

LIMITS TO LITERACY:
THE PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNCTIONAL LITERACY
AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AMONGST THE FOREST-DWELLING
VAN GUJJARS

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Abstract

The failure of countrywide basic literacy campaigns to enhance social mobility has led to the promotion and development of localized, comprehensive functional literacy campaigns. These campaigns are particularly applicable to marginalized groups; as they aim to empower communities by providing them with the necessary skills to navigate their socioeconomic and political environments. This qualitative study examines the long-term impact of one such functional literacy campaign on the semi-nomadic pastoral Van Gujjar community. I use the Assets, Opportunity Structure, and Degrees of Empowerment (DOE) method to investigate community members' perceptions of the level of political empowerment that followed their participation in a functional literacy program. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques such as focus groups (n3), semi-structured interview (n30), observation, and key informant interviews (n3) provide a comprehensive understanding of the perceived link between functional literacy and political empowerment in the Van Gujjar community. Using a long-term impact-evaluation as a framework, I hope to add to the contemporary understanding of the role literacy can play in empowering nomads to better navigate their ever-changing political environment.

Introduction

Empowerment and Development

The ineffectiveness of top-down approaches to development has heightened the popularity of community-led participatory development amongst development agencies since the 1980s. This progress led to mainstreaming of “empowerment” as a desired outcome of NGO interventions and of government poverty-reduction policies. Empowerment, defined by the World Bank - and adopted by others - as "the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes,"¹ is no longer questioned as a valid precursor to other development outcomes, as well as an important development outcome in itself. The intrinsic value of empowerment stresses the importance of empowerment for functioning democracies, the nonmonetary aspects of poverty reduction, and human rights approaches to development.^{2,3,4,5,6,7} Instrumentally, the link between personal or communal empowerment and outcomes such as poverty reduction and the realization of human rights is undeniable.^{8,9}

Literacy, according to the United Nations, “strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health, educational, political, economic and cultural

¹ Alsop, Ruth, and Nina Heinson. "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators." *World*

² Kaufmann, D., A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi. "Governance Matters III: Governance Indicators for 1996-2002." *World Bank Economic Review* 18(2): 253-87. 2004. 1 May 2014

³ Moore, M., and J. Putzel. 1999. "Thinking Strategically about Politics and Poverty". Working Paper 101, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK. 1 May 2014

⁴ Bourguignon, F., F. Ferreira, and M. Menendez. "Inequality of Outcomes and Inequality of Opportunities in Brazil." World Bank Working Paper 3174, World Bank, Washington, DC. 2003. 22 May 2014

⁵ Sen, A. "Editorial: Human Capital and Human Capability." 25 (12). *World Development*. Development as Freedom. 1999. Development as Freedom. New York: Knopf 3 April 2014

⁶ DFID (Department for International Development). "Realising Human Rights for People." DFID, London. 2000. 1 May 2014.

⁷ Moser, C., and A. Norton. 2001. "To Claim Our Rights: Livelihood Security, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development." Overseas Development Institute, London. 2001. 20 April 2014.

⁸ Eyben, R. "Linking Power and Poverty Reduction" World Bank Workshop on Power 6. 5. 2004 . 1 May 2014

⁹ Moore, M. "Empowerment at Last?" *Journal of International Development* 13 (3)2001. 20 May 2014

opportunities and services.”¹⁰ For this reason it is included in the Right to Education as a Basic Universal Right. Yet the failure of large-scale literacy campaigns to uplift communities has lead researchers, policy-makers and educators to question the link between basic literacy and community empowerment¹¹. In response to the ineffective of these campaigns, literacy has come to be understood as contextual and societal phenomenon, and encompasses the ability to use reading, writing and calculation to engage in all activities required for the effective functioning and development of one’s community. It is also increasingly viewed as encompassing social and political awareness and critical evaluation.¹² The objectives behind literacy campaigns have also shifted to the promotion of functional literacy. When functional literacy programs contain relevant course content and specialized implementation methods, empowerment is often an outcome.^{13,14,15} Stromquist states that in the case of adult-literacy, empowerment can be reflected as “ a set of feelings, knowledge, and skills that produce the ability to participate in one’s social environment and affect the political system. This ability can be seen as comprising four dimensions: the cognitive dimension, or the knowledge of one’s social reality and the mechanisms that make it function the way it does; the economic dimension, or access to independent means of support, which help make individuals more autonomous in their decisions; the political dimension, or the skills to participate in and modify institutions and policies of one’s community or nation; and the psychological dimension, or feelings that individuals are competent, worthy of better conditions, and capable of taking action on their own behalf”¹⁶

¹⁰ “Literacy for Life: Education for All Global Monitoring Report” UNESCO (29) 2006

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² McConnell, Suzanne. Literacy and empowerment [online]. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, The*, Vol. 15, No. 2, May 1992: 123-138. Web. 15 Mar. 2014.

¹³ Bown, Lalge. "Literacy and Empowerment." *UNESCO*. N.p., 8 Sept. 2009. Web. 15 Mar. 2014.

¹⁴ Manthoto, L. (1995). Educating women for empowerment in Lesotho. *Convergence*, 28(3), 5–14.

¹⁵ Durgunoglu, A.Y., Oney, B., & Kuscul, H. (2003) Development and evaluation of an adult literacy program in Turkey. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 23, 17 – 36

¹⁶ Stromquist, N. P. “Literacy and Empowerment: a contribution to the debate” Background study commissioned in the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade. 2009. 12 April 2014

Literacy for Political Empowerment

Comprehensive research into the long-term effects of functional literacy programs is scarce. Most often it is in the form of a pre-test/post-test analysis, but while these are able to measure, to some extent, changes in attitudes, they are not able to investigate the impact of the literacy on daily practices. Given a subjective understanding of “empowerment” no causal link between literacy programs and empowerment can be made without recognizing the multitude of other factors at play in any given situation. Several studies in developing nations such as Ghana, India, and Uganda have been able to link literacy programs with community capacity building, social awareness, and participation in the development process from a rights-based approach.^{17 18}

Of these different empowerment dimensions, it is the political sphere that has shown the strongest intrinsic link to between empowerment and other development outcomes such as increased political participation, and a stronger democracy. Neo-literates often gain more knowledge about political parties, laws, and other political knowledge. Their civic engagement also increases, and they often start to vote and participate in community-level decision making.¹⁹ It is predicted that as individuals are exposed to information pertaining to public and government institutions that affect their environment, they become more willing to work towards the betterment of those institutions.²⁰ Evidence suggests that the cumulative nature of political knowledge means that continued exposure to political accounts is instrumental in developing participants interests. Exposure in the form of political discussion or reading materials, such as newspapers, is important for sustained engagement.²¹ For this reason, literacy programs with a

¹⁷ Stromquist, N. P. (2002). Education as a means for empowering women. In J. L. Parpart, S. M. Rai, & K. Staudt. Rethinking empowerment: Gender and development in a global/local world. (pp. 22-38).

