Buying Consent: The Achilles' Heel of Aid-induced Community Participation

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Abstract

Community participation remains central to development policy; but so do concerns that negotiations to achieve it have become a drill devoid of real meaning. Repeatedly, development interventions fail to unlock its presumed benefits: low-cost innovation, good governance, and sustainability. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Pakistan, a well-known case of organic community participation, this article demonstrates that the ability to buy consent in the case of donor-funded projects erodes the capacity for real community negotiations to take place. The article argues for closer study of cases such as OPP, known for their strong element of community embeddedness, to understand where things go wrong in aid-induced community participatory projects. It shows how constant negotiations within the community that allowed for the building of trust, the merging of local and technical knowledge, the trialling and adjustments of interventions, and patient lobbying of government officials and field staff are key to unlocking the real benefits of community participation and ensuring social accountability on the part of government agencies. The quick fixes encouraged under development projects which normally rely on material incentives to generate co-operation, undermine these very principles leading to growing evidence of failure of aid-induced community participatory projects.

Keywords: Organic participation; aid-effectiveness; Orangi Pilot Project (OPP); low-cost sanitation; Pakistan.

Introduction

Community participation has been central to development discourse and planning since the 1980s. The conceptual justification for putting it at the centre of development planning has come from three influential strands of academic scholarship: social capital (Putnam, 1994), collective action (Ostrom, 19991, 1996), and good governance (Tendler, 1998). Not only bilateral but also multilateral development agencies vouch for its importance in the effective delivery of development projects, whether aimed at delivery of basic social services or more subtle outcomes such as promoting gender empowerment or inducing good governance (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). With the rise of participatory methods in development in the 1990s, most significantly under the influence of Robert Chambers (Chambers, 1997), for a brief moment it even appeared that the development community had cracked the code for engineering effective community participation. Yet the overwhelming concern today is that, 40 years on, community participation in development has become a bit of a charade (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) whereby all the boxes are ticked but the projects repeatedly fail to unlock the assumed benefits of community participation, namely relevant and low-cost solutions which are sustainable and get the lower tiers of government to be more accountable (Hulme and Edwards, 1997).

The participatory methods introduced by Robert Chambers aimed to identify actual steps that could effectively enable the development community to engineer community participation in diverse settings. Convening community-level mobilization meetings, using innovative tools to help community members to map their preferences, and forming village councils to both implement and oversee development projects and increase the accountability of public services are but a few of the proposed measures. These steps are today standard operating practices adopted by most NGOs when implementing donor-funded development projects (Cooke and Kothari, 2001); the assumed benefits of such participation, however, have failed to materialise. The relative failure of this attempt to professionalize community participation has contributed to growing cynicism about the whole concept of community participation among practitioners and development scholars alike (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Bano, 2012; Banks et al., 2015). Many within donor-funded NGOs now question the inefficient modes that are commonly employed and view the alleged benefits of as exaggerated.[1] This growing disillusionment with the whole notion of community participation necessitates that we revisit its basic principles and refresh our understanding of why people's involvement in the development process was argued to lead to low-cost solutions, sustainability, and good governance in the first place.

This article presents a detailed analysis of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), a major community-embedded development initiative in Pakistan, which has been globally recognized for its effectiveness in dramatically improving living conditions in one of the largest slum settlements in South Asia (Zaidi, 2001). OPP presents an example of what may be described as an organic case[2] of community participation as it evolved without any external stimulus from an international development agency or the

government (Khan, 1998; Zaidi, 2001). Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with OPP, the article shows how constant negotiations within the community which allowed for the building of trust, the merging of local and technical knowledge, the trialling and adjustments of interventions, and patient lobbying of government officials and field staff were key to unlocking the real benefits of community participation. As opposed to the quick fixes encouraged under aid-funded projects which often lead to offers of material incentives to win co-operation, the case of OPP demonstrates the importance of long-term commitment, patience, and protracted and often tedious negotiations in order to convince the relevant parties of the need to collaborate. The article, however, also argues that for NGOs to be able to achieve such community mobilization requires a high degree of ideological commitment; NGOs that rely on financial incentives to mobilize communities are unlikely to be able to invest in the cultivation of these long-term relationships that are key to unlocking the main benefits of community participation.

