

Strategies, Barriers and Policies towards Creating a More Inclusive Society **Sangeetha Purushothaman, Huairou Commission, Best Practices Foundation**

Introduction

This paper will discuss the issue of exclusion and participation drawing heavily on the Indian experience. What has exclusion meant in countries like India? It has meant historically that several communities are unable to participate effectively in the process of development, economically, socially and politically. These include populations such as the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, religious minorities such as Muslim communities, populations that fall below the poverty line, and among these populations, women are the worst affected.

In countries like India several programmes and strategies have emerged to facilitate the participation of these populations such as poverty alleviation programmes, educational scholarship programmes for scheduled castes and tribes, and more recently, the Backward Regions Grant Programme, among others. In addition, India has implemented electoral quotas in local government in proportion to the population size of that area that ensure elected representation and political participation of these populations resulting in close to a million women coming into power. Quotas have been implemented in educational institutions, in government contracts and agencies to ensure that these populations have special consideration for seats in colleges and employment. Civil society too has innovated a range of innovations to address poverty and facilitate participation of marginalized populations. All these interventions have at their base the mobilization of communities especially the poor towards increasing their participation.

Yet, despite all these measures, poverty continues to persist. One constraint identified has been the piecemeal nature of these solutions and compartmentalization of government programmes and approaches. Few initiatives have actually addressed the root causes of poverty and exclusion and fewer still are comprehensive in nature. It is therefore important at this moment to take stock of these interventions, best practices and the laws, programmes and policies in place to facilitate the participation of the excluded.

This paper situates the critical importance of participation of local communities in the larger debates, the strategies to facilitate participation of marginalized communities, the advantages and limitations of these strategies. It points towards the gaps that now need to be addressed towards ensuring comprehensive solutions emerge that can actually meet the larger social policy goal of greater and more effective participation of “all”. It further aims to initiate a dialogue on the types of institutional arrangements and capacity building measures needed to improve participation of all sections of local communities.

Situating Participation in the Dialogue on Rights and Development

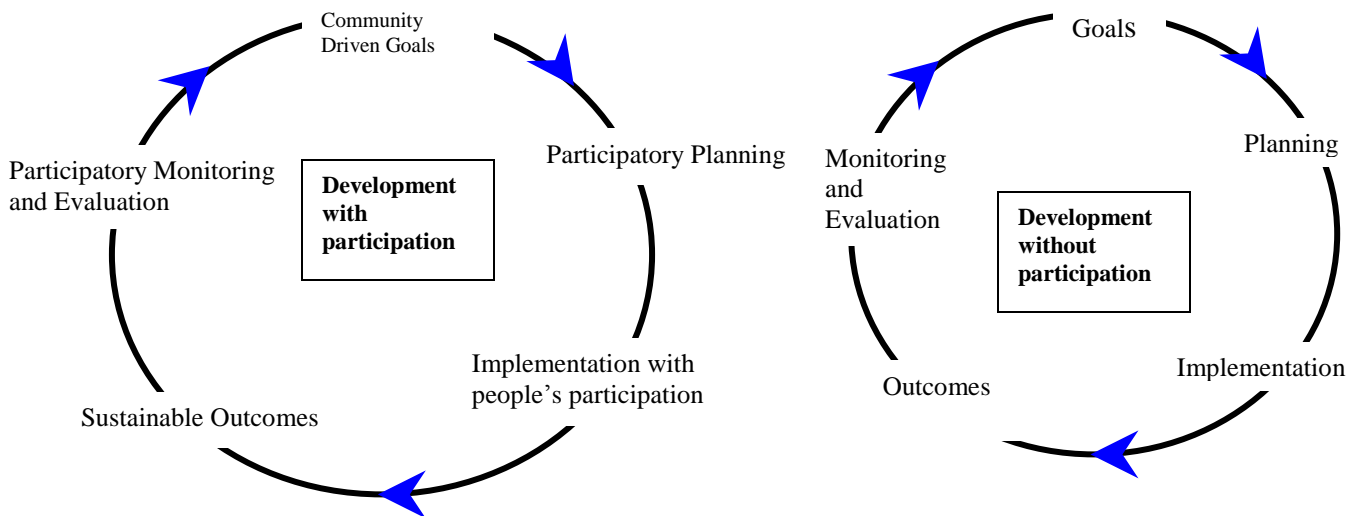
People’s participation is increasingly seen as vital to the democratic process and to overall development by researchers, donor agencies, and more recently even by

government. The literature and debates among practitioners now positions participation as important for inclusion, sustainability, accountability, empowerment, and even for governance.