¹⁸ Konate, Maimouna. "The Effects of Literacy on Rural Women in Mali: Transformation through Empowerment." *Michigan State University* (2010): n. pag. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

¹⁹ Stromquist, N. P. "Literacy and Empowerment: a contribution to the debate" 4.

²⁰ Stromquist, N.P. "The Political benefits of Adult Literacy" Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006 Literacy for Life. 2005. 1 April 2014. 1.

²¹ Stromquist, N. P. "Literacy and Empowerment: a contribution to the debate" 6

specific goal of enhancing political participation, such as those that teach legal literacy or those that adopt a Freirian approach to teaching critical literacy, have shown significant empowerment outcomes as past participants in these programs are more likely to continue to seek out information.²² This trend is not as pronounced in the case of women's political participation, though a large body of evidence shows that this has little to do with a lack of political knowledge present in females, but rather has to do with the absence of time for their sustained political involvement.²³ Indeed, other studies have shown that often ideological forces within communities diminish the possible impact of the functional literacy programs. A study on a functional literacy program for women in Mali found that upon evaluating past participants, only a few had remained literate. Furthermore, even those who were literate maintained very similar socio-economic practices and attitudes to their illiterate peers. This is because the community's perception of women, including the women's perception of themselves, still remained powerful force in maintaining traditional social order.²⁴ In Nigeria, nomadic education, though praiseworthy for its objectives, was not received well.²⁵ Long-term observation of its effects showed that the program did not only maintain the nomads low literacy levels, but it also "legitimized administrators' and settled peoples' exploitation of the nomads, under the expectation that the nomads will learn, through education, to avoid exploitation." Researchers of this study warned that an over-emphasis on literacy at the expense of other programs might violate their other human rights such as the right to pursue their livelihood.²⁶

When the Nigerian government adopted the literacy program mentioned above, the program became politicized and a need for measurable indices of success was created. This meant that,

²² Ibid. 2.

²³ Ibid. 8

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Dyer, Caroyne. "Education for All" and the Rabaris of Kachchh, Western India

²⁶ VerEecke, Catherine. "NIGERIA'S EXPERIMENT WITH A NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR NOMADIC EDUCATION."

“little cognizance has been given to what Nigeria’s nomads see as appropriate for themselves.” In sum, while the link between literacy and political empowerment of the community is not linear, and should not be measured as such, it has been illustrated by many large-scale studies.^{27,28,29}

The Indian Context

According to the most recent *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/2014*, India has the largest population of illiterate people globally, and is home to 37% of all illiterates.³⁰ And while the National Literacy Mission (NLM) of 1998 was able to make 127.45 million people literate - including a large proportion of females, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes – illiteracy continues to be a grave concern. The government’s latest schemes, *Saakshar Bharat(year)and Scheme for Support to Voluntary Agencies for Adult Education and Skill Development(2009)*, aims to support intensive involvement of voluntary sector in endeavors to promote functional literacy, skill development, and continuing education particularly in the 15-35 year old age group.³¹ The worldwide trend from basic literacy instruction to functional literacy skills, that aim to empower participants, is important for pastoralist and nomadic communities, whose literacy levels are strikingly low in comparison to even other rural populations.³² Not only does their physical isolation from mainstream educational systems hinder their access to education systems, irrelevant course materials provided little incentive for participation.³³

²⁷ Burchfield, S., Hua, H., Baral, D., & Rocha, V. “*A longitudinal study of the effect of integrated literacy and basic education programs on women’s participation in social and economic development in Nepal.*” Washington, DC: Office of Women in Development, United States Agency for International Development. (2002). 1 May 2014.

²⁸ Carron, G., Mwiria, K., & Righa, G. “*The functioning and effects of the Kenyan Literacy Program: A view from the local level*” Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning. 77. 1989. 20 March 2014.

²⁹ Reder, S. “*The Development of Literacy and Numeracy in Adult Life.*” In S. Reder & J. Bynner (eds.), *Teaching Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills. Findings from Longitudinal Research.* New York: Routledge, 59-131. 2009. 1 May 2014.

³⁰ “Literacy for Life: Education for All Global Monitoring Report” UNESCO (29) 2006

³¹ “Home: Department of School Education & Literacy - Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.” *Home: Department of School Education & Literacy - Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.* N.p., 24 Feb. 2012. Web. 19 Mar. 2014.

³² “Literacy for Life: Education for All Global Monitoring Report” UNESCO (29) 2006

³³ Postiglione, Gerard, Ben Jiao, and Li Xiaoliang. “Education Change and Development in Nomadic Communities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).” *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 2012. 89- 105. Web. 10 Mar. 2014.

Successful literacy programs for nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists are delivered within a non-antagonistic cultural environment, are flexible in response to changing needs, and are designed to empower communities to address social economic and political hindrances to pastoral livelihood. ^{34,35} But India does not cater formally to the education of its nomadic populations, and thus perpetuates the exploitation of these peoples. India's regional development plans are designed for sedentary groups and these - in conjunction with shrinking natural resources, increasingly damaged ecosystems, globalization, and urbanization – reinforce the nomads' position of vulnerability in the country. India, more than any other Asian country, reported that their push for literacy was part for a greater human resource development plan. This wording is significant, as the need to create *human resource* is often in direct contradiction to the desired outcomes of non-governmental literacy education programs, such as the nomads' enhanced understanding of their rights live in the forest and continue their livelihood practices. Policy design insists that pastoralists can benefit from development opportunities if they compromised their peripatetic occupation, become sedentary, and enroll their children in government schools. This approach has led to poor enrolment and retention rates of pastoralists in formal and non-formal schools. Educational provision needs to change to match pastoralists' needs. However, in a world where the nomadic pastoralists' needs are changing rapidly, it is a difficult task to equip the community with the tools to cope with and overcome the challenges of the globalizing world while at the same time supporting and recognizing the value in their traditional livelihood. As researchers on the Rhabaris of Kutch, a transhumant pastoralist group found in Western India, stated, "Groups such as the Rabaris want to be included, as Indian citizens, by a state that honours their constitutional right to an education of quality. 'Education' should not cost them their means