This article has five sections. Section 1 reviews the conceptual debates that made community participation central to contemporary development thinking; the challenges that development agencies continue to face in inducing community participation; and the explanations available within the existing literature for these failures. Section 2 presents the context of Pakistan, introduces OPP with a particular emphasis on mapping its community embeddedness, and explains the research methodology. Section 3 presents an analysis of how OPP was able to unlock the three-fold benefits of community participation: developing low-cost solutions; improving the delivery of government services by making the relevant government agencies adjust their working procedures through enhanced social accountability; and attaining sustainability. Section 4 explains what enabled OPP to generate organic

community participation. The conclusion draws out the lessons provided by the case of OPP for the implementation of donor-funded community participatory projects.

Section 1. Community participation: the rationale

Community participation became central to development thinking from the 1980s onwards, along with a general push towards moving away from state-centric models of development and allowing for a greater degree of involvement by non-government organizations (Bano, 2012; Mansuri and Rao, 2013). This push was partly a product of the misappropriation of development funds and the failure of post-colonial states to deliver on promises of development; in the view of the critics, however, it also coincided with a general shift towards pro-market policies under what is frequently referred to as the Washington Consensus (Edward and Hulme, 1997; Teamey, 2007). The importance of community participation has since then been reinforced by a number of influential studies which can broadly be grouped under three heads: social capital, collective action, and good governance.

Robert Putnam (1994), in explaining the difference in democratic strengthening in northern Italy compared with the south, placed primary emphasis on social capital, i.e. those networks of associations and voluntary co-operation that bring people together and in the process build trust and a willingness to work towards collectively desirable goals. Putnam's work in turn reinforced the emphasis that Tocqueville (1835) had placed on voluntary associations when assessing the strength of American democracy in his influential book, *Democracy in America*. Both scholars emphasized the importance of social connectivity, mutual trust, and learning about how to build

community consensus by participating in voluntary associations in order for good governance to emerge. To quote Tocqueville (1835, p. 515), through these organizations, ‘feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon another’. Putnam (1993) similarly argued that participation in civic organizations inculcates co-operation skills as well as a sense of shared responsibility for the collective endeavour. By the 1990s, social capital had come to be seen as the missing link in development (Harriss, 2001).

Elinor Ostrom’s influential studies on collective action further reinforced the importance of involving the community in finding optimal solutions. Ostrom, a political economist who tried to find a middle way between the market and the state, showed (1991, 1996) how communities can put in place institutional arrangements that can help to preserve a common good which otherwise runs the risk of being exploited. Her case studies showed how communities can at times offer effective alternatives to state regulation or the free market that can yield more optimal results in terms of both efficiency and equity. In noting the community’s ability to find viable solutions to regulate common resources, Ostrom did not neglect the findings of three dominant models — the tragedy of the commons, the prisoner's dilemma, and the logic of collective action — which highlight the free-rider problem whereby rational individuals are expected to shrug their responsibility to contribute to production of a collective good. Instead, her focus was on showing that when individuals are connected and have the means and capacity to communicate or enter into binding agreements they can agree on governance practices that can ensure the efficient preservation of shared resources for the collective.

While both these strands of literature broadly fall within the ambit of good-governance literature, the third strand explicitly addresses how community participation can in fact help to introduce good government by making the lower tiers of the government more accountable and state delivery of basic services more efficient. Many studies have in particular focused on studying the links between community participation and improved governance through decentralization (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 1999; Eaton, 2008). Judith Tendler (1998) in her influential study on *Good Government in the Tropics* showed how when lower-tier government officials feel directly embedded within the community, government delivery of basic social services can record dramatic improvements. Considering four different service sectors in Brazil, Tendler showed how there is a need to review the existing mistrust of the government within development planning; she argued for placing greater emphasis on identifying the circumstances under which public servants become truly committed to their work, and how that can improve public service dramatically. Tendler criticized development agencies for often basing their policies on observations of bad government practices, rather than learning from the good examples in a given country. This, she argued, led to lessons being drawn from successful models from industrialized countries and requiring the developing countries to import those models. Against this, the cases that she studied showed that government workers demonstrated an unusual degree of dedication to their jobs once the government made efforts to instil a sense of mission in the staff, and the staff were enabled to be more flexible and responsive to community demands by allowing for more direct contact between the government staff and the community members.