Participation and the Development Framework

The development process can take place with or without participation (Figure 1). Historically Indian government for example developed five year plans, which translated into clear programmes with concomitant goals, which were implemented with clear development outcomes and results were evaluated. Yet people’s participation in planning, design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation of these programmes was minimal. Civil society institutions also have similar development programmes some of which are participatory and others not. With participation every aspect on the development cycle changes as seen below and outcomes are more sustainable as people have ownership over the process and the outcomes both.

Figure 1: The Development Cycles With and Without Participation



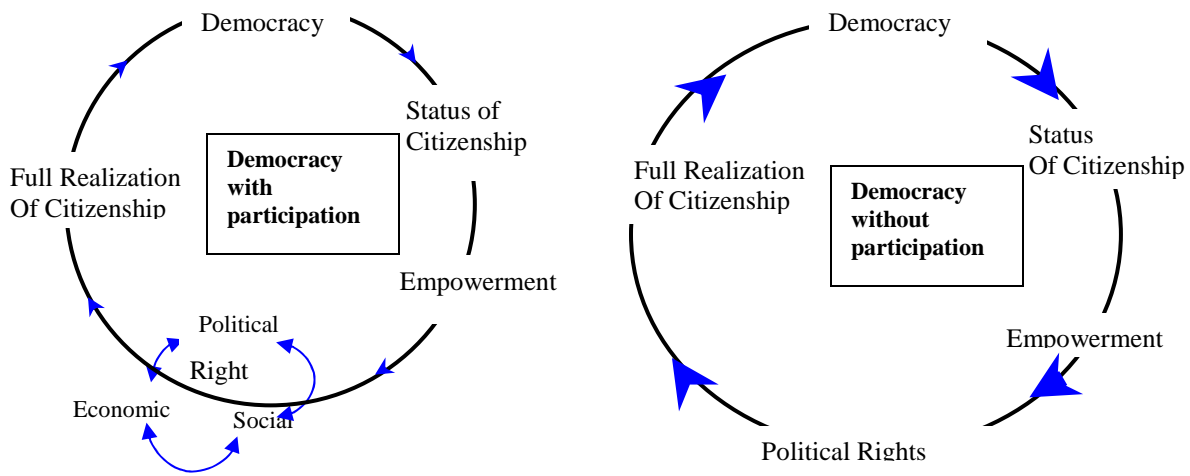
Participation and the Rights/Democratic Framework

Rights-based approaches to development take as their foundation the need to promote and protect human rights (those rights that have been recognized by the global community and are protected by international legal instruments). These include economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political rights, all of which are independent. (DFID, 1999, Guidance Sheet Number 1.2.)

The democratic process historically has taken place again with limited participation in the form of people voting in their elected representatives who then make the decisions on the development and governance processes on behalf of the larger public, namely those whom they represent. Thus people’s participation in democracy traditionally as epitomized by liberal theories sees citizen’s rights to political participation as merely

voting in their elected representatives. These elected representatives are then bestowed with the power and legitimacy to make decisions on behalf of those they represent. Other rights such as social and economic rights exist on paper in democracy but the poor have limited capacity to exercise these rights. For instance, not all can afford decent health care, and even when provided by the state the poor often do not know how to access health care benefits nor are they aware of resources specifically earmarked for them. Nor does everyone in a democracy have a decent livelihood. Political rights are also limited in that not all have the resources or the capacity to run for political office and the poor themselves rarely have access to information on candidates that they elect. Responsible citizenry in a democracy is bestowed certain rights but on the other hand also has duties and responsibilities towards society. It is the duty of a citizen to vote, to monitor and to report corrupt practices, to promote good practices and so on. It is thus the duty of a citizen to participate in democratic processes.

Figure 2: The Democratic Process With and Without Participation



Participation however is not automatic. Thus the crucial question here is what are the strategies that lead to the more effective participation of marginalized communities? A critical look at these theoretical models raises several unanswered questions with respect to participation. Namely how should rights and development approaches be interlinked on the ground? Given that facilitating participation is an expensive process, does this balance out with its role in long term sustainability? The idea is to evolve a framework, which reflects the ground reality and experiences from the ground which allows for more comprehensive solutions where the theoretical (and somewhat artificial) boundaries of rights and development do not exist.