³⁴ Kratli, Saverio. "Education Provision to Nomadic Pastoralists." *IDS Working Paper 126*(2001): n. pag. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

³⁵ VerEecke, Catherine. "NIGERIA'S EXPERIMENT WITH A NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR NOMADIC EDUCATION." 28.D (1989): n. pag. Center for African Studies. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

of earning a living or destroy their way of life.”³⁶ However, as the desired means of earning shifts quickly amongst these groups, so too does their desire for certain types of education. More recently, attempts at creating a peripatetic adult literacy program are said to have been met with limited success, “Nomads saw the programme as a vehicle for gaining the technical skills to deal with a defined range of tasks, but since it could not offer the economic, cultural and symbolic capital they seek in their present circumstances, viewed formal schools as the route to empowerment.”³⁷

The Van Gujjars

The Van Gujjars are a pastoral semi-nomadic community living in the forest in the central part of the Himalaya's. They migrate with herds of buffalo between the Shiwalik foothills in the winter and the Upper Himalayn Region in the summers. Their migration has been restricted since the 1980s under colonial rule by the British. The creation of the Rajaji National Park in the middle of the Van Gujjar winter pasteurland in 1992 further threatened the lifestyle of the Van Gujjars. The Rajaji park was created under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), which established protected areas and prohibited hunting and trade in wildlife products. Thus, the creation of the Rajaji National Park and similar parks since meant that the Van Gujjars lost many of their traditional forest rights: their movement within the forest, and their use of it's vegetation were severely prohibited.³⁸

The creation of the park, and resettlement of some Van Gujjars in a nearby town - fueled the beginning of a long battle of the Van Gujjars - lead by NGO *Rural Litigation for Entitlement Kendra* (RLEK) – for their rights to live freely in the forest.³⁹ The literacy program with which

³⁶ Choksi, A., Dyer, C “Education is like wearing glasses: Nomads' views of literacy and empowerment” *International Journal of Educational Development* 18. 5. 1998, Pages 405–413. 1 April 2014

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dyer, Carolyne. "Newsletter No. 4 - Nomads: Excluded from Inclusion - EENET." *Enabling Education Network*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

³⁹ UNESCO. "Teaching the Nomads in the Wild." *UNESCO*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

this paper is concerned is one of the many initiatives lead by RLEK and another closely-linked organization, the *Society for the Promotion of Himalayan Rights* (SOHPA), in the time since. The organizations' initiatives have made great strides: the Van Gujjars have since gained the right to vote, the right to government social services such as rationed goods, and the right to their inclusion on the family register, while still living in the forest. Their presence as political actors has been noticed by political parties who are eager to rally with the Van Gujjars to gain their support. Local Pradhans also seem to be paying attention to the needs of the Van Gujjars. Pernille Gooch, a researcher who has been working with the Van Gujjars for over twenty years, believes that the increased political involvement and attention “empowers the Van Gujjars when it comes to resource sharing and conflict resolutions at the local level.”⁴⁰ Finally, in January 2008, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) came to be to protect forest dwellers and address the injustice that they have already experienced. The full effects of the act are not yet evident, but should the Van Gujjars meet its requirements once it is implemented, the FRA will provide them with official rights to live permanently in the forest. The FRA aims to rectify the damage done by previously denying forest dwellers right to the land. For many Van Gujjars, however, the FRA has come too late: the difficulties that have come to plague the pastoral livelihood mean that most would rather relocate to agricultural land and pursue a sedentary life. Indeed despite the many political victories, the hardships are still immense.⁴¹

The Van Gujjars' migratory route falls in an area that has been consistently divided between governing bodies. This has meant that the Van Gujjars encounter different sets of legislation, and must deal with different forest officials, as they migrate between the states.

⁴⁰ Gooch, P. “*Victims of conservation or rights as forest dwellers: Van Gujjar pastoralists between contesting codes of law*” Conservation and the Law 7.4.2009.239-248 1 Marh 2014

⁴¹ Ibid. 241

Living between the many rules that have come to govern the forest has become exhausting.⁴²

While almost all Van Gujjars migrated annually twenty years ago, the number of non-migrating Van Gujjars has since decreased ten-fold.⁴³

Before a mass literacy drive by RLEK in 1993, none of the Van Gujjars were literate. This led to daily exploitation as the Van Gujjars interacted with other community members at the market, or when their community was faced with legal issues.

A report by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex and the Overseas Development Institute in England on social exclusion explains that in much of Asia, “indigenous groups pursue a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life which is regarded as ‘inferior’ by the rest of society, but which also serves to keep them outside mainstream development efforts.”⁴⁴ The report then goes on to praise RLEK as an example of combatting this pattern of social exclusion by means of an “innovative approach whereby local teachers migrate with the community and implement a culturally adapted curriculum.”⁴⁵

RLEK’s program was significant because:

- It depended on the use of volunteer teachers, and appointed one for every five families
- Volunteers received a month’s training in the culture and practices of the Van Gujjar community
- The program had the broad goal to “empower the community to stand up for their rights and bring an end to the oppression they have faced for years.”⁴⁶ In addition to legal literacy, the Van Gujjars were asked to specify what they would like to study and opted for accounts, to be able to

⁴² Dhar, Sushovan. "The Van-Gujjar Struggle for Traditional Rights: Women in the Leadership -." *Radical Socialist*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

⁴³ SOPHIA Documentation “Self-Diagnosis” Evaluation

⁴⁴ "Social Exclusion and the MDGs: The Challenge of ‘Durable Inequalities’ in the Asian Context." *ASIA2015 Group3A* (2006): 20. Web. 10 Mar. 2014.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

deal with milk traders; and English so that they could read road signs, billboards and registration numbers of heavy vehicles so they could note those that killed their cattle on the road.

- RLEK prepared three basic textbooks based on the technique of Improved Pace and Content of Learning. The writers were exposed to the culture and lifestyle of Van Gujjars; and one male and one female prospective learner were involved in preparing these primers.

- Subjects dealt with in the primers included cooperative systems, social harmony, improvement of environment, significance of conservation, personal hygiene, family planning, child health

- The program involved a post-literacy component that set up a mobile library and aimed to ensure places of reading material to the Van Gujjar communities on a variety of topics.