By presenting evidence from a number of case studies and contexts, the literature on social capital, governing the commons, and good governance established the benefits

of community participation: innovation and low-cost solutions; improved government accountability; and sustainability of services. As Mansuri and Rao (2013, p. 1), on the basis of their exhaustive review of literature on aid-induced community-participation efforts, note: 'Indeed, local participation is proposed as a method to achieve a variety of goals, including sharpening poverty targeting, improving service delivery, expanding livelihood opportunities, and strengthening demand for good governance.' Yet, as they conclude, there is scant evidence confirming donors' ability to induce sustained community participation, either for efficient project delivery or for supporting social accountability.

Thus, in response to their question 'Can participation be induced through the type of large-scale government and donor funded participatory programs that have become a leitmotif of development policy?', Mansuri and Rao (2013, p. 1) draw negative conclusions. They note that there is little evidence to show that induced participation builds long-lasting cohesion: 'Participatory projects also often fail to build cohesive and resilient organizations. During the course of a project, cash or other material payoffs induce people to participate and build networks—but these mechanisms tend to dissolve when the incentives are withdrawn' (Mansuri and Rao 2013, p. 5).

Apart from raising concerns about co-operation and the sustainability of such co-operative efforts under donor-funded projects, they also note a number of concerns about capture, showing that participants in the development projects are normally the better-off within the community, wealthier, often more educated, and more politically connected. "Capture", they argue, also tends to be greater in communities that are remote from centres of power, have low literacy rates, are poor, or have significant caste, race, or gender disparities (Mansuri and Rao 2013, p. 5). This leads them to

argue for recognizing the problem of 'civil society failure', just as we talk of state failure or market failure. As they note:

> Civil society failure at the local level can be broadly thought of as a situation in which groups that live in geographic proximity are unable to act collectively to reach a feasible and preferable outcome. It includes coordinated actions that are inefficient—or efficient but welfare reducing on average—as well as the inability to undertake any coordinated action at all. (Mansuri and Rao 2013, 4)

To minimize these challenges in inducing community participation, they argue for the importance of three factors. First, they identify the need to understand the context, as outcomes of interventions are highly variable across communities; local inequality, history, geography, the nature of social interactions, networks, and political systems all have a strong influence. Second, they stress the importance of noting how government's openness to community engagement has a positive impact on co-operation, an issue also noted by Tendler (2008) in her work on Brazil. Third, they observe that effective civic engagement does not develop within a predictable trajectory. Instead, they argue that it is likely to proceed along a 'punctuated equilibrium' in which 'long periods of seeming quietude are followed by intense, and often turbulent, change' (Mansuri and Rao 2013, p. 9). Donor-driven participatory projects, they argue, often expect to follow a far less contentious trajectory:

> Conditioned by bureaucratic imperatives, they often declare that clear, measurable, and usually wildly optimistic outcomes will be delivered within a specified timeframe. There is a danger that such projects set themselves up for

> failure that derives not from what they achieve on the ground but from their unrealistic expectations. (Mansuri and Rao 2013, p.12)

It is the importance of this last observation in understanding the challenges to donor-induced community participation that becomes very clear when assessing the success of OPP in mobilizing the community to come up with low-cost innovative solutions to local sanitation problems and its success in putting in place social-accountability mechanisms that made the relevant government agencies more responsive to the community's sanitation needs. Further, the OPP case calls into question the significance of the other two dimensions in explaining successful community mobilization: uniqueness of the context and government responsiveness. While sensitivity to local context and the openness of state agencies can indeed affect the outcomes, the OPP case shows that it is important not to ignore the fact that the strong financial incentives offered by donors to NGOs to undertake community participation in reality distorts their ability to do precisely that. This is particularly so when we can see that projects like OPP are able to mobilize communities and get government agencies to respond to the needs of the community in a context where state agencies are generally not sympathetic to community demands, and where other donor-funded NGOs fail to win community participation and good governance (Bano, 2012).