Interventions on the Ground to Improve Participation

The simple answer to improving participation looking at experiences on the ground is that it is only through mobilization of these communities, capacity building and their empowerment, can they in turn better exercise their social, economic and political rights

and partake in the process and benefits of development. Thus each of these strategies to facilitate participation will be examined in turn with situating different solutions developed on the ground within this analysis.

Table 1: Interventions to Address Multi-Dimensional Nature of Poverty		
Economic Empowerment	Social Empowerment	Political Empowerment
1. Community Mobilization 2. Community run microfinance (Mf) institutions and Services 3. Research And Advocacy 4. Livelihood strategies 5. Integrated Livelihood Strategy With Mf Services 6. Linking With Banks For Sustainability. 7. Natural Resource Management 8. Vocational Training. 9. Awareness on economic Programs And Entitlements 10. Advocacy towards greater access to and control over resources	1. Community Mobilization 2. Rights Awareness And Legal Literacy 3. Awareness On Programs and Entitlements (health, education and other social entitlement programmes) 4. Operationalizing and Monitoring Of Social Programmes and Social Indicators 5. Gender Sensitization 6. Gender planning, and budgeting 7. Build women's institutions (federations and Women's courts) 8. Advocacy towards access to social rights	1. Community Mobilization 2. Capacity building of local government 3. Capacity building of local government on participatory planning. 4. Link CBOs and local government 5. Train to contest elections (Pre and Post-election) 6. Train CBOs on local government roles 7. Train CBOs on participation in local assemblies 8. Expose CBOs to Government Departments 9. Build capacities of SHGs to leverage public infrastructure investment to complement private enterprise. 10. Monitoring delivery of public goods and services 11. Advocacy on good governance
Outcomes		
Increased access to and control over resources by the poor and marginalized communities	Increased exercise of rights by marginalized populations	Increased power and decision making in the hands of marginalized communities

Common strategies used by all Approaches

Community Mobilization

Community mobilization which runs through all strategies, takes the form of creating formal and informal collectives such as self help groups, youth groups, farmer groups, water tank committees, watershed committees, village forest committees, village level

federations of self help groups, as well as federations at other levels. A range of issues such as the enhancement of livelihoods of the poor, natural resource management, improved engendered governance and the increased access of the marginalized to social rights have based their interventions on the formation of these various groups. Once the groups are mobilized, their capacities have to be built to take on the types of activities that the strategies require.

However these collectivities vary widely on the ground in their purpose, types of activities undertaken, level (local, district, state, or nationally in India), degree of formality, recognition by formal authorities, and so on. And it is within this variation that we find both problems and solutions. One variation is based on *degree of formality*. CBOs mobilized for participation in natural resources management programmes run by the government such as Village Forest Committees and Watershed Committees tend to be organized with the help of government, recognized by government, formally registered and are typically elite dominated. CBOs organized by civil society such as women's groups are often unregistered and less recognized by formal authorities such as government agencies and banks. The next variation is based on *purpose of mobilization*. Based on the purpose, CBOs vary both in composition, degree of formality, and activities undertaken.

Capacity Building:

Thus, capacity building varies from intervention to intervention, ranging from initiating savings and credit, skills training and income generation for economic development, to awareness on different social programmes and their monitoring to overcome social exclusion, and finally to participate politically in the electoral process and beyond.

Justice Delivery, Networking and Advocacy:

Simple awareness of rights is not enough to ensure inclusion. Once made aware of these rights, marginalized communities need to have mechanisms by which they can exercise these rights as well as redressal mechanisms when these rights are violated. Traditional redressal mechanisms like courts and law enforcement agencies can be called upon but have often proved to be prohibitively expensive and biased against these communities. New institutional mechanisms are evolving like the Nari Adalat, which are easier for poor communities to access at a very low cost, often free. However, these kinds of alternative justice delivery mechanisms are still rare. When laws themselves are not adequate, then advocacy and networking are essential strategies to create a more enabling legal environment for inclusion. For implementation of programmes and policies designed to promote inclusion, participation in decision making bodies at higher levels requires networking at those levels.