- The program involved other community empowerment components to allow the Van Gujjars to gain insight into issues of health, sanitation, natural resource, environmental management, veterinary care and the rights of citizens under the constitution.⁴⁷

As is the case amongst literacy programs worldwide, quantifying its success proves difficult because of the varying lengths and frequency of attendance. The program claims that since it began, 21,000 Van Gujjar adults have become literate, can now negotiate better terms of re-settlement with Rajaji National Park authorities, and have been offered 2 hectares of land.⁴⁸

With the aid of outside NGOs, they have also begun to form milk co-operatives, and have fought for and procured their voting rights.⁴⁹ The adult literacy work has also led to a demand for formal schools for Van Gujjar children and RLEK has set up four exclusive schools for them.⁵⁰

Research Question

⁴⁷ Dyer, Carolyne. "“Education for All” and the Rabaris of Kachchh, Western India

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "South Asian Nomads - A Literature Review." *Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity* 58 (2011): n. pag. *University of Sussex Centre for International Education*. Web. 10 Mar. 2014.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Given the innovative approach and perceived success of RLEK's literacy campaign, I hope to investigate the perceived link between functional literacy skills and political empowerment amongst the forest-dwelling Van Gujjar community.

As this study does involves a control, it is at times tempting to, once the Empowerment Indicators are decided upon, simply compare the two groups' possession of these indicators and to come to my own conclusions about the impact of the literacy campaign. However that is not the purpose of this study. Rather I aim to learn about the Van Gujjars perception of political empowerment and its link to functional literacy. I hope to use a method of Participator Rural Appraisal to learn :

- 1) In which ways do the Van Gujjars believe that participation/non-participation in the RLEK Literacy Campaign affected the development of their current political attitudes and practices?
- 2) In which ways do the Van Gujjars believe that participation/non-participation in the RLEK Literacy Campaign affected their current political status?

In the last 20 years since the program piloted, the Van Gujjars' interactions with government authorities have been described at times as victorious and at others as tumultuous. Thus, I think it is important to gauge their perception on these changes, and how the literacy program shaped the way they approached these interactions with the state.

I hope to use these results to understand their perception of the link between literacy and political empowerment. In understanding their perceptions about the ability of literacy campaigns to empower their own community, I hope to gain insight into the role that such initiatives should have in today's world – when political pressures on nomadic communities from government actors is immense.

Analytical Framework

In recognizing the context- and situation-specific conception of empowerment, I had hoped to investigate perceived changes in experienced empowerment in the most holistic, yet comprehensive way. I felt it important to allow the target community to identify their own indicators for empowerment, and to ensure that value given to their changes in political empowerment was their doing and not mine. After much research into the most comprehensive, and least obtrusive methodology to fit my study, I chose to use Alsop and Heinson's (2005) method for measuring empowerment, as explained in a handbook by the World Bank.⁵¹ The approach is "based on the premise that empowerment cannot be measured in a way that does justice to its inherent complexity and that satisfactorily meets these three criteria of meaning, causality, and comparability."⁵² Thus it aims to make use of indicators that are able to explain important dimensions in changes in power, and then to complement these measurements with interpretive qualitative analysis. It attempts to measure empowerment by measuring *personal agency* (the capacity to make purposive choice), *opportunity structure* (the institutional context in which choice is made) and *the interaction between those two factors* (the extent to which the desired action is followed through with and is effective, or the Degree of Empowerment.)⁵³

Agency is defined as an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices--that is, the actor is able to envisage and purposively choose options.⁵⁴ Assets are the sets of resources that equip actors to use economic, social, and political opportunities and we can use different assets to serve as indicators of agency. These assets may be psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human. Asset endowment can be used to measure

⁵¹ Alsop, Ruth, and Nina Heinson. "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510, February 2005*. N.p., n.d. Web.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ ⁵³ Jupp, Dee, and Sohel I. Ali. "Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them Quantifying Qualitative Outcomes from People's Own Analysis Insights for Results-based Management from the Experience of a Social Movement in Bangladesh." *Sida Studies in Evaluation* 1 (2010): n. pag. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

⁵⁴ Alsop, Ruth, and Nina Heinson. "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators."

both empowerment as an endpoint, and the process of empowerment.

Opportunity structure looks at the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions, including the laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms governing behavior. In order for *agency* to transform into *empowerment*, the institutional context within which the actor lives and works must allow it. Formal institutions include the sets of rules and regulatory frameworks that govern actors' operations. Informal institutions are the societal norms and unofficial rules that govern include the "unofficial" rules that structure incentives and govern actors' operations. Informal institutions often take the form of cultural practices and norms of behavior. It is important to note that the official existence of formal rules says little about the way they operate. Thus monitoring the presence of these rules must look at their every-day operations and accessibility.

Degrees of empowerment are measured by the existence of choice, the use of choice, and the achievement of choice.

To illustrate, if a team were trying to assess the degree of political empowerment of women, it would need to gather information on (1) whether opportunities for political participation exist, such as whether elections are held, and, if so, (2) whether women attempt to vote; and (3) whether they actually vote. The achievement of choice is a measure of how far a person or group is able to achieve their desired outcome.⁵⁵

The Degrees Of Empowerment, unlike assets and opportunity structure, try to measure the state of empowerment using direct indicators of empowerment by assessing an actor's capacity to make effective choice. The framework does not assume that the Degrees of Empowerment act as a continuum along which the final degree – achievement of choice – signifies total empowerment.

It is for this reason the that framework aims to look at the interplay of assets, opportunity structure and degrees of empowerment to gain an comprehensive understanding of the “dynamic processes and relational changes that are less predictable, less tangible, more contextual, and

⁵⁵ Alsop, Ruth, and Nina Heinson. "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510, February 2005*. N.p., n.d. Web.

more difficult to quantify in data collection and analysis”⁵⁶

I will measure political empowerment at a local level in which the respondent is a civic actor and has various interaction with the state either directly or indirectly

(See Figure 1, Appendix 1 for a diagrammatic representation of the relationship between Assets, Opportunity Structure, and Degrees of Empowerment)

Procedure

This paper set out to examine whether, and in what ways, the acquisition of basic literacy skills through a literacy campaign has impacted the level of political empowerment experienced by the Van Gujjar people living in the forests of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Findings were collected through a process of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) that included focus groups, semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and interviews with key informants, and then analyzed using the Assets, Opportunity Structure, and Degrees of Empowerment method outlined above. Each step of the research process is outlined below.

