are areas where there is a direct conflict of interests between tribal communities and the Forest Department which permits powerful contractors to exploit forest produce, while debarring these communities from accessing the same resources. [4] However, the study contexts barely reflect the kind of socio-political mileu inhabited by the vast majority of people in India, a mileu where social and economic stratification is acute, and where, therefore, it is difficult to justify civil society as a monolith, and the state and civil society as oppositional categories.

Indeed, an analysis of the political economy of India's development reveals the class compromise made post-Independence between the industrial bourgeoisie and landlords (Patnaik, 1997). [5] Limited and skewed land reforms in most parts of the country, particularly the fertile plains in the north, failed to break the social power of large landlords. At the same time, it did create a unique social category of medium owner-cultivators comprising diverse castes that claimed historical linkages with the land despite ritual subordination to the "upper castes." They were officially designated as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and they devised a number of strategies to consolidate their newly acquired economic strength, combining upward cultural mobilization with political–economic demands. Their classification as OBCs entitled them to a host of federally sponsored schemes and subsidies, particularly in the sectors of agriculture, irrigation and water usage, and rural electricity.

The socio-political clout of medium owner-cultivators as well as industrial bourgeoisie together translated into a growing proportion of the Federal Government's developmental outlay comprising transfers such as subsidies and interest payments. By 1990, almost 40% of this outlay was being met through deficit financing. Such a source of development financing proved to be unsustainable, leading to the financial crisis of the following decade. Structural adjustment loans from Bretton Woods Institutions—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank—bailed India out of this crisis. These institutions insisted on loan conditionalities, forcing the Indian Government to embark on "neoliberal" reforms that focussed on, among others, fiscal discipline by reducing the fiscal deficit and restructuring public expenditure to priority areas (Reddy, 2000, pp. 505–506).

(e) *Exercises in regularization: reform and exclusion in India*

These neoliberal reforms and the discourses attendant on them are regularized, in a Grams-

cian sense, [6] by the Indian state in its daily interaction with its citizens. Through this, it attempts to regulate the opinions, structures, and practices in society, as well as make *commonplace* some of its own discourses. [7]

Regularization is reflected in a number of sectors, including public health. Although the Government has shied away from proclaiming it explicitly, trends in public expenditure on health reveal a reduction from 1.3% of the country's GDP in 1991 to 0.9% in 2001, indicating state rollback (United Nations Development Program, 2004, p. 158). Only four countries have a lower public spending on health than India does. In many parts of the country, this means (1) a number of positions for service-providers being vacant, and existing providers given charge of adjoining areas; (2) delays in payment of salaries and allowances, including travel allowance and hardship allowance for travelling into remote areas, leading to demoralization; and (3) providers preferring to service better connected hamlets, usually belonging to "upper castes," medium cultivators and sometimes politically connected "lower" castes.

Another discourse continuously "regularized" in India is that of birth-based exclusion. Although the formal apparatus of democratic governance is in place, there are regions where this does not translate into substantial democracy for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as hitherto "untouchable" dalit castes, tribes, and religious minorities, unorganized on-farm and off-farm labor, and women. No doubt pre-capitalist relations of production have been penetrated, and education and public sector employment made available through affirmative action. But domination on the basis of birth-based attributes like castes and clans persist, and often determine the differential attitude of the bureaucracy, police, and service-providers toward citizens, especially in rural north India, where the present study is located.

(f) *Upheaval*

Regularization is by no means universal, or even imperative. It is contested by, to use another Gramscian concept, "upheaval." Upheaval dislodges not only the "regularized" discourses, but also the very structures that try and regularize, including (but not limited to) the arms and apparatus of government. In the present context, "upheaval" refers to dislodging the regularized discourse of state rollback

and birth-based discrimination by agents of the state, for example, health service-providers. It should be clear that, paradoxically, upheaval in rural north India necessarily draws on the Fundamental Rights enshrined in India's Constitution. Upheaval translates into articulating the interests of the poor, who most likely happen to belong to the "subordinated" communities; into making the state and its agents work; and into making the state more responsive than it currently is.

(g) *Synthesizing the evidence*

The empirical studies described earlier—spanning Asia, Africa, Latin America, and eastern Europe—reveal how an optimal level of synergy between state and civil society is a marker of good governance. The alliances and networks forged by poor people and their representatives with key decision-makers emerge as particularly significant. Such synergies are strongest where communities are neither subordinated to the state apparatus, nor isolated from it.

The frameworks of accountability that bind rights-holders and duty-bearers emerge as the second marker of good governance. They do not allow "synergies" to become an excuse for governments to abdicate their responsibilities. Rather, government's role as duty-bearers is emphasized. As duty-bearers, various actors in the government—bureaucrats, police, lawmakers, and service-providers—are accountable to citizens. Citizens are recognized as rights-holders.

Mobilization of poor communities emerges as the third crucial dimension of good governance in this context. Mobilization means not only access to productive resources but also negotiation with political power, recreation of cultural spaces, and establishment of representative governance. Communities access resources and spaces from which they were so far excluded, participate in and influence policy-making at various levels, and enforce the implementation of policy while rejecting policies that do not serve their interests.

In India, therefore, poor rural communities do not necessarily want to overthrow the state, but in fact to strengthen its presence and make it more effective in implementing development policy. Governance for them is a scenario where poor people forge alliances with important stakeholders, within the local community and with policy-makers and service-providers. In these communities, the prospects for good

governance are reflected by the extent of synergy (or isolation), accountability (or abdication of responsibility), and mobilization (or access) that characterizes their interaction with the state.

3. RATIONALE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The political and social mileu in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest State, with 16% of its population, comprising multitudes of castes and religious groups, classes, and contradictions, typifies these tensions and prospects. Recent works on the State have focussed on a whole variety of issues, reflecting both exciting possibilities and daunting challenges offered by the State to policy-makers, academics, practitioners, and activists. Some of the themes broadly covered by this literature are: persistence of semi-feudal labor relations (Jeffrey & Lerche, 2002); failures to overcome the "inertia" of poor institutions (Dreze & Gazdar, 1996); absence of public action (Heller, 2000); movements, including political mobilization, of hitherto "untouchable" dalit castes (Pai, 2002); and rapid growth of hindu nationalism in the State post-economic reforms (Jaffrelot, 2000).

However, there is a significant absence of scholarly work that explores the possibilities offered by enhanced civil society action in the State, and the extent to which this influences the governance processes here. The State sends the largest number of lawmakers into the Indian Parliament, and wields tremendous influence on the policy-making processes that ultimately govern the country. Unfortunately, the tendency to ignore Uttar Pradesh in studies that aim to document the civil society—governance interface overlooks this political reality. Within the State, Allahabad district provides a vibrant spectrum in terms of political mobilization and demographic characteristics, as we shall see subsequently. [8]

(a) Scope and structure of the present paper

The present study relies on inductive reasoning processes to interpret and structure the meanings derived from data. Inductive reasoning uses the data to *generate* hypotheses (in contrast with deductive reasoning that uses data to *test* hypotheses). Adopting this line of reasoning makes the study qualitative, and therefore takes the position that interpretive understanding is possible by way of uncovering and thereafter explicating the meanings of a phenomenon.

We have noted the rich body of evidence that contests the assumption of a positive correlation between civil society action and good governance. This paper contributes to scrutinizing this assumption, and adds to the growing critique, within India, of the neoliberal governance agenda that deploy instruments such as joint forest management (Hill, 2000), watershed development (Chhotray, 2004), participatory planning (Sharma, 2003), and community-based models of health financing (Qadeer, Sen, & Nayar, 2002). However, it does more than that. It presents data that emerge from a study, and then seeks to explain the meanings of that data. It considerably weights local political processes, and presents the complex interplay of "statist" and "neoliberal" perspectives that influence development processes on the ground. It also attempts at developing a framework for analyzing the civil society–governance interface. Thus, the paper hopes to propose a set of steps which, if carefully executed, could "guarantee" a good theory, as Glaser and Strauss (1967), the venerable proponents of grounded theory would approve.

A description of the methodology follows and Section 4 describes the profile of our study area. Thereafter, Section 5 presents our findings from a study of 120 women's groups in the north Indian district of Allahabad. We will highlight regional variations within the district, to contextualize our findings. In Section 6, we analyze the emergent data before concluding.

(b) Methodology

As an international NGO (INGO) practitioner responsible for monitoring the project progress, formulation of strategies for sustainable programming and project compliance with organizational mandate, the author was led naturally to examining the positive civil society–good governance–development hypothesis. These responsibilities meant that the author had to propose methods and approaches that would enhance the prospects of communities accessing services, organizing to advocate for improved delivery and establishing institutions that would sustain these activities. This was contingent on a review of existing approaches deployed by the project's partner NGOs.

The rationale for the present study was thus provided by the project requirements to iden-

tify community institutions that would sustain the program, even after the project phased out. In the transforming national context, it was imperative that these institutions be comprised of the project participants, but not isolated from other stakeholders, especially service-providers and elected representatives. This civil society–governance interface, which makes governance good and as defined earlier, emerged as a key topic that needed in-depth exploration. Four distinct, but related themes contributed to an enhanced understanding of the topic. These themes may be classified as (1) organizational theme; (2) negotiational theme; (3) locality development theme; and (4) political space theme. Each of these themes was further comprised of two variables—an action variable and an outcome variable. The study design is schematically represented in Figure 1.