In advancing these arguments, the evidence presented in this article finds support in what Joshi and Houtzager (2012) have identified as core reasons for the failure of development agencies to induce ‘social accountability’. ‘Social accountability’ is broadly defined as citizen-led action for demanding accountability from providers, especially in contexts where normal mechanisms of state accountability are seen to be

failing (Stokes et al., 2004; Ackerman, 2005; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Foresti et al., 2007). Defining social accountability as 'the ongoing and collective effort to hold public officials to account for the provision of public goods which are existing state obligations', Joshi and Houtzager (2012) note that the focus on social accountability emphasizes the short route of accountability (between non-elected public officials/providers and citizens), making public officials directly answerable to service users. Given that in many developing countries the long route of accountability, which relies on operating through the policy makers and politicians, is not working, development agencies including the World Bank have argued for strengthening the short route of direct accountability (World Development Report 2004).

Noting that there is a growing consensus across these different studies that social accountability can play an important role in improving service delivery, strengthening governance, reducing corruption, and empowering citizens, Joshi and Houtzager (2002) contend that donors have conceptualized social accountability as mechanisms or widgets which have been turned into standardized procedures such as social audits, and the use of community score cards. They argue that this professionalization of the process depoliticizes the 'the very processes through which poor people make claims'. They instead argue for focusing on disaggregating social-accountability actions, and viewing them as part of a long-term on-going political engagement of social actors with the state. As they argue (Joshi and Houtzager 2002, p. 155):

> One of the key features of the approach we suggest is to examine social accountability actions as one part of a broader and longer process of engagement between collective actors and the state. Collective actors such as

> advocacy NGOs, social movements and neighbourhood associations pursue multiple goals and use a variety of strategies to influence processes of public policy and execution of policy. The actions that, when taken together, we call social accountability, are almost always part of broader strategies that traverse multiple institutional or non-institutional public arenas – collective actors in cities like urban centres of Latin America or South Asia may attempt to influence several moments of the policy process, for example by lobbying legislative bodies or engaging in media campaigns. At the same time, they may also use local participatory institutions or informal governance institutions to hold public sector managers or providers accountable for full execution of the very policies that they are seeking to modify.

This article will illustrate how the findings of Joshi and Houtzager (2012) are strongly supported by the case of OPP. It is not the social-accountability framework but the whole community-development discourse within the development agencies that has been developed since the 1970s under a toolkit approach. This approach to the professionalization of community-development processes has actually severely neglected the very essence of community participation and social capital: mutual trust and social connectivity. Translated into development policy and planning, this push for community embeddedness and engagement has led development agencies to develop a whole tool kit for engineering community participation. Most visible in this area has been the work of Robert Chambers. In *Whose Reality Counts?*, Chambers (1997) outlined how development projects can win community participation. The study presented a critique of narrow forms of community participation whereby the local community is merely consulted on already planned projects; it instead argued for

involving the community more systematically from the stage of need identification to the design, implementation, and eventual monitoring of projects.

Yet, twenty years on from the time of this publication, as noted above we have a plethora of studies showing that such measures have simply helped to professionalize the whole field of community participation (Bano, 2012; Mansuri and Rao, 2013); some have even referred to it as 'the tyranny' of community participation whereby community members are pressured into taking part in these participatory processes when in reality they have little control over the outcomes (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Further, as discussed in some detail above, existing studies show that donor-funded community-participation programmes, especially when executed through NGOs, fail to unlock the three-fold benefits of community participation (Banks et al., 2015). As Mansuri and Rao (2013) note, after a major review of evidence on community participation in development, the World Bank alone invested more than US$80 million in projects aspiring to achieve community participation between 2002 and 2012, but the evidence to support the effectiveness of aid-induced community participation remains scarce.