(See Figure 2, Appendix 2 for a diagrammatic representation of the procedure)

Sampling

The main NGO working with the Van Gujjar community at the moment is the Society for Promotion of Himalayan Indigenous Activities (SOPHIA). I was allowed access to the Van Gujjar community through SOPHIA. Together we selected 3 strategic locations for my fieldwork – Timli Beet Forest, Darra Sot (Uttarakhand State), Khajnor Forest Area, Datli Sot (Uttar Pradesh State) and Kaluwala khol, (Uttar Pradesh State). These areas were selected on the criteria:

- The contained areas where the literacy campaign operated
- They contained both migrating and non-migrating Van Gujjars

⁵⁶ Malhotra, A., S. Schuler, and C. Boender. *“Measuring Women’s Empowerment as a Variable in International Development.”* Draft, PRMGE, World Bank, Washington, DC. . 2002. 7 April 2014

- They were accessible within a day's journey (using motorized transport and then hiking)

Once selected, field staff from SOPHIA acted as intermediaries to ensure that I was welcomed into the host community.

Once at each sight, a model of stratified purposeful sampling was used.

3 Focus groups: Groups were divided into one female, one male and one mixed-gender group to see if changes experienced over time were gender specific.

30 Interviews: Twenty interviews were done with past participants and 10 interviews were done with non-participants to act as a control group. Respondents were aged 18 – 70. Groups were divided between the two factors of gender, migratory status (presently migrating or staying in one place for the whole year) and age (above 40, below 40).

Age – Due to the rapidly changing nature of the Van Gujjar's social, economic and political status, and the extended period that the program continued for, we felt it important to ensure I heard the views of both younger and older members of the community.

Participants: 11/20 below 39, 9/20 Above 40

Control: 4/10 below 39, 6/10 Above 40.

Method of income generation – Due to a myriad of factors outlined above, the Van Gujjar's traditional method of income generation, namely the selling of Buffalo milk, is severely under threat. Because non-traditional income generation methods will require different skills, I felt this an important indicator. I felt that this was more important than dividing respondents amongst nomadic status, as even those who are not currently migrating often send their buffaloes with family members and thus maintain relatively similar lifestyles as those that do migrate.

Participants: 9/20 traditional dairy sales, 11/20 other source of primary income

Control: 5/10 traditional dairy sales, 5/10 other source of primary income

Gender – Because empowerment often manifests itself in different ways for different genders, we felt it important to gather information from each gender separately. Though a sincere attempt was made to have an equal number of females and male in each block of respondents each group, this proved difficult. Ultimately I was unable to interview a sufficient number of female past-participants because

- Few females participated in the program
- Married females move to their husbands' homes that is often in a completely different part of the forest.
- The women who had moved to this area did not come from areas that were reached by the literacy program.

Participants: 17/20 Male, 3/20 Female

Control: 5/10 Male, 5/10 Female.

While a comparative analysis of female and male perspectives will not be possible provided the small female sample size, discussion of those results that were found is still included below.

Data Collection

Literature Review

Due to the unfamiliar research location, an extensive literature review was done in order to gain a broad understanding of the history and present-day situation of the Van Gujjars as understood by the literature.

Key-informants interviews

In order to prepare for work in the field, three interviews were done with experts on the Van

Gujjar lifestyle and past and present issues .

These interviews provided perspective on:

- General knowledge about the Van Gujjar lifestyle that would facilitate the research process
- Significant milestones in the Van Gujjar community that can be used to talk about historical time periods
- Key demographic variables to inform maximum variation sampling

Participatory Rural Appraisal

A method of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was used to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Van Gujjar's life has changed within the last 20 years.

1. Focus Groups: Three focus groups were set up to document local histories and gain an understanding of the context that existed before the intervention of the literacy campaign. The focus groups consisted of 4-6 Van Gujjar people each, a translator, and the researcher. One of these groups was exclusively female, one was exclusively male and the final one was mixed. Distinction was not made between past participants in the literacy campaign and non-participants, as the purpose of the focus groups was to understand the communal experience of the past twenty years. Discussions ranged in length between one and two hours and took place in areas that were both convenient for participants and secluded from large amounts of distracting activity. In the case of the all-female group, the discussion was held in the cooking area of the *dera* (home) , as this is normally exclusively for women. The remaining discussions were held in the main area of the *dera* and outside on an open area of land. Groups were asked to reflect on the changes that they had perceived in the last 20 years (local milestones were used to indicate time). Conversations were free flowing and only loosely directed so that each

discussion covered social, political and economic changes. The data from the interviews were analyzed using an inductive iterative process. We noted both particular stories and common themes and categories.

2. Semi-structured interviewing: Findings of interest from the literature review, key informant interviews and focus groups informed the creation of the interview guide. The interview guide was piloted with one member of the Van Gujjar community who was a past participant of the literacy program, and was altered slightly due to his suggestions. Interviews were done with 10 non-participants (control group) and 20 participants. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and took place in areas that were both convenient for participants and secluded from large amounts of distracting activity. Participants were informed about the objective of the study and informed verbal consent was obtained. Most the interviews (21) took place in the family's meeting area (a roofed area that is reserved for resting time, and is normally empty during our interview hours) and others took place outside (6) or in the living area (3). Interviews involve the researcher (interviewer), translator and the respondents. Interviews were recorded with additional notes taken by the interviewer. The interviews took place at the respondent's convenience, and formal questions were often only asked after relaxed conversation that sometimes took many hours.

Data Triangulation: In addition to those results that were confirmed by observation two other sources were consulted to confirm data provided by the interviewees. Family members were asked to confirm data related to participation in the campaign (Length of time, attendance rates) and an interview with a field worker from SOPHIA was used to validate responses related to their participation in the community.

Data Management

Consent - Before each interview respondents were explained the objective and context of the study and the types of questions that I would be asking. They were told that, should they choose to participate, they will be able to decline to respond to any questions which they do not want to answer, and to end the interview at any time. Once a comprehensive explanation of my project had been given, informed verbal consent was obtained.

Management – Interviews and focus groups were recorded with a recorder and key information was noted in a field journal. Permission was given for both these data collection methods. Only three respondents weren't comfortable with the use of a recorder, these interviews were written out.

Data Analysis Methods

Upon return to the nearby city of Dehradun the semi-structured interviews were transcribed in English and coded. Due to the preset analytical method, data was coded according into a set of themes developed *a priori* to so that it was easier to analyze the direct and indirect empowerment indicators. These broad themes were Informational Assets, Psychological Assets, and Material Assets, Formal Opportunity Structure, Non-Formal Opportunity Structure and Degrees of Empowerment. However, the *a priori* themes served only as broad analyses tools, the individual development indicators were constantly evolving in response to data collected.