As is evident, the nature of the topic and its constituent themes and variables did not lend easily to quantitative methods alone. Hence, qualitative methods complemented quantitative ones. While quantitative methods were useful to document repetitive trends and common experiences, qualitative methods helped to understand the nuances presented by the numbers. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to identify study participants. Given the nature of inquiry, these shared expressions were crucial. The concern with exploring the collective experience of women's health group members necessitated the use of this technique. Information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to our stream of inquiry were identified. The cases were provided by the women's health groups, which provided us with the perspectives needed for this study.

Focus group discussions were conducted by project staff in each of the 120 project-target villages in the district. Our discussions attempted to disaggregate the efforts of the NGO staff and women's group members in terms of roles and outcomes—that is, what the women's groups did, and what they perceived were important outcomes. We classified the content of our discussions in terms of civil society actions and governance outcomes so that we could more clearly chart whether and how civil society action led to improved governance. Constructing these roles and outcomes was an emergent process through grounded analysis. Average percentage values for each role and outcome was arrived at, based on how frequently these were reported across the groups.

Data were analyzed using the "constant comparative analysis" approach, since the study aimed to document the differences in experiences on account of historical, political–economic, and cultural factors. The usual pitfalls of a wholly qualitative approach were avoided, qualitative data verified, and validity ensured by the concurrent use of quantitative methods.

SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION

Figure 1. *Schematic representation.*

4. AREA PROFILE

Allahabad district located in the northern Indian State of Uttar Pradesh is one of India's largest, with a population of almost five million. [9] Given its location at the confluence of India's most revered rivers (the Ganga and the Yamuna), it is an extremely sacred pilgrimage site. Sixty per cent of the district's population lives in rural areas. Rural Allahabad is dominated numerically and economically by the Yadav and Kushwaha castes, officially designated as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). [10] Along with medium land-owning Muslims, they are often described as "backward agricultural castes." Dalit castes such as Kols, Chamars, and Raidases, officially classified as Scheduled Castes, comprise up to a quarter of the district's population (Census of India, 2001—Series A). In addition, the district also comprises a substantial population of "upper" castes (officially classified as "general castes," such as Brahmins and Rajputs).

(a) Political profile

Such a demographic configuration coupled with the district's strategic importance has often made it the site of fierce political articulation in modern times, demolishing the perception of Allahabad being solely an ecclesiastical center. [11] Today, Allahabad represents the microcosm of all-India politics, where some of the fiercest electoral battles are fought. The city returned conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lawmakers for 15 years to the Indian Parliament, but this dominance has been broken with the election of a candidate belonging to the Samajwadi Party (SP) which claims to represent interests of backward agricultural castes and is the party ruling the State. The district comprises 11 Legislative Assembly constituencies—three urban and eight rural—whose elected members represent their electorate in the State Legislative Assembly. Of the rural constituencies four are represented by the SP, and one each by the Congress, the BJP, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which claims to represent the rights of dalit castes, and the Communist Party of India—Marxist (CPM). The CPM has never been a major player in the State. It holds only two seats in the entire State Legislative Assembly—of which one is from here.

As in most of Uttar Pradesh, voting patterns do not necessarily conform to ideological affili-ations. Post-Independence, the Congress Party had built up a coalition of various castes and religious groups, but frittered away its support-base through intense factionalism and corruption. The Hindu nationalist movement of the early 1990s recruited large numbers of OBCs and dalit castes, primarily as a counter to the rapidly rising caste consciousness among both these "subordinated" communities. In the mid-1990s, the BSP and the SP attempted to form a short-lived coalition Government in the name of all such communities. Its failure ruptured the prospects of a grand alliance between these castes, and in fact embittered them. New social coalitions were crafted out when the BSP and BJP jointly formed a government at the State. Although this political coalition was even more short-lived, many commentators believed it was time to take stock of the new economic realities that placed both dalit and "general" castes on the peripheries, and advocated a political alliance between them against the OBCs who had emerged as the new economic as well as political elite. [12]

(b) Sub-district governance

Governance in rural Allahabad is located within the framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) established by the Federal Government, and strengthened by the State Government through Conformity Acts passed during the 1990s. *Gram Sabhas* (assemblies of all adult members of a village) have been recognized as the basic unit of governance in rural areas and the *Gram Panchayat* the basic administrative tier. The *Gram Panchayat* is presided over by the *Gram Pradhan*. PRIs seek to enable local communities to have a greater say in local development planning, implementation, and monitoring, including nutrition and health issues. At the same time, they seek to ensure social justice by providing for at least 33% reservation for women, and proportional representation for dalit castes.

However, these provisions have yet to translate into meaningful action in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Many of the institutional arrangements that are prerequisite for decentralization are not in place. The State has been rather niggardly in devolving functions and where it has done so, it has not matched these with commensurate functions and functionaries. In Allahabad, as in other districts, *Gram Panchayats* have been overwhelmed by centrally sponsored schemes, over which they have little or

Table 1. *Self-reliance among Allahabad's Panchayats*

	2002–03	1992–93
Taxes	90,000	1,545,238
Grants-in-aid	142,533,000	2,942,000
Special program for ZP/PS Construction/capital assets Other		–
Total	142,623,000	4,487,238
Self-reliance ratio	0.0006	0.34

Source: Government of Uttar Pradesh (2000, Table 55).

no practical control. Their financial autonomy is pathetic, and has actually *declined* during the last decade. At an average, Own Tax Revenues of Allahabad's *Gram Panchayats*—a proxy for their degree of self-reliance—represented over 30% of its total revenues when the Amendment was introduced: by 2003, this had plunged to less than 1% (see Table 1). Moreover, *Gram Panchayats* continue to develop ingenious ways to keep women out of the public life of the village, for instance, by encouraging their husbands or other male members of their households to represent them. The attitude toward representatives belonging to dalit castes is perhaps worse.

(c) *Select regional indicators*

The rural areas of the district are bifurcated geographically and administratively into the fertile plains north of the Ganga (Trans-Ganga) and the arid region south of the Yamuna (Trans-Yamuna). The Trans-Yamuna region lags behind Trans-Ganga in a number of crucial developmental indicators, but does not significantly lead in any. The agriculturally fertile plains north of the Ganga characterize most of the Indo-Gangetic belt, which has historically constituted the core of state-formation in the subcontinent. [13] Trans-Yamuna, on the other hand, is popularly known as "*pathar*" (barren land). Its rocky terrain and unarable land made it un-attractive for cultivation till the last century. Only over the last century or so, "upper"-caste settlers from the northern and eastern plains have entered the region to exploit its stone quarries and minor forest produce. They imported cheap labor from nearby districts and settled them here. The State Government's land redistribution policies have only moderately managed to break the power of the region's large landlords, unlike in the Trans-Ganga region. Politically, the SP controls three of the district's six rural constituencies, and the rest is shared by the BJP, the Congress, and the

Table 2. *Socio-economic profile of Allahabad's regions*

Indicators	Trans-Ganga	Trans-Yamuna
Population	1,396,865	1,145,211
Density	660	377
% of Cultivators to total main workers	52	49
% of Agricultural labor to total main workers	22	30
Literacy rate	28.6	28.9
% of Scheduled Caste to total population	28.4	25
% of Households below poverty line to total households	36	56
Landholdings		
% of Marginal holdings to total holdings	84	72
% of Area under marginal holdings to total reported area	46	26
Average size of marginal landholdings	0.3	0.3
% of Small holdings to total holdings	10.5	15
% of Area under small holdings to total reported area	26	19.5
Average size of small landholdings	1.3	1.3
% of Medium holdings to total holdings	4	9
% of Area under medium holdings to total reported area	21.6	24
Average size of medium landholdings	2.7	2.8
% of Large holdings to total holdings	<1	4.5
% of Area under large holdings to total reported area	6	23
Average size of large landholdings	5	5.2

Source: Government of Uttar Pradesh (2000, Table 24).

BSP. The SP also controls one of Trans-Yamuna's two rural constituencies. The second constituency is controlled by the CPM.

The Trans-Yamuna region comprises only 29% of the district's total population, but almost 35% of its Scheduled Caste and over 80% of its Scheduled Tribe population. This region comprises 38% of the district's rural population, but nearly 50% of the district's rural poor live here. Forty-four per cent of the district's agricultural laborers and 80% of its industrial workers (mostly informal sector work and hazardous occupations of stone quarrying and mining) live here. However, out-migration is rare. On the other hand, the Trans-Ganga region, which contributes 36% of the district's population, contributes only 9% of its Scheduled Tribe population. Almost 60% of the district's cultivators live here, in comparison with 38% in the Trans-Yamuna region. Fifty-six per cent of the households in Trans-Yamuna region live beneath India's official poverty line, in contrast with 36% in Trans-Ganga region (see Table 2).