What we have today are very detailed guidelines for mobilizing communities which most NGOs duly claim to follow. But these standardized procedures are failing to unlock the expected benefits of improved governance, sustainability, and low costs. We therefore need to re-engage with cases which have a track record of sustained community participation to understand what factors help to mobilize genuine community participation, and what community participation can really offer. A close study of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Pakistan, which is internationally

recognized for unlocking precisely these benefits, offers precisely such an opportunity.

Such an approach, based on analysing successful cases of organic participation to understand the limits of state-induced community participation, is also in line with the approach of Tendler (1998), who argued that the focus on negative factors at the national level in developing countries, instead of seeking opportunities to learn from successful cases, leads to misguided policies. It is also in line with Joshi and Houtzager's (2012, p. 158) reasoning:

> Social accountability work is currently facing a cross-roads. On the one hand, scholars could continue to invest in expanding the number of robust studies and build the evidence base for conditions under which the different widgets work. This is the path that a lot of research currently underway is already taking. However, this path is resource intensive, and the payoff seems located in the distant future. The other path involves examining closely the evolution of citizen engagement over time in the kinds of context that we are interested in intervening in. This is more likely to give us clues as to how and when social accountability in particular settings will emerge and work to lead to responsive public officials and improved public services.

This is precisely what is gained from a close study of OPP with a focus on understanding what shapes its ability to engage the community to contribute to the delivery of basic social services, as well as its ability to make the lower tier of government more accountable. This article shows how long-term, open-ended interactions that build mutual trust are essential for effective community participation to emerge. More specifically, the article points towards specific factors, such as

recruiting staff from within the community, drawing on the community's knowledge, and connecting with political networks within the community: factors that are essential to an understanding of OPP's success in community mobilization. Further, the article shows how generating community participation is conditional not just on the specificities of the context but also (as noted by Joshi and Houtzager (2012)) on the characteristics of the organization undertaking the community mobilization. The OPP leadership consciously resisted drawing on strong financial incentives, recognizing that this could lead to dependence on donor-funded projects, which in turn would reduce the flexibility as well as the independence of the organization that is required to build a trusting relationship with the community and the state agencies. This article will illustrate how the characteristics of the organization initiating community mobilization, and the incentives offered by the donor agencies to NGOs to undertake community-mobilization work, are key factors to understanding what restricts donors' ability to induce community participation and social accountability on a sustainable basis.

Section 2. Background and methodology

The growth of informal slum settlements on the fringes of major cities in the developing world is one of the most serious challenges faced by development planners. These unplanned settlements, which are home to some of the poorest populations, lack the most basic of facilities. Since the inhabitants often lack legal ownership of the pieces of land that they occupy, they receive little support from government agencies in their efforts to secure basic social services. Orangi is one such settlement in Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan with an estimated population of 16

million. Orangi town itself consists of 113 low-income settlements, hosting around 1.5 million people. While many such slum settlements exist in Pakistan, few rival Orangi's scale or fame; it is well known in the international development community due to the success of OPP. Established by Akhtar Hameed Khan, an ex-bureaucrat, who in the 1970s led the famous Comilla Pilot Project in Bangladesh (Khan, 1998), OPP offers services in five basic areas: low-cost sanitation, housing, health, education, and credit for micro-enterprise. As OPP developed specialized interventions for each of these sectors, three autonomous institutions emerged under its umbrella in 1988:

1. OPP–Research and Training Institute (OPP–RTI): manages the low-cost sanitation, secure housing, and education programme;
2. OPP–Orangi Charitable Trust (OPP–OCT): manages the micro-enterprise credit programme;
3. OPP–Karachi Health and Social Development Association (OPP–KHASDA): manages the health programme.