Findings

Informational Assets

Respondents were first asked to explain the changes that they have experienced in the last twenty years. (Instead of “twenty years,” different key events were used to mark

out the recall period) Because RLEK was involved with the Van Gujjar community in many different capacities, it was important to see whether those who participated in the literacy campaign felt the impact of RLEK's intervention stronger than those who simply benefitted from other RLEK initiatives. Sixteen out of twenty past participants mentioned the RLEK intervention as a key point in their life, in comparison to only three out of the ten control group respondents. The most commonly stated change associated with the RLEK for both participants and non-participants was the gaining of knowledge about the rights of the Van Gujjars, followed by a clearer understanding of the price of milk and learning to write Hindi. Nineteen out of twenty past-participants were able to tell us about the Forest Rights Act, while only six out of ten nonparticipants were able to do the same.

The past-participants were all very grateful for the information that had been disseminated from RLEK. They were not aware of their rights before their campaign or of the importance of identity cards. They spoke of using their knowledge to get out of bribes and to stand up against changes they did not want in the community. Sakhura, a non-participant, reflected on the link between political knowledge and action:

“I remember a day that the men when to a protest in the city. I didn't go. The male members used to go. I didn't know how to do it, what to shout for, where to sign.”⁵⁸

Only once did I hear criticism about the information and perspective that was passed on with the literacy campaign. During one interview, as a man of about fifty told me about the benefits of the knowing this information, the man's father, who looked about 70, interrupted. Speaking about the leader of RLEK, a fierce advocate for Van Gujjar forest rights, he said,

“ The problem is I did the campaign but still I can't do anything myself. Now I can talk loud, but only when someone tells me what to say. And we can get fooled! When we went to Dehradun for a march Mr Kaushal told us to scream ‘Hamare Jungle! Hamare Jungle! So we

⁵⁸ Sakhura. 2014. Personal Interview. April 17.

screamed. But then the forest became degraded and we stopped singing and we started crying. Then we felt bad.”⁵⁹

While Bashir Ahmad’s opinion is only one in comparison to the many conversations I had had in praise of Mr. Kaushal and this work, it does highlight a concern amongst this population’s susceptibility to exploitation. A similar situation can be predicted today as so few Van Gujjars are able to independently seek out political knowledge. All respondents were aware that they were able to vote, and 28 out of 30 had voted in the last election. Apparently they all know the voting procedure, or are explained it at the voting station. Twenty-five respondents said that they voted for whichever party they were told to vote for, their instructions coming from visiting politicians (14), panchayat heads (9), or NGO representatives(2) . When politicians from more than one party visited, they made their decision based on who promised them the most – though these responses were complimented with story after story of being denied what was promised to them. Only 5 respondents, all past-participants in the literacy program, consulted an outside source. Three of those read the newspaper, one went to political rallies in the nearby town, and the other said he “heard people speaking about it in the town,”⁶⁰ - a response that might also refer to political rallies.

The ability of respondents to reach a nearby town varied greatly depending on the reason for travel. Technically all respondents contained the informational assets to allow them to get to the town, but factors such as workload, lack of permission from family, and fear of wild elephants means that the non-formal opportunity structure can at times be prohibitive.

Psychological Assets

⁵⁹ Bashir Ahmad. 2014. Personal Interview. 11 April 2014.

⁶⁰ Sakhura. 2014. Personal Interview. 10 April 2014.

The whole group of respondents' capacity to envision change was affected due to the unlikely chance of relocation, a stated ideal for all respondents. Most spoke about the combination of "education" and "land" as the only way things could look optimistic. While this answer was never prompted, and the possibility of resettlement was never mentioned explicitly by the interviewer, every single respondent mentioned this when asked questions such as "Do you think your children's life will be similar to yours?" or "What do you think is your biggest political struggle at the moment?" Their wishes were the same even if they were to receive all rights to the forest, and a mobile school to travel with them.

There was a stark difference between other psychological assets mentioned between participants and non-participants. Fourteen out of twenty participants reported feeling confident enough to speak about politics to forest officials or panchayat meeting attendees. Yet, only four non-participants would be willing to speak to government officials or panchayat meeting.

Confidence was the most frequently mentioned desired indicator for female non-participants. When asked how their life would have been different had they participated, every female non-participant respondent mentioned that, had they participated, they would have been confident to interact with other people outside the forest. This lack of confidence had a powerful affect on other assets and on their agency as a whole.

Despite this high amount of self-confidence in past-participants, participants and non-participants were equally skeptical about the community's capacity to fight against political changes they did not want. Initially responses were positive, but when the question was clarified to ask if participants would feel the same way if no NGO intervened, only one participant and four non-participants remained optimistic. Sahel Muhammad Hussein believes that the Van Gujjar community used to be far more united and thus

convened together far more frequently. When asked why they no longer meet, Sahel compared the prospects in the forest to those at the resettlement area near Haridwar, “If we meet we just talk about our problems and that’s all. In Haridwar they meet so much because there is hope. Here there is no hope so why should we meet?”⁶¹

Material Assets

Major changes related to material assets have affected both participants and non-participants almost equally in the last 20 years, almost completely thanks to the efforts of RLEK and SOPHIA. All but one of the eligible respondents has a ration card and a voter ID card. An overwhelming majority had them made for them by SOPHIA staff, and 5 (3 participants, 2 nonparticipants) had it done by the local panchayat leader in exchanged for political support. All of them have either a permanent (8) or half-year forest permits (22). Interestingly, only one of these respondents had applied for his card independently; no other respondent, regardless of literacy level, felt confident that they could do so without SOPHIA’s help.

Human Assets

Due to varying lengths of participation in the study, from a few months to many years, literacy and numeracy were achieved to varying degrees. The lowest level of literacy reported by past participants was the ability to sign their name in Hindi and do basic arithmetic. The greatest skills accrued involved reading well (in order to understand a full newspaper article) and doing complex sums. Length of enrollment and frequency of attendance correlated to degree of literacy acquired.

Three of the non-participants interviews had some basic literacy skills. These had been taught to them at *Madrassa*, a school for arabic studies. Because the main languages of

⁶¹ Sahel Muhammad Hussein. 2014. Personal Interview. April 17.

instruction in the *Madrasas* are Urdu and Arabic, participants did not gain much in the way of human assets related to political empowerment.