Post-Independence, state-subsidized ground water development, reflected in the concentration of private tubewells in Trans-Ganga region, have contributed to a higher ratio of net cultivable land to reported area, and even higher ratio of irrigated area to cultivable area, compared with the Trans-Yamuna region (see Table 3). Although Trans-Ganga is more predominated by marginal holdings, the distribution of holdings in Trans-Yamuna region continues to be skewed, with 23% of the area under cultivation belonging to large landowners. In blocks like Koraon, Meja, and Manda, almost 34% of the area under cultivation belongs to large landowners, [14] while making up

only 5% of the number of landholdings. Kol tribes comprise over 40% of the Scheduled Castes in these blocks, which form the Meja Assembly constituency—one of the two constituencies in the entire State to return a Communist lawmaker (see Table 2 again).

(d) *The state and its delivery mechanisms: a regional perspective*

Like most Indian districts, Allahabad is divided into community development blocks. In 12 blocks the State Government operates the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Program to meet the nutritional and health needs of pregnant and lactating women and children, as well as pre-school needs of children below six years of age. For nearly three decades, the ICDS has been the instrument of the Indian state to provide for its most vulnerable sections. In particular, its coordination with the Health Department is crucial. The *anganwadi* (pre-school) center, "manned" by a female service-provider is the physical space in the village where ICDS reaches out to the community, and thus one of the arenas where civil society interfaces with governance. The service-provider's role has gradually expanded, to facilitate women's groups, to provide information to these and other existing groups about the government's welfare schemes and to help them benefit from these. [15]

In Allahabad, the State Government implements the ICDS in partnership with NGOs in 11 of 12 designated blocks. Data for the six ICDS blocks located in the Trans-Yamuna region reveal that the proportion of agricultural laborers to total main workers in each block is higher than the district average. This is in

Table 3. *Land use in Allahabad regions*

Land use indicators	Trans-Ganga	Trans-Yamuna	Allahabad	Eastern Uttar Pradesh	Uttar Pradesh
Ratio of net cultivable area to reported area	67	61	64	66	59
Ratio of gross irrigated area to gross cultivable area	83	69	67.5	60.4	72.2
Ratio of net irrigated area to net cultivable area	79	68	65	61.4	83.4
% of Area irrigated by state tubewells	7.7	6.8	7.4	10.1	5.8
% of Area irrigated by private tubewells	61	11	37	59.5	63.5

Source: Calculated from Government of Uttar Pradesh (2000, Tables 17 and 18) and Pant (2004).

Table 4. *Basic demographic data of select ICDS blocks, 1995–96*

Block	Population	Female	%	Total workers	%	Main workers	%	Agricultural labour	%	Industrial labour	%	Construction workers	%	Marginal workers	%	BPL%	SC/ST%
Trans-Ganga																	
Soraon	133,463	62,897	47	44,170	33	42,283	95.72786959	12,129	28.68528723	22	0.052030367	513	1.213253553	1,887	4.272130405	51	27.9
Beharia	181,247	86,689	48	66,754	37	58,605	87.79249184	12,379	21.12277109	31	0.052896511	611	1.042573159	8,149	12.20750816	34	25.1
Bahadurpur	208,124	97,194	47	64,571	31	61,440	95.15107401	19,482	31.70898438	40	0.065104167	1,165	1.896158854	3,131	4.848925988	30	24.6
Pratappur	150,375	72,972	49	53,836	36	49,552	92.04249944	8,176	16.49983855	64	0.129157249	288	0.58120762	4,284	7.957500557	14	24.5
Dhanupur	151,416	72,477	48	50,027	33	46,510	92.96979631	7,692	16.53837884	62	0.133304666	399	0.857880026	3,517	7.03020369	45	21.4
Kaudihaar	268,596	124,685	46	91,294	34	89,472	98.00425001	31,727	35.46025572	19	0.021235694	832	0.929899857	1,822	1.995749995	16	27.4
																	25.15
Trans-Yamuna																	
Shankargarh	102,625	47,983	47	43,343	42	41,063	94.739635	13,581	33.07356988	3,289	8.009643718	285	0.694055476	2,280	5.260364996	68	32.7
Chaka	127,270	58,135	46	40,215	32	39,203	97.48352605	12,452	31.76287529	137	0.349463051	632	1.612121521	1,012	2.516473953	33	26.5
Meja	117,289	54,516	46	41,126	35	37,703	91.67679813	11,431	30.31854229	102	0.270535501	212	0.562289473	3,423	8.323201867	57	23.1
Koraon	182,849	84,992	46	73,389	40	70,461	96.01030127	23,516	33.37449085	83	0.11779566	135	0.191595351	2,928	3.989698729	74	29.6
Manda	117,254	55,481	47	39,267	33	36,382	92.65286373	9,495	26.09807047	102	0.280358419	167	0.459018196	2,885	7.347136272	59	24.9
Jasra	112,399	51,937	46	42,845	38	40,237	93.912942	12,800	31.81151676	155	0.385217586	297	0.7381266	2,608	6.087058	49	22.5
																	26.55
																	24.7

Source: Government of Uttar Pradesh (2000, Table 8).

contrast with the Trans-Ganga region, where only three of the six blocks reveal such an occupational pattern (see Table 4).

The State Government's Health Department services the district through provisioning primary health centers that cater to the basic health needs of the rural population. A service-provider is positioned in a cluster of villages, and she is responsible for meeting the health-related requirements of the ICDS' target groups. The health infrastructure in terms of primary health centers (PHCs) per 100,000 population is better in Trans-Yamuna blocks than in Trans-Ganga blocks. However, the percentage decadal increase in health centers per 100,000 population is slightly higher in Trans-Ganga blocks (see Table 5).

(e) *Fieldwork area*

Forty-five of the villages were located in Trans-Ganga region and 75 villages in Trans-Yamuna region. From Table 6 it is clear that ''backward agricultural castes'' numerically dominated 78% of the study villages in Trans-Ganga region and 28% in Trans-Yamuna region. In 31% of the Trans-Ganga study villages and 80% of the Trans-Yamuna study villages, dalits comprised less than half the population. ''General'' castes comprised over a quarter of the village population in 17% Trans-Ganga villages and almost 40% Trans-Yamuna villages. The position of *Gram Pradhan* has been reserved for women in 56 villages, representing nearly half the total sample, and for Scheduled Castes in 45 Panchayats and for OBCs in 23 Panchayats. It is important to note that *Gram Panchayats* in over 70% of the Trans-Ganga study sites were presided over by a representative of the Scheduled Castes, whereas in Trans-Yamuna, less than 17% were.

5. CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES AND GOVERNANCE OUTCOMES: KEY THEMES

(a) *Non-governmental organizations*

A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in rural Allahabad. Following Rothman and Tropman (1987), we classify the approaches deployed by them as (1) locality development, where people are

Table 5. *PHCs per 100,000 population—1991*

Block/district	1990–91	1998–99	1999–2000	% Decadal increase
Trans-Ganga				
Kaudihaar	4.5	3.5	3	28.5
Soraon	3.8	2.2	2.2	26.5
Beharia	2.2	1.7	1.7	31.8
Bahadurpur	3.7	2.9	2.9	29.5
Pratappur	3.5	2.7	2.7	30.8
Dhanupur	2.6	2	2	32.7
Total	20.3	15	14.5	**30.0**
Trans-Yamuna				
Jasra	5.1	5.3	5.3	15.5
Shankargarh	5	3.9	3.9	28.1
Chaka	3.4	1.6	1.6	43.3
Meja	5.8	4.3	4.3	36
Koraon	4.5	3.3	3.3	38.2
Manda	5	4.3	4.3	17.7
Total	28.8	22.7	22.7	**29.8**

Source: Calculated from Government of Uttar Pradesh (2000, Table 15).

mobilized to improve certain living conditions, but without changing the structural and institutional *status quo* and (2) social action, where people are mobilized with the explicit objective of altering the *status quo*. While most NGOs prefer to adopt a locality development approach, some have deployed a social action approach.

As in most of Asia, both types of NGOs have facilitated community organizations (Farrington, Lewis, Satis, & Miclat-Teves, 1992) in the form of women's health groups, albeit toward different ends.

NGOs deploying the "locality development" approach operate in both regions of the district,

Table 6. *Block-wise profile of Gram Panchayats*

Block	No. of villages where the population of:			No. of Panchayats where the sarpanch is:	
	SC < 50%	OBC > 50%	"General" castes > 25%	SC	Woman
Trans-Ganga (N = 45)					
Kaudihaar	1	3	1	5	6
Baharia	1	8	5	7	7
Soraon	5	7	1	5	6
Pratappur	3	10	1	7	6
Bahadurpur	4	7	0	8	5
Total Trans-Ganga	14	35	8	32	30
Trans-Yamuna (N = 75)					
Chaka	2	6	1	6	5
Jasra	0	9	7	1	4
Shankargarh	3	7	2	2	3
Koraon	4	9	4	0	5
Manda	5	14	6	2	2
Meja	7	15	7	2	7
Total Trans-Yamuna	21	60	27	13	26

Source: Focus group discussions, conducted in Allahabad during December 15, 2003–July 10, 2004.

but NGOs deploying the "social action" approach limit their activities to the Trans-Yamuna region, particularly Shankargarh and Koraon blocks. In this paper, we are concerned with women's groups facilitated through both approaches. The technical and managerial capacities of these groups are provided by three NGOs deploying the "locality development" approach. These three NGOs are jointly implementing a community-based nutrition and reproductive health program, conceived of and funded by a United States-based INGO. Each of these is well recognized by the district and State Government for their past experience in social development practice. While the broad contours and bottomline deliverables are decided through an agreement between the INGO and the State Government, local NGOs are free to evolve the strategies they think as being most relevant.