Convergence:

Simply put *convergence* represents the breaking down of bureaucratic walls between major government departments. Currently government agencies in India work mostly in isolation from each other and from civil society. Convergence would imply they begin to coordinate and synergize their efforts with each other. However simply convergence without the participation of communities would not be as effective in its outcomes. True

convergence of government initiatives should build on the inputs and would therefore require the active engagement with CBOs for which currently institutional arrangements are inadequate at best. A new initiative on convergence is just beginning in West Bengal through DFID.

Situating Grassroots Strategies

Economic Empowerment: Strategies such as microfinance, livelihood programmes and natural resource management programmes have emerged towards attaining the goal of economic empowerment, which provide the poor access to critical resources such as credit, subsidies, and common property resources. *Microfinance* institutions organize the poor primarily for credit purposes and the positive outcomes are increased access to credit and decreased dependency on money lenders on the part of the poor but simultaneously due to the cost of credit delivery being high with the poor paying interest rates of 12 to 24 percent and the lack of capacity building on livelihoods this results in more indebtedness and often little or no improvement in incomes or living standards. Thus equity and ecological sustainability are not addressed adequately by MFIs. Organizations that mobilize the poor for *Natural Resource Management* strategies focus typically on the landed and have little for the landless. Formal CBOs that access common property resources such as forests and water bodies typically are dominated by elites and one strategy used by civil society institutions is to get representation of the informal CBOs like SHGs on the boards of formal CBOs that allow the voices of the poor to come into decision making of these bodies. Because economic development programmes only provide *vocational or skills training* and credit for production, the poor have run into problems in terms of accessing markets and recently this has led to new strategies emerging to help the poor gain *access to markets* (MOVE and Just Change are new initiatives that represent these strategies)¹.

Several gaps have been identified with stand alone economic interventions. SHGs mobilized by government for *livelihoods* through poverty alleviation programmes tend to be limited in that they have no inputs on rights or awareness of other entitlements in terms of social programmes. Thus all it has taken is a single health epidemic to wipe out the economic gains of these groups as they do not have any access to health care or insurance. If not organized collectively and allowed a say in political and decision making processes, the livelihoods of the poor can easily be under threat due to unfavorable decisions made at higher levels. Thus federating the SHGs and training them to understand and represent the economic interests of the poor to government at all levels is vital to long term sustainability. Further engagement with local authorities and for SHGs to have decision making powers is equally important for the economic enterprises of the poor to succeed if they need adequate infrastructure such as electricity, water, roads and transportation to facilitate production and delivery of goods and services. Often times these types of decisions are taken at higher levels where neither the SHGs nor the local authorities have a voice.

¹ MOVE increases market knowledge of the poor so they can access and understand today's rapidly changing markets. Just Change represents another model where social capital in the form of federations of poor tribals can buy and sell products to each other, capitalizing on internal markets.

Social Empowerment: A range of organizations especially women's organizations, tribal organizations and caste based organizations mobilize sections of the populations and raise awareness using *rights based* approaches to increase awareness among excluded populations on their rights and to some extent on their entitlements as citizens. Another major strategy used by rights based organizations is to mobilize groups to increase *access to public goods and services* such as health programmes, housing, educational programmes, widow and old age pensions and so on. A third major strategy used has been *monitoring of local government* in terms of their delivery of public goods and services. This has included strategies such as the use of report card (Public Affairs Center) which rate different public services and the neighborhood group strategy used by organizations such as Mahila Samakhya which monitor government services and provide crucial inputs to government on eligibility and for their future planning for delivery of these services, the development of social indicators and their monitoring. In this context also *gender planning and budgeting* within public institutions is a new strategy, earlier restricted to national governments. Finally we see the emergence of new strategies such as the creation of new organizational forms such as local and state wide federations among women's groups, tribal groups and so on towards *advocacy*. Other new forms of organizations that have emerged include the women's courts runs and operated by poor women to ensure that poor women have access to justice as they do not normally have access to formal justice delivery mechanisms such as courts and the police, which tend to be expensive and gender biased.

However exclusively rights based approaches have been criticized for not adequately addressing the livelihood issues faced by the poor while still expecting them to participate in local community development. In a study done on 32 federations in Karnataka one major demand from the federations was the need to address livelihood issues and the problems faced by poor women who lose their day's wages when they engage in rights based campaigns. Another problem was the inability of these initiatives to take on board the local authorities. Biases against local authorities for their reputation for corrupt practices have accentuated this lack of engagement.

