

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Putting the hype about e-governance into perspective, Mudit Singh does not only point to the socially structured, unevenly realized access to digital tools of citizen participation but also the continued importance of substantial decentralization and financial devolution.

– René Véron, Full Professor of Social Geography, the Institute of Geography and Sustainability, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

It's rare to find a book that so adeptly links important social policy, theories of democratic participatory governance and sophisticated network analysis. Dr Singh has managed to do all three; drawing on years of deep involvement in the field, this book is a gem that is sure to be a go-to resource for everyone working in this field.

– James Moody, Robert O. Keohane Professor of Sociology at Duke University, USA

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Localizing Sustainable Development

BY

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Technology Kanpur, India*



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNA	Community Need Assessment
CBA	Community-Based Assessment
CP	Community Participation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GEN	General Castes
GP	Gram Panchayat
GS	Gram Sabha
HDR	Human Development Report
HH	House Hold
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SC	Schedule Castes
SNA	Social Network Analysis
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
WB	World Bank

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mudit Kumar Singh is a 2017–2018 batch Fulbright alumnus and currently affiliated to the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (Postdoctoral Fellow), and Duke University (Visiting Research Fellow).¹

Dr Singh has been carrying out research, advocacy and teaching for the past 12 years in India. He has worked with a variety of communities including people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in Rajasthan, the flood-prone community in Bihar, female and youth from villages of Himachal Pradesh and the stone-breaker community in Uttar Pradesh. He has been part of the policymaking process at the ground level in building urban health and employment generation policy in India.

He completed his Master's in Business Administration in Rural Development in 2009 from Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad. After working for about five years with civil society organizations, he joined his PhD in 2014 and visited Duke Network Analysis Center, Duke University, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, and the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur during his doctoral training.

He has published in high-quality international journals and presented to a variety of audiences including government, police, researchers, and health and legal practitioners.

His recent studies apply a mixed-method approach to explore linkages between social capital, social networks and public participation in the context of local governance and public policy. Currently, he engages with a variety of stakeholders – trade unions, government, civil society organizations and workers at the Just Transition Research Centre, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology that can help in devising a community-centric policy to shift away from fossil fuel to renewable energy in India.²

1 <https://muditsingh.netlify.app/>

2 <http://www.iitk.ac.in/JTRC>

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ABSTRACT

Since World War II, nations across the globe have devised many institutions from local to global level to achieve the best possible governance of resources to meet development goals. This book is primarily based on my field studies of Indian villages and slums over the past twelve years in India. But it has gone further to include cases from other parts of the globe to present a comprehensive picture of community participation at local levels.

On the one hand, scholars argued for the engagement of local people for the success of development projects. On the other hand, some scholars stressed on the building of democratic institutions that may involve the public through direct and indirect means. The Word Bank and the United Nations also considered the importance and need of such local institutional building for the success of development projects. Thus, local democratic institutions are highly crucial for developing countries like India, where the majority of the population still lives in villages. Since independence, various states of India started building democratic institutions called *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs) run by the elected members and bureaucrats.

Acknowledging the various forms of participation, and factors that are discussed by scholars around the globe, I present a conceptual model that more or less explains community participation at local levels. From the field work, the study has used two important indicators – attendance and ability of attendees to speak in the meetings as a measure of their participation and active participation, respectively. I discuss the socioeconomic factors – income, age, landholding, embedded social capital in the social networks (whom they are friends with and seek help), education, gender etc. and power that transcend through these socioeconomic classes that eventually shape up individuals' decisions to participate in local governance and in development interventions through external agencies.

Based on my experience in India, I also discuss the community-centric institutional arrangement that can potentially help marginalized sections of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. The analysis in the book suggests that with high social capital, elites and brokers are vocal in the open meetings regulated by village panchayats. At the same time, social capital also

works as a support system for weaker sections. This way, I highlight the good of social capital working for the individuals, whereas social capital potentially working against the collective efforts for the rural poor. Further, the research finds that the creation of new villages facilitated by the state administration might help to achieve the attendance level of villagers but active participation level does not improve. Narratives from the community suggest that villagers demand for further decentralization, especially of financial powers at the village level itself. According to them, this may genuinely empower the village council members that may result in the revival of village committees to meet the objective of power transfer to villagers. The community reflections echo the scholarly shift towards treating participation as an *end* in case of local governance instead of a *means* to achieve certain intervention objectives. Unless the financial decentralization happens at local committees, the development intervention by any agency (Government or CSOs) will keep getting biased outcomes often working against the marginalized sections.

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