Of the three NGOs, one covers five Trans-Ganga blocks (we will call this NG1), and two cover six Trans-Yamuna blocks (SG1 and SG2). NG1 is the youngest NGO, and has an operational experience of only six years. Its chief functionaries live on the northern outskirts of Allahabad city, and belong to medium land-owning families of the dominant, but ritually "backward agricultural caste." One of them is a local leader of the SP. SG1 is the oldest of the three NGOs, operating for over two decades. Its chief functionary is a well-respected physician of the city, with no landed interests whatsoever. Similarly, the chief functionaries of SG2 are professionals (mostly teachers and scientists) from the numerous satellite towns of the main city, drawn primarily from the professional classes.

The Governing Body of all three NGOs consists mostly of local notables. But all are professionally managed. Staff represent a mix of professionalism and voluntaristic values. Most frontline staff are recruited from local communities. However, an important difference is that the leadership of NG1 is more socially and culturally embedded in the local context than that of its counterparts in southern Allahabad.

(b) Women's health groups

The three NGOs have facilitated 120 women's health groups in an equal number of villages. All 45 groups in northern Allahabad and 20 groups in southern Allahabad were facilitated by locality development NGOs. Fifty-five groups in southern Allahabad were facilitated by social action organizations. These groups comprise between 15 and 20 women, of reproductive age (15–45 years). They are (preferably married) women who are interested in voluntarily associating in groups with the purpose of discussing issues related to nutrition and reproductive health, disseminating relevant information about behaviors and organizing local campaigns. They focus on encouraging positive health behaviors among adolescent girls and young mothers. Based on the classification of groups by Thorp, Stewart, and Heyer (2005), we may describe these as "claims" groups, which are distinct from "efficiency" groups formed to overcome market inefficiencies.

These groups are designed to support community volunteers in organizing monthly nutrition and health days (NHDs), during which supplementary ration is provided to pregnant and lactating women to last her for one month. In addition, health checkup by the Health Department's service-provider, and structured nutrition and health counseling by volunteers and ICDS service-providers are also organized. According to practitioners, it has been easier to facilitate groups in Trans-Yamuna region.[16] The experience, particularly with the Kol community (Joshi, 2003), suggests that the historical difficulties faced by them have also strengthened their ability to organize for self-management, to resist external aggression and to protest discrimination by "upper"-caste settlers. Drawing on their networks with indigenous people in neighboring districts of Mirzapur, Banda, and Chitrakoot, they have conventionally built up strong community organizations. Frameworks of trust and reciprocity are relatively strong, and have enabled practitioners to layer their institution-building processes.

(c) Themes and variables

From our discussions, at least four key civil society actions were clearly discernible, viz. (1) organization of women; (2) negotiations with service-providers; (3) planning for local development; and (4) assertion by women of the need for better nutrition and health care for them. Each of these actions led to at least one key governance outcome respectively: (1) communities' organization led to greater sense of inclusiveness at least among women's groups; (2) negotiations led to improved service-delivery; (3) participation in development plans led

to members being able to influence local development issues; and (4) assertion by women led to them assuming leadership roles within the village polity—thereby enhancing the political spaces available to them. We classified these into four themes, *viz.* (1) the organizational theme; (2) the negotiational theme; (3) locality development theme; and (4) political space theme. These are explored in detail below.

(i) *Organizational theme*

More groups in Trans-Yamuna region (65%) demonstrated organizational roles than groups in Trans-Ganga region (33%). Likewise, corresponding organizational outcomes were more clearly discernible in Trans-Yamuna region (48%) than in Trans-Ganga region (23%).

For many groups, this organization had more than merely an instrumentalist value. Organization was valued for its own sake. Through regular and structured sharing, women found methods to support one another, to share their personal and socio-economic issues and to find relevant solutions to the problems they face. Undoubtedly, more Trans-Ganga groups organize regular "meetings" (71%) than Trans-Yamuna groups (65%). These are more clearly informed by community agenda in Trans-Yamuna groups (65%) than Trans-Ganga groups (44%). Trans-Yamuna groups also tend to allocate responsibilities among members more clearly (65%) than their Trans-Ganga counterparts (11%). Sixty-four per cent of Trans-Yamuna groups ensured participation of all eligible poor (in contrast with less than half of Trans-Ganga groups); 65% of Trans-Yamuna groups ensured that individuals were not excluded on account of their ascribed characteristics (in contrast with a quarter of Trans-Ganga groups); and 64% of all Trans-Yamuna groups articulated a clear and shared understanding of their groups' objectives (contrast with only 7% Trans-Ganga groups) (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Count for groups reporting on organizational themes*

No.	Sub-variables	Total (N = 120)	%	Trans-Ganga (N = 45)	%	Trans-Yamuna (N = 75)	%
Activity: WHGs strengthen organization (CO)							
1.	Regular meetings of WHG members are organized	81	68	32	71	49	65
2.	Meetings are driven by agendas set by communities	69	58	20	44	49	65
3.	Responsibilities for organizing activities are clearly laid out in the group	54	45	05	11	49	65
4.	Clear articulation and shared understanding of vision and mission	51	43	03	7	48	64
	Avg. % ($\sum$ CO)		53.12		33		65
	Checklist						
Outcome: Members report that they take cognizance of diverse views and inclusiveness in programs (DI)							
1.	WHGs ensure participation of all eligible "poor" in NHDs	74	62	22	49	48	64
2.	WHGs ensure that all ethnic groups are represented within them	61	51	12	27	49	65
3.	WHGs collect and present different types of relevant data	07	6	01	2	06	8
4.	Clear articulation and shared understanding of vision and mission	51	43	03	7	48	64
5.	Responsibilities are shared and rotated, irrespective of ascribed identities	53	44	08	18	45	60
6.	Group meeting minutes document opinions of different factions	42	35	09	20	33	44
	Total ($\sum$ DI)		39.5		23.1		48.26

Source: Focus group discussions, conducted in Allahabad during December 15, 2003–July 10, 2004.

(ii) *Negotiational theme*

Data on negotiational themes appear to contradict the data on organizational themes. More groups in Trans-Ganga region (70%) demonstrated negotiational roles than groups in Trans-Yamuna (46%), despite organizational outcomes being favorable among groups in the latter region. Corresponding negotiational outcomes were better demonstrated among groups in Trans-Ganga region (59%) than groups in Trans-Yamuna (38%).

Community-level change agents existed in all villages, as did community-based resource maps. However, more groups in Trans-Ganga region were familiar with the functions of the service-provider (89%) than in Trans-Yamuna region (28%). More groups in Trans-Ganga region (51%, in contrast with 40% groups in Trans-Yamuna region) organized monthly "convergence" forums, where service-providers of both the Health and ICDS departments would dispense services. More group members claim access to service-providers during an emergency in Trans-Ganga region (38%) than in Trans-Yamuna region (5%). Indeed, functionaries of Health and ICDS Departments present themselves more regularly in Trans-Ganga region than they do in Trans-Yamuna. Women's groups were beginning to negotiate with service-providers. Forty-six per cent of all groups had performed these roles. They were taking a lead in organizing monthly NHD at the anganwadi center, a weekly occasion in each village where all public service-providers were mandated by a district administration directive to be present and dispense their services (see Table 8).

Table 8. *Count for groups reporting negotiational themes*

No.	Checklist	Total (N = 120)	%	Trans-Ganga (N = 45)	%	Trans-Yamuna (N = 75)	%
Activity: WHGs negotiate with providers (NP)							
1.	Community-level change agents are present in the village	120	100	45	100	75	100
2.	Community map exists in village	120	100	45	100	75	100
3.	Community knows provider-functions	61	51	40	89	21	28
4.	Community knows welfare and food security schemes routed through providers	62	52	40	89	22	29
5.	NHD organized by community	53	44	23	51	30	40
6.	Community ensures provider presence for NHD	45	38	23	51	22	29
7.	Community regularly informs providers about nutrition and health status in the village	48	40	18	40	30	40
8.	Community accesses providers during any emergency	21	18	17	38	04	5
	Total ($\sum$ NP)		55.20		69.71		46.49
Outcome: Community reports that health service-providers have improved delivery (ID)							
1.	Health providers (ANM) present on NHDs, with immunization and check-up kit ready	43	36	23	51	20	27
2.	ICDS providers (AWW) provide nutrition, facilitate counselling and information to women in the communities	40	33	22	49	18	15
3.	Service-providers regularly meet health group members	43	36	23	51	20	27
4.	Group members receive training by both voluntary agencies and government trainers	94	78	38	84	56	75
	Total ($\sum$ ID)		45.83		58.8		38

Source: Focus group discussions, conducted in Allahabad during December 15, 2003–July 10, 2004.

(iii) *Locality development theme*

More groups in Trans-Yamuna region (38%) demonstrated agenda-setting roles for locality development than groups in Trans-Ganga region (17%). Correspondingly, many more groups in Trans-Yamuna region (22%) demonstrated outcomes in locality development planning than groups in Trans-Ganga (4%).