Orangi's success in improving services for the community in all these areas is well known (Zaidi 2001); it is, however, best known for the learning that it has been able to offer in the area of low-cost sanitation. Its low-cost component-sharing sanitation model has won international acclaim (Zaidi 2001; Khalid 2006; World Bank 2006). The OPP sanitation programme began by providing social and technical support to residents in Orangi to lay their own lane sewers and secondary sewers. Under this model the latrines in the homes, the lane sewers, and the secondary sewers, collectively known as 'internal development', are financed, managed, and maintained by the people, while the trunk sewers and treatment plants known as 'external

development' remain the responsibility of the government. Through the programme 1,45,466 houses have invested US$3.2 million in latrines in the homes and lane sewers, and the government has invested more than US$4.6 million in trunk mains. In 1992 the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation accepted the OPP model for its sewerage project, financed by the Asian Development Bank, to be implemented in parts of Orangi. In 1994 Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority, the provincial government agency responsible for provision of land titles and upgrading of *katchi abadis* (informal settlements), adopted the OPP approach. In 2003 the Punjab Katchi Abadi and Urban Improvement Directorate too accepted the model. OPP has thus been Karachi City Government's partner for developing the city's main sewage disposal and drainage channels for close to two decades now.

This model has been replicated in other cities within Pakistan and other developing countries (Khalid 2006; World Bank 2006; WaterAid 2011). The key strengths of OPP's low-cost component-sharing model are that it is low-cost, that it involves both the government and the community, and that the collaboration has been sustainable. This success in winning government collaboration is particularly noteworthy when we take into account the fact that OPP's model required the government sanitation departments to alter their own model and approach to providing sanitation in slum settlements. OPP has also systematically lobbied the sanitation authorities to move away from taking large international loans for costly sanitation projects. It was not easy to convince the government to support the OPP model, which allowed for low-cost alternatives as compared with the high-cost projects funded by development loans, because many government officials had personal gains to make from such large contracts. Yet OPP eventually succeeded in convincing the relevant agencies and

concerned officials to adopt its model rather than the costlier options attached to the development loans.

The success achieved by OPP through a community-embedded development approach makes it an ideal model to demonstrate how organic participation comes about, how it empowers the community to find relevant solutions and make the government agencies accept those solutions, and why donor-funded projects, even though following the expected rituals associated with community mobilization, routinely fail to generate genuine community participation. Existing reports and studies on OPP, while recognizing the centrality of community participation to this model, have not investigated these specific questions; instead they have focused on mapping the technical details of the low-cost component-sharing sanitation model (Hasan, 1999, 2000; Zaidi, 2001; Welle, 2006).

This article draws on both documentary evidence and in-depth fieldwork with OPP and its multiple partner organizations, collaborating government agencies, and community members to understand what community participation means and how it is sustained. The basic philosophy of the organizational leadership can be discerned in the writing of OPP's founder, the late Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, and interviews with its senior leaders whom he trained and who took over the leadership of the programme after him. The day-to-day working of the model and the relationship between the OPP, the community, and the relevant state agencies is mapped through ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the OPP–RTI central office in Orangi. In-depth interviews and group discussions with OPP field staff, community members, government officials, and local activists and community-based organizations that

work with OPP helped to explain what constitutes OPP's community, and how this sense of community has been cultivated. Additional fieldwork was also conducted with Lodhran Pilot project (LPP), which is located in Lodhran, a district in the Punjab province. LPP is considered to be one of the successful replications of the OPP model. Fieldwork with LPP aimed to verify whether the factors that seem to have been central to OPP's success in community mobilization in Orangi also apply in the case of LPP.

Section 3. How did community participation work?

Studies of community participation have demonstrated the importance of various factors that could potentially facilitate the process (Chambers, 1997; Banks et al., 2015; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The fieldwork with OPP establishes three factors which play a particularly useful role in building trust within the community and developing innovative solutions to local sanitation problems: recognizing the importance of local knowledge; recruiting staff from among the community members; and collaborating actively with local community networks and activists within a framework which was very responsive to local needs and opportunities. OPP studied the on-going community self-help efforts and provided technical support to complement those efforts; the staff were recruited from within the community and motivated by inculcating in them a strong sense of community belonging; and both the community and the relevant government agencies were made to recognize that they needed to work together. This section explains each one of these factors in some detail.

