

Cultures of Entitlement and Social Protection: Evidence from Flood Prone Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Summary. — Sen's entitlement thesis rooted in social contract theory has been used to explain access to food, and is used by states to design social protection programs as transfer entitlements to diffuse food insecurities. Social protection programs have now burgeoned in several countries as a strategy to enable the poor to overcome risks, vulnerabilities and poverty. These social protection programs have inclusion and exclusion errors, which current theorization attributes mainly to political clientalism, social vulnerability, elite capture, targeting inefficiency, leakages and corruption, lack of information transparency and improper designing of social protection programs. This paper argues that the errors are due to a more fundamental assumption made in application of social contract and entitlement-based approach to social protection programming. It identifies an uncritical application of Sen's entitlement thesis to social protection programs, as leading to inclusion and exclusion errors. The main problematic, the paper shows is that the social contract-led entitlement thesis works within the domain of formal rights situated within the state-citizen relations, and as such, misses out on the non-formal entitlements and non-state influences that impact materialization of social protection programs in practice. Evidences from flood prone Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, India indicate that non-state rules linked with clientele and patronage relations, moral and local political economies trump over formal rights to mediate social protection entitlement outcomes. Rather than abstract state-citizen social contract, it is the moral contracts of reciprocal exchanges with influential patrons embedded in the moral economy of the villages that ultimately ground the social protection entitlement claims of poor villagers. Conceptualizing this process of access as cultures of entitlement, the paper builds a framework for reinterpretation of entitlements and their outcomes, suggesting a recalibration of application of Sen's entitlement thesis to social protection programs. In conclusion it argues that Sen's entitlement thesis which is pitched at transfer of economic resources through social protection from the state to the poor is inadequate. Learning from social movements currently leading the transparency and accountability struggles in India, it calls for an instituting and recognition of accountability as *new* cultural resource and entitlement. In conclusion it argues that information, and accountability as new cultural entitlements, when mobilized through collective agency of the poor can potentially challenge the current cultures of entitlements evidenced in this paper that presently underlie social protection outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amartya Sen (1999) advocates an entitlement theory as a way to understand *how* access to food is mediated in a society. Given this, Sen provides a useful lens to design and monitor social protection programs, which provide for food and livelihoods entitlements in the context where such vulnerabilities are faced by people. As transfer entitlements (Sen, 1999) social protection programs have as one of their objectives enabling poor citizens to overcome risks, vulnerabilities and poverty cycles (Barrientos & Hulme, 2008). The last few years have seen burgeoning of social protection programs which have found a firm place in development policy moving from narrow safety nets to quasi-welfare programs and enabling growth (Barrientos, 2012; Devereux, McGregor, & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). Transformative social protection based on social contracts between citizens and states, that transforms conditions of underlying vulnerabilities and poverty is advocated (Chopra & te Lintelo, 2011; Devereux & Lund, 2010; Devereux *et al.*, 2011; Ehmke, 2011; Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2007; Sabates-Wheeler & Koehler, 2011; Tessitore, 2011). ILO's 189 member countries unanimous adoption of social protection floors on 14th June 2012 is a significant step in that direction and is hailed as a new global social contract (Durojaye, 2015; Ginneken, 2011).

This citizen rights and social contract-based normative conception of social protection sits well with Sen's own entitlement thesis which is derived mainly from the discourse of formal rights enjoyed as entitlements by the citizenry through social contract (Sen, 2010), and with Sen's own transformative project that calls for changes in their entitlements in ways that enable adequate food and livelihood security for all.

Yet, the current emphasis on social protection as legal entitlements performed through social contracts between state/citizen relationships has its own limitations. For example, Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann (2012) show that cash transfers in South Africa have at the best led to weak social contract relation between its beneficiaries and the state. Evidence from our research on reach of social protection programs in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, India, shows that in places where social contract does not work effectively, those who are culturally entitled reap maximum benefits. Following from this, our paper's main theoretical contribution is to highlight the gaps in the current social contract and entitlement-based framing of social protection thus calling for its reinterpretation.

India has a plethora of social protection programs, however, as this paper will show these programs do not always reach the

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poor—they have both inclusion and exclusion errors. As a result, the social protection programs are not able to fully meet their stated objectives of enabling access of food and livelihoods to the most vulnerable.

A literature review of studies, both global and India focused, identifies various operational gaps for the inclusion and exclusion errors, namely: (a) political clientalism, (b) exclusion due to social vulnerability, (c) elite capture, (d) targeting inefficiency, (e) leakages and corruption, (f) lack of information and transparency, and (g) improper designing of social transfers: universal or targeted, conditional or unconditional, cash or kind.

Our evidence from Bahrach, India, identifies another problem that leads to inclusion and exclusion error, namely the uncritical application of the concept of entitlement to social protection programs. We argue that Sen's concept of entitlements needs to be understood in the context of the social, cultural, and political factors that constitute *cultures of entitlements*, thus calling for their re-interpretation in their application to social protection programs.