Fifty-one groups, a majority of which are located in Trans-Yamuna region, expressed a clearly articulated and shared vision of what role they envisaged for their locality development. In 82 villages, again mostly in Trans-Yamuna region, group members and the larger community have been involved in social resource mapping to that end. Thirty-nine groups, all in Trans-Yamuna region, initiated an internal lending program that would help members in need. However, none of these groups have yet been able to leverage support from other stakeholders, to realize their developmental decisions. Only 19 groups discussed local development issues in their meetings, and 17 represented these at local government meetings. Similarly, only six groups had liaisoned with local government bodies and only two were consulted by these bodies while framing village development plans. Almost all these groups were located in Trans-Yamuna region. Overall, however, the level of responsibility for locality development is highly restricted, with only 16% of groups across the district demonstrating any favorable outcomes (see Table 9).

(iv) *Political spaces theme*

More groups in Trans-Yamuna region (32%) demonstrated political space roles than their counterparts in Trans-Ganga (a meager 4%). On the contrary, and surprisingly in the light of the prevailing optimism on civil society–governance outcomes, more groups in Trans-Ganga region (8%) demonstrate political space outcomes than in Trans-Yamuna region (1%).

Through the joint initiatives of women's groups and NGO project staff, village-level advisory committees (VLACs) have been formed in seven *Gram Panchayats*, each of which happened to be presided over by a representative of the Scheduled Castes. This was expected to provide a platform where representatives of women's health groups and other community-based groups would interface with key village-level stakeholders. The VLAC

Table 9. *Count for groups reporting on locality development themes*

No.	Checklist	Total (N = 120)	%	Trans-Ganga (N = 45)	%	Trans-Yamuna (N = 75)	%
Activity: Communities determine locality development agenda (LD)							
1.	Communities participate in locality mapping	82	68	18	40	64	85
2.	Change agents regularly maintain nutrition and health database	51	43	19	42	32	43
3.	Groups mobilize members' savings	39	33	00	0	39	52
4.	Liaison with local self-government institutions	06	05	02	4	04	5
5.	Groups support drawing village-level development plans	02	02	00	0	02	3
	Total ($\sum$LD)		30		17.33		37.6
Outcome: Group members report that they can influence decisions on locality development issues (DL)							
1.	Locality development issues discussed during WHG meetings	19	16	6	13	13	17
2.	WHGs represent developmental needs to *Gram Panchayat*	17	14	2	5	15	20
3.	WHGs generate own revenues by mobilizing members' savings	39	33	00	0	39	52
4.	Leverage funds available with health and sanitation committees	00	0	00	0	00	0
	Total ($\sum$DL)		15.62		4.44		22.33

Source: Focus group discussions, conducted in Allahabad during December 15, 2003–July 10, 2004.

was convened by the *Gram Pradhan*. A typical VLAC comprised service-providers, local teachers, and doctors; representatives of community-based organizations including women's health groups; project grassroots volunteers such as animators and change agents; local hamlet representatives to the *Gram Panchayat*; any other member of a sub-Committee constituted by the *Gram Panchayat*; as well as other key stakeholders such as school teachers, religious leaders, and other interested and relevant persons. VLACs were thus a coalition of village stakeholders, although the inclusion of several non-elected professionals, providers, and volunteers resulted in a disproportionate representation of "upper castes." Where VLACs had been formed, it appeared that key village-level stakeholders were able to "synergise" their efforts, with one another and with duty-bearers on health issues. They presented applications made by women's groups to fill up the vacancies of service-providers, and to ensure universal coverage.

Twelve per cent of the groups provided an opportunity for their members to assert themselves within the household. [17] Over half the members in 10 groups—all in Trans-Yamuna region—reported that they were beaten less frequently and less severely now than before joining the groups. Seven groups were able to negotiate with other household members so that they could be assured rest during pregnancy. In the public sphere, as many as 37 groups contested controversial decisions taken by the local government institutions relating to inclusion of names eligible for welfare and food security schemes. This has happened in both regions, but is more common in Trans-Yamuna than in Trans-Ganga regions. Members of 40 groups have refused to work at the prevailing labor market rates, which are often as little as half the Rs. 58/- entitlement for agricultural labor, and nearly three-fourth the Rs. 65/- entitlement for industrial labor. Members of 55 groups—all in Meja, Manda, Koraon, and Shankargarh—regularly participate in political rallies organized by the CPM demanding enforcement of daily wage entitlements, land redistribution guidelines and right to employment. Each member claimed to have voted in the last Assembly elections—and were emphatic about voting in the future. In contrast, women in Trans-Ganga groups reported participating in rallies of "many political parties," but rarely voted in Panchayat elections.

Finally, the opportunity provided by WHGs for women to assert themselves in public and private spheres was supposed to have empowered them personally, politically, economically, and culturally by providing them access to such resources, and also enabling them to resist and reject relationships of subordination and oppression. However, at an average, this is demonstrated in barely 4% of the cases. There have undoubtedly been some achievements. In 14 sites, 10 of which are in Trans-Ganga region, their contest for revising flawed lists of eligible poor has been successful. Members from five groups had successfully contested elections to Panchayats and were currently holding positions of authority with which they could address local issues. In nine cases, women received *pattas*—legal title deeds over land—as a consequence of ongoing State Government land redistribution operations. However, in none of the cases have Panchayat directives to providers been heeded. In no case has local government directed any follow-up by the Health Committees. In none of the villages, landlords and quarry owners have relented and agreed to adhere to the mandated daily wage entitlements. When local women boycott work, they simply hire labor from neighboring districts. Eight per cent of Trans-Ganga sites demonstrated this outcome, but in Trans-Yamuna region, only 1% of all groups did (see Table 10).

(d) *Mapping elements with dimensions*

We noted earlier that optimal synergies between providers and citizens, accountability of duty-bearers to rights-holders, and mobilization of communities are key dimensions of the civil society–governance interface. The elements of the themes that emerged from the field mapped onto these dimensions in four distinct permutations. One, where elements mapped onto the mobilization dimension only. Two, where elements mapped onto both mobilization and accountability dimensions. Three, where elements mapped onto both mobilization and synergy dimensions. And four, where elements mapped onto all three dimensions (see Figure 2).

Where the elements mapped onto the mobilization dimension alone, they demonstrated a preference for Trans-Yamuna groups. Both elements of the organizational theme, and the role elements of the locality development theme and political spaces theme mapped onto the

Table 10. *Count for groups reporting on political space themes*

No.	Checklist	Total (*N* = 120)	%	Trans-Ganga (*N* = 45)	%	Trans-Yamuna (*N* = 75)	%
Activity: WHGs provide the forum for women to assert their need for better health and nutrition care (AS)							
1.	WHGs are the forum for women to discuss their reproductive health and nutrition issues	12	10	0	0	12	16
2.	Over half the members are beaten less now than they were before	12	10	0	0	12	16
3.	WHGs negotiate with households to redress skew against women's health concerns	7	6	0	0	7	9
4.	VLACs constituted	7	6	3	7	4	5
5.	Both WHGs and VLACs represent women's' issues in the local government assembly	6	9	2	5	4	5
6.	WHGs monitor the lists of households eligible for welfare schemes prepared by local government, and advocate for appropriate targeting	37	54	11	24	26	35
7.	Members refuse to work at less than the Minimum Wage Entitlement	40	33	0	0	40	53
8.	Members participated in political rallies consistently	55	46	0	0	55	73
9.	Members exercised their own judgement while voting	55	46	0	0	55	73
	Total (∑AS)		21.3		3.95		31.8
Outcome: Group members report that they can exercise some degree of power (PW)							
1.	WHGs representation used by local government to direct providers to meet deficits	03	0	03	0	00	0
2.	WHG representation used by local government to direct Health Committees for follow-up	03	0	03	0	00	0
3.	Complaints do not resurface	03	3	03	7	00	0
4.	Local government revises list of households eligible to receive schemes due to pressure from WHG	14	12	10	22	04	5
5.	Members of WHGs received *pattas* or legal title deed	9	7.5	0	0	9	12
6.	WHG members contest elections successfully and hold office in Panchayats	5	4.16	5	11.11	0	0
7.	Contractors have revised the wage rates	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total (∑PW)		4.4		7.61		1