Mixing lay and specialist knowledge for low-cost solutions

As is the case with most mega cities in the developing world, Karachi – which is a port city and former capital of the country – has frequent influxes of immigrants from neighbouring cities and rural areas. The failure of the state to absorb these immigrants has led to the mushrooming of informal housing settlements, referred to as *katchi abadis*. Here land is normally occupied by professional land grabbers and then sold in small plots to low-income households without the legal paperwork. The result is sprawling illegal housing colonies where the state shoulders little responsibility for social-service provision, given that these colonies are not included in its official planning remit. Estimates offered by various parties during the fieldwork suggest that these unplanned *katchi abadis* today accommodate approximately 6 million people, close to one third of Karachi's population. In 1975 a policy of *katchi abadi* regularization was adopted, which led to the establishment of the Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority (SKAA) to regularize the illegal settlements. But progress has been very slow, with only 1.5 per cent of *katchi abadis* being regularized per year. It was an exposure to these desperate living conditions that motivated Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan to try to improve the conditions therein.

The following excerpt from Dr Khan's book helps to explain how the conditions within the slums shaped the working of OPP:

> Orangi is Karachi's biggest *katchi abadi*. It is not an inner-city slum, but a new suburban settlement which began twenty-five years ago. Its population is estimated to be about one million persons, consisting of mohajirs (old Indian

> immigrants), Biharis (immigrants from Bangladesh), Pathans (immigrants from the Northern Areas), Punjabis, Sindhis, and Balochis. It is proudly called a mini Pakistan. The majority belong to the working classes. A survey made in 1989 shows that there were 110 *mohallas* or sectors, 6,347 lanes or streets, and 94,122 houses. More immigrants are coming and building more houses every year. The people are fully aware of their vote power and street power. There are anjumans and associations everywhere; lobbyism is very popular; demands are pressed and complaints made about deprivation ceaselessly. (Khan 1998, p. 103)

Elaborating on the complex make-up of the community and the high degree of agency among its members, Dr Khan goes on to record how he was inspired to establish OPP by observing the strong ethos of self-help within this community (Khan, 1998):

- Ninety-five thousand houses had been built without any help from the Development Authority or the House Building Corporation.
- A total of 509 private schools and 646 private clinics were set up. Transport was almost entirely under private management.
- More than 11,000 shops, workshops, and micro-enterprises were providing employment to thousands of families.

From the outset OPP worked to support the community in its efforts to improve its own quality of living, instead of trying to dictate to it from outside the community. Dr Khan adopted a research and extension approach. First he thoroughly analysed the problems and then focused on understanding what the community was itself doing to try to address that problem. Based on this research, OPP identified the areas where it could help to support the efforts being made by the community. Often the answers

were not immediate but were learned through trial and error. This is precisely how its low-cost component-sharing sanitation model, today internationally recognized for its effectiveness, came about; it was a product of constant adaptation to challenges and opportunities that emerged as OPP worked closely with the community.

The first and most important technical contribution that OPP made to the community was the provision of mapping facilities. As explained by both OPP and government staff, mapping is a very important process in sanitation planning. When OPP started its work in sanitation, it recruited young engineers who spent much of their initial time just mapping the area. Maps helped the community as well as the government to visualize the problem; it made the solutions look more realistic. In developing these maps of the local areas, OPP in turn was heavily relying on the knowledge amassed by the local community members who, by virtue of living in the area, were very familiar with its geography. Gradually, by engaging with the community, OPP realized that the standard government sanitation model could be replaced by a more cost-effective model, because the government model required digging much deeper than necessary (Khan, 1998). This led to new guidelines for digging shallower drains, which reduced costs. Further, the whole model became more economical due to OPP's success in convincing the community and the state agencies to pool resources. The community was convinced to invest its own labour and resources to build the inner sewers, while the government took on the responsibility of building the bigger sewers to which these individual sewers connect.

Even though the community was involved in developing the model, getting the wider community to accept it required mobilization. As one of OPP's field mobilizers explained:

> We ask people to understand that something is better than nothing. We ask them to pool between Rs. 25,000 and 50,000— less than 500 US dollars. This much amount is nothing. We tell people if the government does the same work it will cost Rs. 400,000 to R. 500,000. We ask them to visit the neighbourhood and see themselves the work, which has been done at a very low cost through our help. You can safely say 80 to 90 per cent of the community agrees to self-finance.