Political Empowerment: Several strategies have emerged including electoral quotas, capacity building and empowerment of local government to access and control resources, empowerment of communities through mobilization, capacity building and linkages to the local authorities, among others. Participatory planning processes involving the local authorities have been initiated in states like Kerala accompanied with devolution of resources to local authorities.

In other states however micro-planning has ended up not being supported with concomitant budgetary allocations making it difficult for local authorities to actually address local problems. Even in states like Kerala however participatory planning has not necessarily involved local community based organizations or local communities. Local assemblies are the fora at which such planning should take place but this is currently not happening. Thus capacity building and the required institutional arrangements that allow CBOs and local authorities to effectively engage are not in place.

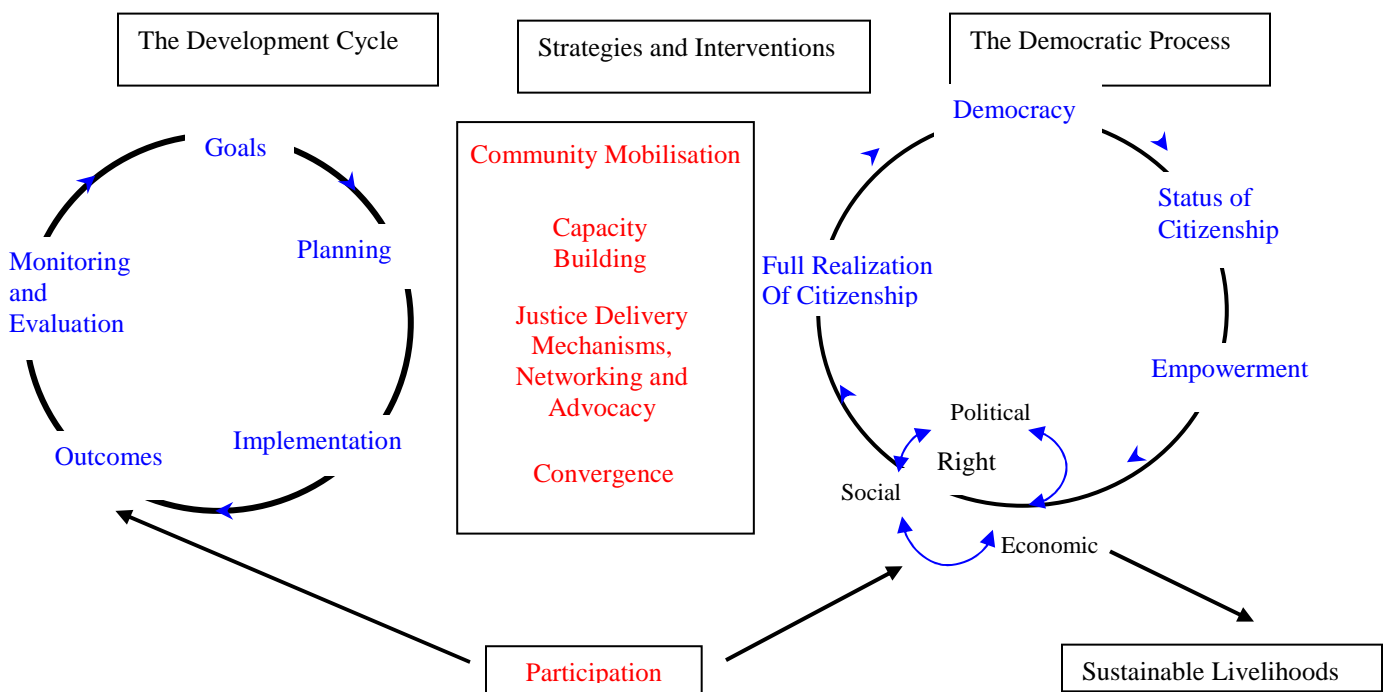
The few initiatives that have created such spaces have been found to empower both the local authorities and the communities.

Redefining Theory from Below: Participation, Development, Rights and Sustainability

The interventions above have built the capacities of the excluded to address poverty, basic needs, assert their rights, influence political processes, and move towards self reliance. To influence the development cycle and democratic process, both, the quality of participation needs to improve which takes place through capacity building and mobilization which in turn, helps create an informed, mobilized, conscious citizenry and rights and development strategies need to merge (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001).