Source: Focus group discussions, conducted in Allahabad during December 15, 2003–July 10, 2004.
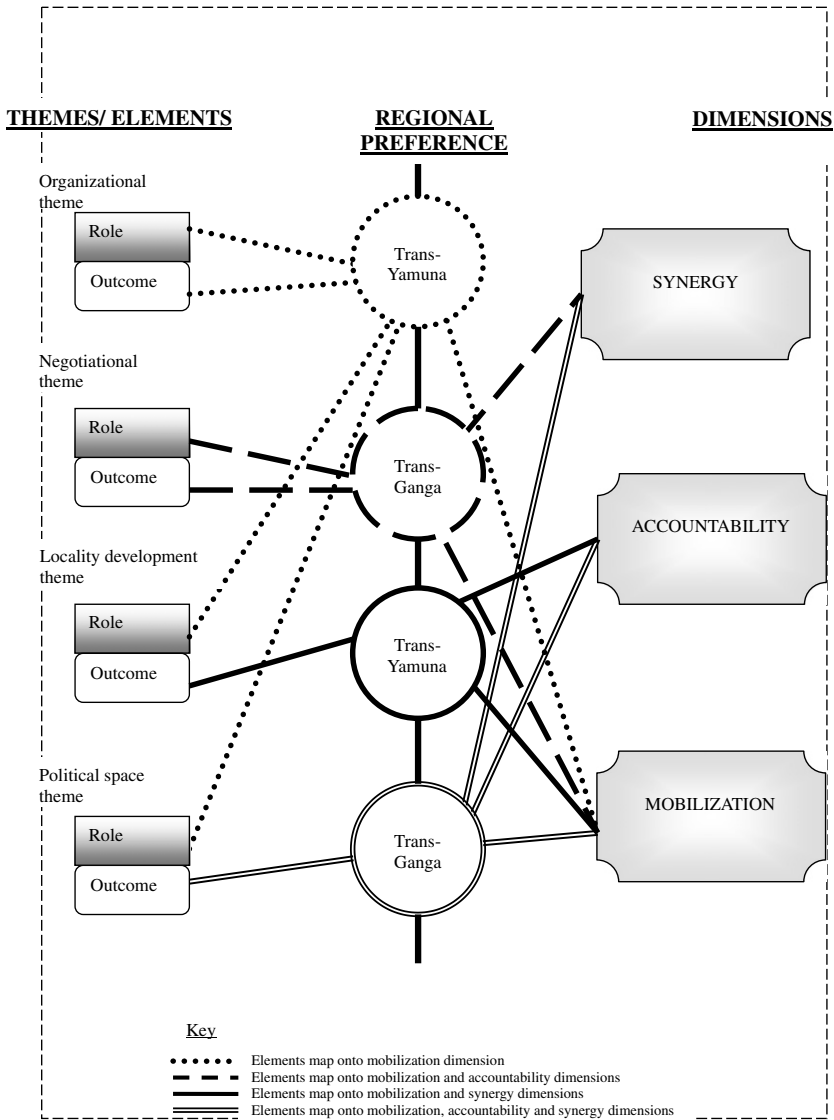
Figure 2. *Dimensions of the Civil Society–Good Governance interface.*

mobilization dimension alone. Where the elements mapped onto the mobilization and accountability dimensions together, their preference was similar. The outcome element of the locality development theme mapped on both these dimensions. On the other hand, where the elements mapped onto the mobilization and synergy dimensions, they demonstrated a preference for Trans-Ganga groups. Both role and outcome elements of the negotiational theme mapped on these dimensions together. When the elements mapped onto *ALL* dimensions, ironically the results were similar.

In all organizational elements, mobilization pertained to the access by women of spaces and social resources from which they were hitherto excluded. But, in respect of the political spaces theme, mobilization referred to the rejection of insubordinate relationships—within the household, the community and the labor market—by women. The mobilization dimension was also reflected in the negotiational aspect

as well as the structural and institutional outcomes of the political spaces theme. Here, it translated into access by women to services, policies, and economic resources.

Thus, the meanings and manifestations of mobilization underwent changes across groups. For some groups, mobilization meant access to services, policies, and economic resources. For others, it meant accessing hitherto unexplored spaces and social resources. Yet others understood it in terms of rejecting insubordination. Clearly, where mobilization pertained to accessing unexplored spaces or rejecting inequitable relationships, Trans-Yamuna groups demonstrated better outcomes. On the other hand, where mobilization pertained to accessing policies and resources, Trans-Ganga groups demonstrated better outcomes.

6. DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNANCE, AND CIVIL SOCIETY: GRASPING THE MISSING LINKS

Our findings are summarized in Figure 3. The average percentage values of roles/outcomes for the district as well as its two regions are plotted.

While comparing the interface of civil society roles with governance outcomes between the study regions, the data sets reveal four distinct scenarios, as described in Figure 4.

Trans-Yamuna's organizational aspects and locality developmental aspects reveal the "high role—high outcome scenario" of Scenario IV. Trans-Ganga's organizational and locality developmental aspects reveal the "low role—low outcome scenario" of Scenario I. Groups' organization roles and roles in setting locality development agenda are more apparent in Trans-Yamuna region. Similarly, groups in this region demonstrate higher inclusiveness and locality development responsibility outcomes. At the same time, Trans-Ganga's negotiational aspects also reveal the "high role—high outcome scenario," while Trans-Yamuna's negotiational aspects reveal the "low role—low outcome scenario." Trans-Ganga groups perform higher negotiation roles and demonstrate improvements in service-delivery compared with their Trans-Yamuna counterparts.

Trans-Yamuna's public space aspects reflect the "high roles—low outcomes scenario" of Scenario III. Conversely, Trans-Ganga's public space aspects reflect the "low roles—high outcomes scenario" of Scenario II. This is ironical,
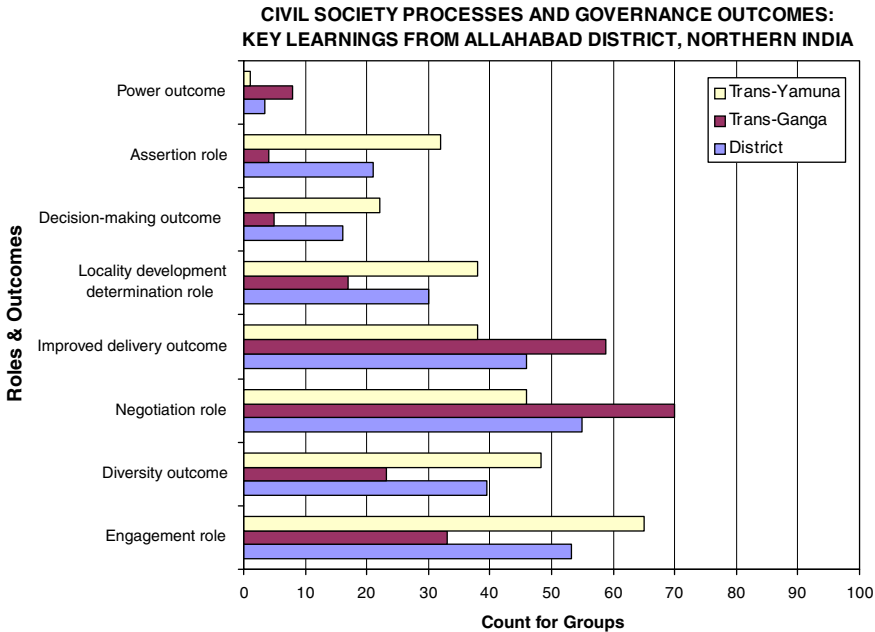

Figure 3. Civil society processes and governance outcomes: key learnings from Allahabad district, northern India.

**ROLES AND OUTCOMES VIS-À-VIS KEY ASPECTS OF
CIVIL SOCIETY-GOVERNANCE INTERFACE IN ALLAHABAD**

SCENARIO III Trans-Yamuna: political spaces theme	SCENARIO IV Trans-Yamuna: organizational theme Trans-Yamuna: locality development theme Trans-Ganga: negotiational theme
SCENARIO I Trans-Ganga: organizational theme Trans-Ganga: locality development theme Trans- Yamuna: negotiational theme	SCENARIO II Trans-Ganga: political spaces theme

ROLES — HIGH / LOW

OUTCOMES — LOW / HIGH

Figure 4. *Roles and outcomes vis-à-vis key aspects of civil society–governance interface in Allahabad.*

because although groups in Trans-Yamuna appear to perform higher assertion roles than their northern counterparts, their power outcomes are abysmally poor in comparison. Groups in Trans-Ganga, which perform relatively poor assertion roles, appear to be more successful in demonstrating structural and institutional outcomes. Overall, these variations notwithstanding, structural and institutional outcomes are poorly demonstrated in the district. In the following sections, we will attempt to unpack some of these data. What do these data mean? What are some of the critical factors for their manifestation? What do these imply for development practice?

(a) *Social engineering in Allahabad's regions*

The competition between economic elite, who also wield enormous political clout, and the social elite (the "upper" castes) in rural north India, has been noted. This intra-elite competition has compelled the latter to seek alliances outside the traditional caste hierarchy to contain the expansion of the former's political clout. On their part, the rural poor—a significant majority of who belong to the dalit

castes—have sought to identify prospects for and forge coalitions with communities who are relatively non-threatening, and who might be able to promote their interests.

Against this backdrop, and given the findings, it is evident that the poor in Allahabad's Trans-Ganga region are seeking alliances with the subordinated elite in their villages. Thirty-five of the 45 Trans-Ganga groups operate in villages where "backward agricultural castes" comprise numerical majorities. In the remaining, they comprise slightly less than half the population. Service-providers, who are drawn from the ranks of the social elite, fulfill their share of the deal: they dispense services at mandated forums, provide information about welfare schemes and regularly interface with women's groups. Such interface enables women's groups to cross the public–private divide. NG1 leaders have been actively promoting such alliances. Their belonging to the *economically* elite sections as well as their embeddedness in the local context reduces the antipathy of their co-caste persons toward such an alliance. Here, synergies appear to be the function of a "caste compact" aimed at blunting the political–economic superiority of the agricultural castes.