The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that the program should not have ended as soon as participants acquired basic literacy skills. Mohammad Alam, a 36 year old past-participant in the literacy program, expressed disappointment at the level of human assets that the campaign gave him.

“After the literacy campaign I felt positive that things would change. But for the rights I can’t do. I can sign and write my name. I can understand, maybe, what the letter says. But I can’t do anything to change it. For that I need education.”⁶²

Formal Opportunity Structure

Significant improvement in the formal opportunity structure can be observed since the beginning of the literacy campaign. However, action around formal opportunity structure was controlled completely by the NGO offices. Of the three communities I visited, only the residents of one community knew of a Forest Council that existed. However, the respondents were all eligible to vote and had the voter services in reasonable proximity.

Non-formal Opportunity Structure

One female non-participant, Jetunbibi, explained that she didn’t attend panchayat meetings because “It’s for the men only.”⁶³ If she could, she would like to. I asked about another community member whom I knew attended the meetings despite female. Jetunbibi explained that it is up to one’s family to decide. I later asked her father about this, who said, “Perhaps as she gets older and has more experience.” Other than that, there were no indicators of impeding non- formal opportunity structures.

Degrees of Empowerment

All respondents aligned with the final degree of empowerment when asked if they vote.

⁶² Mohammad Alam, personal interview

⁶³ Jetunbibi. 2014. Personal Interview. 23 April 2014.

Astoundingly, every respondent asked had voted in the previous election if they were of age. Panchayat meetings were well attended by the Van Gujjars and eighteen of twenty participants and seven of ten non-participants attended the meetings. All non-participants mentioned a lack of confidence (Psychological Asset) and knowledge (Informational asset) as reasons for not attending. Bashir Ahmad, a non-participant put it bluntly, "I can't go... I can't say anything because I don't know anything."⁶⁴ The first past-participant that did not attend was a female, and mentioned work as her reason for not attending. The other respondent was one of my youngest interviewees and though he never gave me an explicit answer, he behaviors hinted at political apathy. Twelve of the eighteen participants that attended panchayat meetings responded that they spoke during the meetings, only a slightly higher ratio than the four out of seven non-participants.

For those living in the area where there is a village council, all reported attending the village council meetings. Yet the village council as a unit seems to be stuck within the first degree of empowerment – that of existence of choice. Many respondents said that at the meetings they talk about their problems but they never do anything. The choice exists for them to take a definitive step, and the opportunity structure is there, yet they are not able to make the choice to produce and outcome.

With regards to lodging complaints against forest officials, different respondents had experienced different measures of empowerment. Three respondents reported having sent a letter of complaint/request - independently from SOPHIA - to a local governing body or the Forest Academy. Unfortunately none of them had received responses, however, this move to use the choice available is significant. It indicates the presence of necessary agency and

⁶⁴ Bashir Ahmad. 2014. Personal Interview. 30 April 2014.

opportunity structure.

One respondent would not be able to use the available opportunity structure to lodge a complaint. The night before we arrived at Yusuf's *dera*, a neighbouring *dera* had burnt down. Yusuf, speaking in front of the owner of the burnt *dera*, spoke of his inability to file for assistance from the government:

“If it was someone who was educated he wouldn't be just sitting here, he would know what to do and where to go and who to speak to get help from the government. He can't find that information so he has to sit here and hope someone will help me”⁶⁵

According to Yusuf's beliefs, then, the absence of the human asset of literacy is impeding the accrual of informational assets, without which endeavors such as this one can't be made.

Discussion and Analysis

Looking at the stated goals of the RLEK literacy campaign, the program was able to increase participants' agency successfully in many spheres by providing them with informational, psychological, and human assets. The Van Gujjar's recall of the information learnt during the literacy campaign – measured, for example, by their knowledge of the Forest Rights Act - is indicative of how great a role it has since played in their life. Van Gujjar's cited familiarity with their rights as a source of great confidence. Unfortunately the Van Gujjars were, for the most part, still willing to vote for whomever they were told to vote for – which shows a lack of critical engagement with politics or, more likely, very limited access to political information. The literacy program also had a great impact on participants' psychological assets. It was this heightened sense of self that participants gained through the literacy program that served as a precursor for all political action. In a paper titled *The Political Benefits of Adult Literacy*, Stromquist describes the link between individual sense of self and political engagement. She

⁶⁵ Yusuf. 201. Personal Interview. April 28.

explains that, “heightened sense of confidence can lead to incipient forms of political behavior; it functions as an invisible armor that prepares people to undertake behaviors that may introduce risks but also intended results”.⁶⁶ While these transformations are exciting, they don’t seem to be visible at community level just yet. Rather the Van Gujjar community has developed a strong dependence on their relationship with SOPHIA, and those external aspects that aren’t addressed by SOPHIA are simply just left unaddressed.

The impact of literacy skills on empowerment outcomes was noticeable mostly for its impact on the informational and psychological assets. The ability to read newspaper headlines, bus schedules, and sign their name was a source of pride and had a positive impact on their agency. Many respondents who consider themselves leaders of the community felt that they would not be able to say the same without literacy skills. Yet while students learned skills of reading and writing in both Hindi and English to various levels from the literacy program, most past-participants were only able to read basic Hindi, write basic Hindi and sign their name in English. These skills were not enough for past-participants to act independently to fill out applications for government documents or to write complaints. Similarly, the skills obtained were not enough to challenge the formal opportunity structure – such as to be involved in the dialogue about the Forest Rights Act. SOPHIA staff took control of all forms that required comprehensive writing and reading. So while the literacy skills gained did improve participants’ agency in the political sphere, activism work was still spearheaded by SOPHIA staff

A Way Forward

In isolated communities such as that of the Van Gujjars, outside interventions of any kind enjoy almost unchecked ability to influence the practices and attitudes of community members. RLEK’s literacy campaign was noted a successful one because it consulted the target population

⁶⁶ Stromquist, N.P. “The Political benefits of Adult Literacy”

of Van Gujjars to create a list of empowerment indicators similar, in many ways, to the one I have created above. It then developed a course curriculum that could best relay literacy skills while at the same time targeting specific indicators as goals. By prioritizing the achievement of certain empowerment indicators, such a familiarity with forest rights and knowledge of the voting process, it pursued empowerment only as a means to reaching the end goal of these specific empowerment indicators. This model seemed indeed to have increased the Van Gujjars agency in a number of factors, and thus often enhanced their attainment of these specific empowerment outcomes on the degrees of empowerment scale. An evaluation that measured the achievement of desired outcomes would most likely score RLEK's literacy initiative very highly. However, by addressing only these factors, the literacy program has failed to use literacy teachings to foster empowerment as an end goal in itself. This results in an example such as the one encountered in the field: past-participants were able to request compensation from the government after the death of a buffalo – because they were taught to do so during the literacy program – but as soon as the issue changed slightly, from requesting compensation for a buffalo to requesting compensation for a burnt down dera, past-participants were unable to make a choice to use the opportunity structures available to them to request compensation. Similarly, while students were able to use the knowledge learnt about their rights in a variety of ways – to vote in local and national elections and to protest changes they don't want – they weren't able to access new political information themselves. So while specific empowerment indicators were met, students gained no insight into how to use the assets they gained and the opportunity structure available them to make effective choices in any situation.