The creation of CBOs and federations has increased participation of the excluded, which in turn has an impact on the democratic process and the development cycle both. A new Participation framework helps position the tools used to enhance people’s participation is represented by Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Participation Framework: Development, Rights and Sustainability



Participation impacts on the development process through the marginalized redefining priorities in planning, then through implementing these plans and creating linkages to government for implementation. Through participatory monitoring of the plans, people learn the tools of monitoring and can use these results to change the development process

to make it more directed, effective and sustainable. These results can further help redefine development goals.

Participation is fundamental to the democratic process. Exposure to these participatory processes has been known to change attitudes of government officials. Awareness of a citizen's full rights and responsibilities has resulted in a shift in thinking on the concept of citizenship. Citizenship thus redefined in democracies is a status bestowed by the state on individuals that entitles them to rights, social, economic and political, which they exercise through participation in public life thereby influencing the development process and outcomes.

Looked at in this manner, *participation is redefined as the active involvement of all stakeholders at every stage in the development process, where the voices of the poor, of women and of marginalized populations are center staged.* Participation is a condition through which citizens become empowered enough to exercise their rights and leads to a more vibrant democracy, better and more equitable development outcomes and finally to a new democratic space where participation itself is transformed into a right, from a condition or a pre-requisite.

How Experiences from the Ground Can Inform Policy

Grassroots experiences have shown the importance of participation, community mobilization and capacity building to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized communities. Thus we need to understand what factors promote or impede participation. Marginalised communities may require separate spaces to develop their confidence, capacities, and articulate their concerns outside the influence of those with power. However separate these spaces eventually their concerns need to be integrated within the plans of the larger community. It is at this stage where the next set of problems in participation arises.

Those in power may simply refuse to accept the problems or solutions of the marginalized, or worse there may be a backlash against them. Presuming acceptance, resources need to be identified to address the problems and to execute the solutions. Often plans get abandoned because of the lack of adequate resources. Worse yet, is a situation where the poor are unable to identify solutions and here strategies that build the capacities of the poor to a point where they are able to better define their plans for themselves are needed and other actors could step in if possible to break the impasse. This recognizes therefore the principle that participation is the responsibility of all stakeholders. However, towards the principle of equity, the participation of the poor and of women needs to be center staged.

The interventions outlined above are piecemeal in that they show substantive outcomes in one sphere and limited outcomes in other areas. This proves unsustainable in the long run, where neglect of certain causes of poverty can undo the gains achieved in other areas. Thus the next move would be towards more comprehensive solutions which implies the need for convergence on the part of the government accompanied by

participatory planning from below. It would further imply more synergy between the rights and development initiatives.

New forms of Processes and Organizations to increase Decision Making Powers of CBOs

Convergence when initiated is typically top down. Real convergence at all levels requires the existence of community organization and coordination at all levels and close engagement between CBOs and government. It would require institutional arrangements that allow convergence among state actors and between state and civil society.

Participatory planning as well within and across communities is also necessary which again requires that communities are mobilized, federated and space for dialogue and planning is created internally and externally with government.

Institutional arrangements

The role of the state in facilitating the growth of CBOs and federations as a basis for intervention cannot be overemphasized. This has already been recognized by the Indian state particularly in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal where the state is taking initiative to mobilize self help groups and federations on scale albeit with a limited purpose. The importance of formal and informal CBOs again cannot be overemphasized and in this context establishing formal relationships between these two forms of CBOs. Importance of creation of new processes towards convergence is again a state initiative and this need to be taken several steps further in terms of creating institutional arrangements for synergy as well as for cross-sectoral collaboration. Major capacity building is required for state and non state actors to accomplish these tasks in the form of capacity building for the state towards community mobilization for multiple purposes, capacity building of civil society and state in participatory planning, participatory monitoring and evaluation and joint implementation.

Center Staging Grassroots Women

Issues being interrelated in the lives of poor women allow them to naturally participate in initiatives that cut across the rights-development divide. Further by starting with grassroots women who are the most excluded within and among marginalized populations, other groups can be more easily included. However leaving out women initially in the hope of their being included along the way is a strategy that has rarely worked. Innovations that have been evolved by grassroots women have much to offer in terms of local knowledge and wisdom that can inform policies on inclusion.

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