In order to place this paper's contribution in the context of the current global and India specific literature on social protection programs, we summarize the findings from this literature review.

(a) Social protection programs, its operationalization, and inclusion and exclusion errors: Critical literature review with a focus on India

In this subsection, we discuss factors identified by the literature on social protection programs that lead to inclusion and exclusion errors.

(i) Political clientalism

This is linked with people being able to access resources due to their connections with local politicians and state patronage of groups for their political loyalty (Berenschot, 2010; Walton, 2009). In West Bengal, India, people who are affiliated to local ruling party are able to get more benefits than others through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme¹ (NREGA), one of the biggest social protection programs in India (Das, 2015). Hickey (2008) also notes that coverage of programs in Africa may be led by political clientalism. However, in some cases, the political clientalism can also be benevolent to all in so far as government implements social protection programs effectively with the idea of gaining votes in return from the people, as observed with a measure of success in Tamil Nadu (Carswell & Neve, 2014), Andhra Pradesh in India (Maiorano, 2014) and in Brazil in the context of Bolsa Familia program (Barrientos, 2013; Fried, 2012) and South Africa in the case of social grants (Plagerson, Harpham, & Kielmann, 2012).

(ii) Social vulnerabilities

In South Asia in general, socially excluded groups are marginalized and overlooked in implementation of social protection programs (Kabeer & Cook, 2010). In relation to India, caste can be a barrier with lower caste persons unable to access social protection due to discriminations (Bosher, Penning-Rowell, & Tapsell, 2007; De Haan, Dubey, & Sabharwal, 2009; Haddad, Chandrasekhar, & Swain, 2012; Mamgain & Diwakar, 2012; Thorat & Sadana, 2009). Improper designing which does not take into account women's social constraints hamper their participation in social protection programs as evidenced in South Asia by Kabeer and Cook (2010), Sudarshan, Bhattacharya, and Fernandez (2010) and in Peru

and Ethiopia by Holmes, Jones, Mannan, Vargas, Tafere, and Woldehanna (2011). Social protection programs continues to be gender blind in practice with dearth of gender disaggregated monitoring and evaluation indicators (Akerkar, 2007; Jones & Holmes, 2011). Elderly persons without education are also more likely to be excluded from pensions (Kaushal, 2014). Elderly people in rural areas and from ethnic minorities and women were found vulnerable to exclusion from social protection support in West Africa (Parmer *et al.*, 2014). Poorer screening processes for ascertaining disabilities can also lead to high exclusion errors for people with disability as found in cash grants given in South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia (Mitra, 2010; Schneider, Waliuya, Munsanje, & Swartz, 2011) and Africa, Latin America, Asia, including India (Gooding & Marriot, 2009; Palmer, 2013).

(iii) Elite capture

Elite capture refers to a process where local elites are able to capture developmental resources due to their "disproportionate access to social, political and economic power" (Dasgupta & Beard, 2007, p. 230). Local elite can design and implement social protection programs in ways that exclude poorest as shown in the case of Maharashtra, India (Pellisery, 2008). Due to their external contacts, powerful castes in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India are able to capture government resources (Parker & Kozel, 2007). Panda (2015) finds that political elite capture is ubiquitous in India, with better off monopolizing the government benefits (Jhabvala & Standing, 2010).

This elite capture is not inevitable, and can be thwarted through local capacity development and organization of marginalized groups as experienced in some cases in Indonesia, Tanzania, and India (Dasgupta & Beard, 2007; Lund & Saito-Jensen, 2013).

(iv) Targeting efficiencies

Targeting criteria to identify the poor can play a crucial role in inclusion and exclusion errors. The questionnaire used to identify below poverty line (BPL) persons in India has been critiqued for its imprecise method of scoring and for providing low quality data (Alkire & Seth, 2008, 2013; Mahamalik & Sahu, 2011; Ram, Mohanty, & Ram, 2009; Roy, 2011; Saxena, 2009). Study by Skoufias, Lindert, and Shapiro (2010) which analyzed 56 social transfer programs in Latin America and Caribbean shows redistributive impacts can be made through targeting efficiency. Obstructive legislations can create wrong ineligibility criteria, for example widows in Rajasthan who are not able to access widow pensions should they have adult sons (Dutta, 2013).

(v) Leakages and corruption

Often poor people are powerless in exposing irregularities, with powerful groups manipulating programs for their gain, through cuts/siphoning from people's wages in NREGA (Deshingkar, Johnson, & Farrington, 2005; Kabeer, 2002; Reddy, Tankha, Upendranath, & Sharma, 2010); Corruption and leakages work in large part of Public Distribution System (PDS) in India, where in highly subsidized food grains does not reach the targeted Below Poverty Line (BPL) families; and is sold in black market (Saxena, 2012). According to Dreze and Khera (2015) PDS leakages were as high as 30% in 2011–12. Leakages were also found in social pension distribution in India (Dutta, Howes, & Murgai, 2010). Although attempts to decrease leakages have been made in India through use of ICT; digitalized service delivery system, biometric cards, mis-appropriations have continued suggesting

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