The comprehensive evaluation is important because, according to research Saverio Kratli, most “evaluations of the impact of educational policies largely ignore the unintended social, political and economic effects that may result from the policy and its implementation. By

narrowing the analysis of the impact of education to measuring only the expected results, we deal with a very incomplete and misleading picture.”⁶⁷ This evaluative research should rather try help us better understand “relationships between mobile groups' expectations from education, the contexts from which such expectations arise, and the educational provision that is required in order for these expectations to be fulfilled.”⁶⁸ Indeed for mobile groups in particular, given their rapidly changing socio-economic and political environment, it seems shortsighted to develop a literacy camping aimed at achieving certain stationary empowerment indicators.

The limitations of this study were my use of a translator, which made the process of Participatory Rural Appraisal very difficult. I had limited time of four weeks to finish the study, and my research period also coincided with the beginning of summer, which is when the Van Gujjars migrate. Finally, I was only able to interview two women who have participated in the literacy program, which made a comparison between the different experiences of males and females impossible.

Recommendations for Further Study

- Examine possibilities for a “Literacy for Empowerment” program for resettled Van Gujjar adults
- Measure perceived (political) empowerment amongst resettled Van Gujjars
- Develop framework for an empowerment module that can be used to supplement the government school syllabus that would be taught to forest-dwelling Van Gujjars under the Forest Rights Act.

⁶⁷ Kratli, Saverio. "Education Provision to Nomadic Pastoralists."

⁶⁸ Dyer, Caroyne. "'Education for All' and the Rabaris of Kachchh, Western India."

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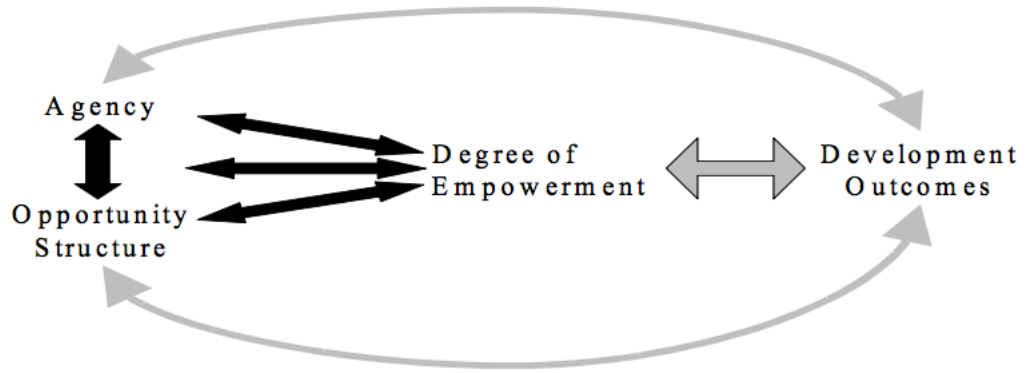
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Appendix 1

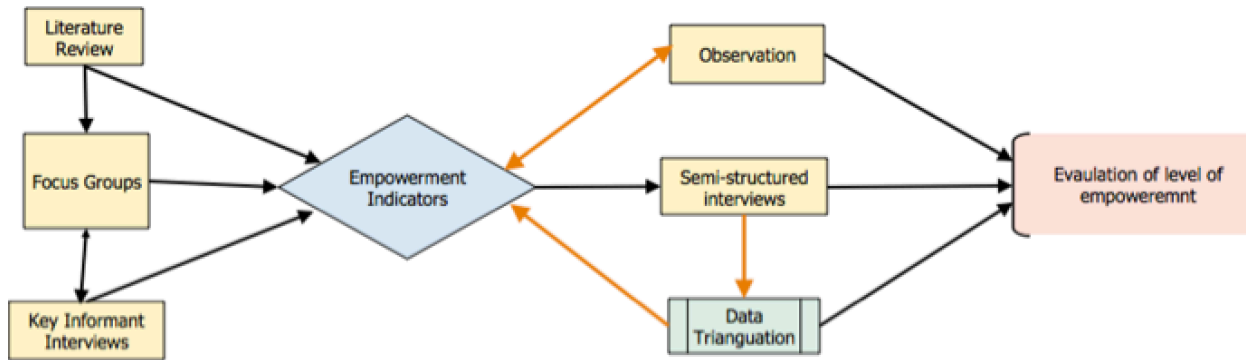
Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the relationship between Assets, Opportunity Structure and Degrees of Empowerment⁶⁹



⁶⁹ Alsop, Ruth, and Nina Heinson. "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators." 6.

Appendix 2

Figure 2: Flowchart illustrating interactive-inductive process of measuring political empowerment amongst forest-dwelling Van Gujjars



Appendix 3

Table 1: Table listing indicators of political empowerment for forest-dwelling Van Gujjars

Domain	Subdomain	Determinants and Outcomes (Local Level)		
		Agency	Opportunity Structure	Degrees of Empowerment
State	Politics	<u>Informational Assets</u> 1. Knowledge of past political changes 2. Access to more than one political informational source <u>Psychological Assets</u> 1. Capacity to envisage change 2. Confident to speak about political issues with Forest Officials and/or in Panchayat meetings 3. Confidence in Van Gujjar's ability to fight for their rights <u>Material Assets</u> 1. Has Voter ID Card 2. Has Ration Card 3. Has Permit	<u>Formal Opportunity Structure</u> 1. Voting rights available for Van Gujjars 2. Voter station accessible 3. There is a Panchayat nearby 4. There is a Forest Council Nearby <u>Non-formal Opportunity Structure</u> 1. Is allowed to attend Panchayat meetings	1. Votes 2. Attends Panchayat Meetings 3. Attends Village Council Meetings 4. Speaks during Panchayat Meetings 5. Submit complaint about Forest Officials where necessary