In Trans-Yamuna, on the other hand, such cross-caste alliances are absent. Such a compact is made difficult by the sizeable population of ''upper'' castes, and their continued economic prowess. They hold land and employ dalits as agricultural labor, often at extremely unjust wages and poor working conditions. The identity between the social elite and the economic elite remains unbroken. Unlike in northern Allahabad, the position of this elite is too strong for them to feel threatened. In addition, they represent over a quarter of the population (a significant demographic presence) in 40% of our study sites. They remain indifferent to, if not outrightly hostile to, any prospects of alliance with dalit castes, as they do not need it. ''Backward agricultural castes,'' numerical majorities in 80% of the study villages, prefer to use their political clout to corner employment and welfare schemes allocated for the region. They are also not enthusiastic about allying with dalit castes, as this would mean a reduced share in the resource pie.

Moreover, the patterns of mobilization among the vulnerable groups—large community organizations, aggressive political rallies, electoral support to a Communist party—seem to widen the hiatus between them and the others, rather than bridge it. The demands voiced by these groups and the manner in which these are raised, are both resented by local elite. Service-providers and key VLAC members, who are drawn from the same socio-economic strata as these elite, are no exceptions. To top it all, the Communist party is not considered serious alternatives to existing political parties. This, despite being important allies of the present Federal Government and ideologically proximate to the SP. The party exercises limited influence in Uttar Pradesh. This political conjunction reduces the prospects of Trans-Yamuna's vulnerable communities from being an effective force in the region.

(b) *Sub-optimal synergies*

Indeed, the data—and their contradictions—reveal the restricted political spaces available to poor communities in both regions. These restrictions are glaring in Trans-Yamuna where, despite being better organized, communities are not really successful in positively influencing service-delivery or in affecting structures and institutions in their favor. However, they are also evident in Trans-Ganga where poor communities have realized that the only way to positively

influence the delivery mechanism is to forge alliances with a section of the local elite through VLACs, which would help them bridge the public–private divide.

The way synergy operates is problematic. The synergies that appeared to have positively impacted service-delivery are based on birth-based affiliations that in turn influence political competition and alliances. Although such alliances have been emerging across Uttar Pradesh since the last decade, and reflect unconventional social engineering tactics aimed at containing the political and economic prowess of dominant agricultural castes, they are predicated on the maintenance of a *harmonious relationship* between social elite and poor communities. Such a relationship is often a function of the degree of compromise that the communities are willing to make.

These emerging relationships are complex. They are exemplified by the formation of VLACs. We also noted that better educated persons belonging to ''upper'' castes tend to predominate these bodies. Members often ''get the job done'' due to their contacts and networks in the bureaucracy, as indeed they have done in Trans-Ganga. They have by-passed elected *Gram Panchayats*, which in several cases are presided over by representatives belonging to dalit castes, on grounds of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Such actions undermine the legitimacy of *Gram Panchayats*, and reveal an ill-concealed bias against the principles of positive discrimination and capacities of Scheduled Caste members. Clearly, the synergies that we claimed earlier are sub-optimal at best and non-existent at worst.

Conceptually, these alliances provide the platform for poor communities to contest the state's attempts at abdicating its responsibilities and hold duty-bearers accountable. But their relative ''success'' in Trans-Ganga region compels us to wonder whether such synergies bear fruit only where the poor seek out and forge networks with the ''upper'' castes on the terms of the latter. The rather pessimistic observation is that where groups have been historically alienated from the state, continue to be exploited and repressed, and are trying to assert their entitlements and rights, their ability to favorably influence public policy is *weak*.

(c) *Restricted political spaces: exploring a possible framework for analysis*

Indeed, despite women's groups waging and winning important battles, structural and insti-

tutional outcomes in both regions were stunted. Distorted eligibility lists were rarely modified, prevailing wage rates remained nearly half the legal entitlement and *Gram Panchayats* were usually unable to either direct Health sub-committees to follow-up on pending cases or make providers answerable for being absent when they were. Moreover, even when group members were elected to positions in the *Gram Panchayat*, they continued to be controlled by male relatives. Our efforts to outline the contours of the civil society–governance interface must explain the factors that encourage or hinder such an interface. The political spaces approach equips us to do this, and indeed enables us to identify the pieces that could subsequently inform a comprehensive framework for analysis.

(i) *Political economy*

To understand the prevalence of limited political spaces, we need to recall that agricultural production in Allahabad's two regions continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by marginal landholdings. Moreover, agricultural labor continues to be a substantial proportion of the population in both regions. Since most labor is absorbed within the villages, local economic elite are also employers. The political and social clout of the economic elite in both regions make it extremely difficult for the articulation of democratic political spaces. Although poor communities in Trans-Ganga region are forging alliances with a section of the local elite, and evolving new possibilities of political alignments, they are not doing this on an equal footing. This arrangement would work well when service-providers belong to the same caste as the region's social elite. But what were to happen if service-providers belonged to dalit castes? Would Trans-Ganga's social elite support them with similar enthusiasm at VLACs? From existing experience of discrimination, it seems unlikely.

In Trans-Yamuna, the conflicts are sharper. Here, poor communities electorally support the CPM, indicating a disenchantment with prevailing political formations. However, even the CPM's radical politics has been unable to break the power of the region's economic elite. Despite policies on land reforms being in place for over four decades, the logic of a parliamentary democracy based on electoral majorities has meant that these reforms are implemented piece-meal, designed to maintain a carefully crafted *status quo*. Long standing

demands in Trans-Yamuna—especially for land redistribution, and redesignation of Kols as Scheduled Tribes—threaten this equilibrium, and are best left untouched by the ruling parties.

(ii) *Capacities of local governments*

Another factor of the poor structural and institutional outcomes is poor capacities and low operational control over funds. As constitutionally recognized bodies, their responsibilities are manifold. In its enthusiasm to make funds available to *Gram Panchayats*, India's Federal Government has swamped these bodies with centrally sponsored schemes, and huge quantums of funds to implement these. For Allahabad, we noted the drastic decline in the *Gram Panchayats*' Own Tax Revenues despite a constitutional provision that envisages *Gram Panchayats* as strong and vibrant institutions of self-governance. Given the lack of capacities within these bodies, they are often unable to understand what their core mandate is, what they are accountable for and how available funds are to be utilized. Consequently, when Health sub-committees and service-providers disobey their directives, *Gram Panchayats* are rarely able to enforce their authority. Capacities of representatives belonging to dalit castes tend to be even more restricted. In such cases, "upper" caste colleagues invoke relations of subordination and superordination to control and dominate them.

(iii) *NGO approaches*

The "locality development" approach deployed by the operating NGOs also contributed to constricted political spaces. All three NGOs have emphasized consistently on "problem-solving": ensuring that "doable" activities are advocated for. So, discrete products (immunization, supplementary nutrition) are distributed, and service-providers' presence ensured. However, these NGOs are less enthusiastic about raising the underlying causes of poor health in the first place. Social exclusion, economic inequity, and gender discrimination often assume violent forms in rural Allahabad, but the NGOs have rarely raised these. In the Trans-Ganga region, where cross-caste political alliances have already been carefully crafted out, the strategies deployed by NG1, whose chief functionaries are embedded in the dominant land-owning castes, epitomize the principles of locality development. Given these alliances, the VLACs in Trans-Ganga

region appear to have effectively raised their concerns on service-delivery. Such alliances are more difficult to build in Trans-Yamuna region, given the region's sharper class conflicts, the radical demands of group members, and also the comparative lack of embeddedness of both SG1 and SG2. Indeed, in this region, VLACs have refrained from pursuing issues, such as absenteeism, lack of services, and discrimination. Despite apparent differences, there are remarkable similarities between VLACs' responses across regions. In both regions, VLACs have not raised their voice advocating for implementation of land reforms, minimum wage entitlements, and even revising BPL lists. As a result, their ability and willingness to impact structural and institutional outcomes, even at a local level, is extremely constricted.

The political and social strategies deployed by the poor, as we have seen, differ along Allahabad's two regions: in Trans-Ganga, they exploit intra-elite conflict to their advantage, whereas in Trans-Yamuna, they support radical politics. Poor people in Trans-Ganga are able to access state apparatus and influence the implementation of policy to some extent.

But their ability, as rights-holders and citizens with entitlements, to enforce government accountability remains weak. This adversely impacts structural and institutional outcomes. Despite service-provisioning outcomes being far superior in Trans-Ganga, the institutional channels through which the poor access nutrition and health services—the VLAC—contributes to such constricted outcomes. In Trans-Yamuna the support to a radical, but insignificant, political party, kills any chances on influencing such outcomes. In both regions, the strategies deployed by the poor as well as the outcomes have yet to reflect significant expansion of the political spaces available for the poor, although a beginning has undoubtedly been made.

