

People's Participation and Public Service Delivery in East Midnapore district of West Bengal

ABSTRACT

West Bengal is said to have pioneered the process of democratic governance in India. However, contrary to expectations, people's participation in democratic spaces of the state is either low or on the decline. The present study, using household level data collected from East Midnapore district, examines different forms and dimensions of participation and identifies the determinants of household participation, in general and women's participation, in particular. It also examines the role of participation in public service delivery and factors determining households' satisfaction towards it. The study uses PCA, OLS regression and logistic regression to analyze data. By considering dimensions viz. attending meetings, raising voice, lodging complaints and making contributions to define participation, it finds six forms of participation in vogue namely nominal, passive, selectively active, active, instrumental and transformative. Level of participation directly depends upon a decent level education, better awareness, holding membership of socio-political organizations and political proximity. Households exhibiting livelihood dependency and entitlement, and belonging to weaker sections have greater likelihood to participate. However, high income deters participation. Holding membership of SHGs and holding job card promote participation among women. With increasing household education and agricultural land holdings, women are found to refrain from public sphere. The study confirms the importance of participation in public service delivery. There are, however, fears of 'clientelism' and 'elite capture' in participation and service delivery. Mere attendance in meetings may not help, rather voice of the people and their contribution towards services may play crucial roles in service delivery. People who raise their voice and make contributions remain satisfied with supply of basic services. The study argues for renewed actions towards removal of barriers like 'elite capture' and 'clientelism' and promotion of SHGs supported by decent level of education, awareness and targeted schemes of entitlement.

Key words: Clientelism, elite capture, invited space, people's participation, popular space, public service delivery