Based on these, we may be in a position to propose an outline of a "synergy–accountability–mobilization" framework. Perhaps further research will reveal its specific components. For the moment, we are content with providing some pointers, which may be useful to practitioners, and which can be taken up by academics and policy-makers. It is important to note the overall national context in which this framework has been developed and to that

Table 11. *Mainstreaming political analysis in civil society and governance work: outlining a framework*

Negative correlation	Variables in the civil society–governance interface: when does civil society action make governance good?	Positive correlation
(A) Mobilization		
Social action	1. NGO approaches	Locality development
Rhetorical	2. CBO attitudes	Pragmatic
Indifferent	3. Dominant political party ideology	Pro-poor
Confrontational	4. Dominant political party approach	Collaborative
Benefice	5. Perception of state-provisioned services	Entitlement
(B) Accountability		
Low	1. Devolution to constitutionally mandated local self-governments	High
Low	2. Rent-seeking among duty-bearers	High
High	3. Exclusion and discrimination against the vulnerable communities	Low
Absent	4. Provisions for social audit	Present
(C) Synergy		
Ascribed	1. Primary basis of affiliation	Achieved
Unity	2. Locus of power	Plural
Low	3. Levels of intra-elite conflict	High
Low	4. Engagement of stakeholders	High
Discriminatory	5. Service-providers' attitudes toward the poor	Responsive

Assumption on national context: Political and civil rights are secured.
Aspiration for national context: Economic, social, and cultural rights to be secured.

end, statements on assumptions and aspirations are absolutely must: the given framework has been developed in view of a national context where political and civil rights are more secure than economic, social, and cultural ones (see Table 11).

(d) *A note of caution*

The merits of mainstreaming political analysis ought not to blind us to the associated risks. Indeed, in explicitly espousing "politics," development agencies risk being labeled "partisan," thereby blunting the impact of their genuinely important work. For agencies working with international support, especially official aid, the line between "empowering" the poor and infringing on the sovereignty of the country-state threatens to blur. However, the most substantive risk lies in the fact that political analysis and political sector working at the grassroots provokes vested interests, without sufficiently protecting the vulnerable communities. Consequently, sporadic interventions may appear to show results only during the organization's presence, but fade away with the project's "phase-out." Thereafter, vulnerable communities are left to face the brunt of local elite, with often violent and tragic consequences. In extreme cases, staff security may be threatened during the project's intervention itself.

Among the various solutions to this problem, three are key. The charges of infringing on national sovereignty may be repudiated by invoking the globalized discourse of human rights—undoubtedly contentious—which national leaders may have ratified. The same message has to be continually communicated to the local elite.

Perhaps more sustainable and lasting results could be found if local elite (the "gatekeepers") are involved in project formulation and implementation since inception. Of course, program managers must walk the tightrope between involving local elite and allowing them to corner the project's resources. The project interventions need to deploy such tools that will enable them to identify and strengthen the equitable relations between elite and subordinate groups, and weaken the inequitable ones. Such tools exist for post-conflict situations, but need to be developed for apparently peacetime scenarios that in reality witness daily persecutions and struggles.

In countries like India, where constitutional commitments to securing entitlements of poor people, and recognizing them as rights-holders

are present, development agencies need to build, seek, promote, and support alliances and networks that can influence the state by using its own organizing principles. This would require internalizing a discourse where the state's responsibilities toward poor, vulnerable, and marginalized communities are emphasized, along with the potential conflict with local elite, whose actions strike at the very basis of the state's ideological moorings.

7. CONCLUSION

Our findings confirm some existing suspicions and raise new concerns. They hold the prevailing "civil society–good governance–development continuum" problematic. But, they do more than that. Several dimensions of the civil society–governance interface are unpacked. Thereafter, deploying a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, we confront skewed and distorted patterns of interaction between civil society and governance. In particular, the way the dimensions map onto the elements reveals the rather unformed and rudimentary civil society and governance processes, reflected in the constricted political spaces available to people. We find that the nature of Trans-Ganga's cross-caste political alliances, which span the public–private divide and which women's groups can tap into, while being conducive to improved service-delivery, are responsible for such outcomes in this region. In Trans-Yamuna, years of vibrant community organization notwithstanding, the relative lack of engagement with government, and sharp conflicts with local elite, limit such possibilities. Clearly, the evidence points to the role of politics in determining governance outcomes. When the context is Uttar Pradesh, India's most politically influential State, this learning becomes highly significant.

Indeed, development programming urgently needs to mainstream political analysis and political sector work if it is to facilitate appropriate forms of civil society–good governance interface. Although duty-bearers are attempting to make rights-holders accountable, citizens are somewhat empowered to access providers, institutions, and resources, and communities are forging alliances that would enable them to span the public–private divide, there remains scope for development programs to facilitate

the optimal synergies that would be qualitatively different from the prevailing subordinate–superordinate relationship between citizens and the state. Similarly, conceptions of empowerment that would encourage citizens to both demand ownership over productive resources and reject unequal relations need to be formulated.

NOTES

1. Clearly, there has ''hardly been a consensus as to its core meaning'' (Doornbos, 2003, p. 4), which has shifted to mean different things to different people at different times.

2. Even governments have jumped on to the bandwagon of achieving growth and poverty-reduction through group-formation. According to an advertisement celebrating the achievement of the previous Government of India (*Indian Express*, March 1, 2004, p. 6), 1.793 million groups had been formed by the end of FY04, with approximately US$1874 million disbursed as assistance to four million group members in 140,000 groups that have taken up economic activity.

3. Indeed, Herry-Priyono's assertion that the opposition between civil society and the state is a matter of historical contingency and not logical necessity is particularly insightful (Herry-Priyono, 2005).

4. In another context, Varshney (2004) compares Gujarat with Kerala to explain how the rich traditions of ''associational engagement'' in Kerala prevented the kind of civil conflict that ripped Gujarat in 2002. While these studies are significant, the areas they focus on limit their usefulness. For instance, tribal communities comprise less than a 10th of India's population, and tend to constitute relatively egalitarian societies. Although not homogeneous, they present a cohesive front against both the state's exploitative agents and ''outsiders.'' Moreover, historically, women among these groups have been less disadvantaged than among others, as reflected in the favorable sex ratios in these communities (Sharma, 2004). The comparison of Kerala with Gujarat evidently does not pay due attention to Gujarat's rich traditions of philanthropy and engagement, which co-existed with civil violence as far back as 1714. Further, none of these studies describe, much less analyze, the political contexts of the study areas. For instance, the leftist movements in Kerala and West Bengal as well as populist governments in Andhra Pradesh, undoubtedly contributed to the construction of a solidarity different from the mobilization by conservative and ethno-centric formations, as in Gujarat.

5. This alliance implied that the bourgeoisie was unable to completely utilize the state apparatus to its advantage, say, by taxing the agricultural sector. The Government's import-substitution strategy and the lowering of terms of trade were intended to favor industry. Though landed interests deeply resented these, they were appeased by input-subsidies and high procurement prices.

6. According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, regularization and upheaval are two faces in the exercise of hegemony, which refers to the process of educating the consent of civil society by a capitalist state through its legal and schooling apparatus, and protecting it with the armor of coercion. Through its efforts, the state attempts to accept the demands made by the prevailing forces of capitalism (Gramsci, 1996).

7. For instance, many critics argue that NGOs (Ferguson, 1994), community development (Baber, 2001), and social capital (Harriss, 2001) serve to regularize certain discourses by a capitalist world order.

8. Despite this, studies describing the strategies deployed by the poor in this district to positively impact are few and far between. A recent study by Ruthven and Kumar (2003) is a significant exception. In it, they describe how individuals and households adopt a variety of strategies to cope with poverty, discrimination, and marginalization in the district's Koraon block. They point out how poor households (belonging to Kol tribal and Muslim communities) in Koraon's villages use their traditional (often subservient) linkages with patrons to improve their economic condition. Those households and castes that use these relationships well improve their condition significantly, others are not able to arrest their downslide into poverty.

9. The district headquarters are located in the city with the same name. The Moghul Emperor Akbar gave it its present name. In colonial times, Allahabad was the capital of British-India's second-most populous province.

10. Accurate data for this intermediary caste category are hard to come by, and whatever data exist are hotly debated, contested, and challenged-often leading to violence. The district figure quoted above is calculated from block and village-data for Government's welfare and livelihood programs.

11. During the 1920s, the Indian National Congress called for non-cooperation with the British Government from this city. In the 1930s, the All-India Muslim League proposed self-determination for Indian Muslims in a session held here. And, in the 1940s, under the leadership of the Scheduled Caste Federation, leaders of Chamar and Raidas communities challenged the Congress' claims to be the sole representatives of the Indian people. During the 1960s, the Yadavs, who claim their lineage from the mythical god-king Krishna, benefited substantially from the land reforms enacted by the State Government. And since the 1980s, the Kols—anthropologically tribal, but recognized by the State Government as Scheduled Caste—have been demanding Scheduled Tribe status.

12. This discussion is based on Pai (2002).

13. The 500-year-old Grand Trunk Road, which skirts the northern edge of the city and Akbar's massive fort overseeing the Ganga bear testimony to the region's strategic importance.

14. Owning over 10 hectares.

15. Incidentally, appointment of service-providers is a much-awaited event in Uttar Pradesh and sustains an entire array of patronage politics. It is commonly believed that appointments are made on the basis of applicants' political connections, or bribes paid to the recruiting officers.

16. In a personal conversation, the manager of a large women's organization working in these blocks commented how it was easier to organize women in these areas because of the traditions of engagement.

17. From the point of view that "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1971), women's intra-household assertion is a significant indicator of their assertion in the public sphere.

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