Further, arriving at this model required much trial and error involving constant inputs from OPP, the community, and the government field staff. As one of the OPP senior members noted:

> It has to be remembered that we did not start the work with a component-sharing model. Initially, we ourselves had no clue of how exactly should the sanitation problem be solved. It was only through involving the community and through trial and error that we developed this model, which involved contributions from the community as well as the government. It was only after 1997 that we started talking about this model in terms of component sharing.

Similarly, a lot of OPP's expansion has happened in response to public demands, rather than being due to planned activities. For example, OPP has over time become involved in resisting evictions of people from certain areas on the pretext of sanitation planning. OPP got involved in this because it received complaints from the people.

Winning the support of the government officials on the other hand required convincing them of the effectiveness of the model. Akhtar Hameed Khan is known for

arguing that often resistance from the government side is psychological in nature, rather than financial (Khan, 1998). Therefore, one important factor in winning government support has been to present options. On engaging with the government, the OPP provided government officials with new models for sanitation work in the low-income settlements which were financially more viable than previous models. Identification of these low-cost options was a big step towards establishing a relationship. As one of the OPP officials explained:

> The estimates get easily approved when they are low-cost. In government projects the officials give very high estimates so that there is a higher margin for corruption. As opposed to government estimates, we were proposing very low-cost alternatives in which there were clearly no corruption margins. So, it was then easier to convince the top ranks within the municipal authority to support the project.

Fieldwork conducted with Lodhran Pilot Project supported these findings. Having technical expertise to undertake detailed mapping of the area was critical in winning the co-operation of the community as well as that of the government, as it showed to both parties that LPP had something to offer. Once LPP had mapped the drainage system, it was much easier to convince the government and the community that LPP was proposing realistic solutions. Further, as in the case of OPP, the low cost of the model was very important to its success (Hasan, 2003; WaterAid, 2011). During fieldwork, LPP's Social Mobilizer highlighted how the low cost of the project is also critical in mobilizing the community to co-operate: 'When we mobilize the people, the most effective tool is to highlight the low cost of the project as compared to the benefits they will get.' He went on to explain that the LPP team briefs the community

about the model and convinces the members that by putting in a small amount of money to build the sanitation facilities they can save far more in terms of medical costs. ‘We also tell them about other monetary benefits of making this investment. For example, we explain to them that if they invest in developing this drainage system then the value of their property will rise,’ he added. Similarly, LPP’s ability to mobilize the community to take part in this programme helped to convince the elected representatives to take the work seriously. Tehsil Nazim Lodhran noted: ‘I feel LPP has been very good at mobilizing the community which is very useful. This way the people get to develop a sense of responsibility in providing social services for themselves.’

Thus, offering specific technical expertise that complemented the community's local knowledge, and convincing the community and the government agencies to pool resources, was key to the emergence and success of OPP’s low-cost sanitation model.

Drawing staff from within the community

The OPP’s emphasis on building on local knowledge was evident not just in how it developed the model based on active consultation with the community but also in its daily operations. OPP is very closely integrated with the community. Its office is physically based within the Orangi area. The staff members mostly come from the local area. Thus within OPP it is really the community’s interests that are most clearly demonstrated, and this has greatly shaped the organizational culture and method of work. A strong team spirit and mutual respect are the driving force behind the working of the organization. The OPP senior staff act as mentors, but with due respect for the junior staff who, because they are actually in the field and come from within

the community, have better knowledge of the reality on the ground. The input of the field staff is thus seen as central to the working of OPP.

With this emphasis on local knowledge and community ownership, OPP motivates the staff through mentoring, providing inspiration, and team building, rather than offering material incentives in the form of high salaries. OPP's leadership explained its philosophy in these terms:

> Our staff profile is very different. Many leave only after death. You won't get trained people; you have to make people; you have to invest in them. When you will make people, and you will train them then they will get moulded the way you want them. What the employees value is flexibility, freedom, respect, and that the decisions are all made by consensus.

Other senior staff members placed similar emphasis on building a relationship when motivating the staff. As argued by one senior member: 'There is also a difference in our working methodology. It is teamwork not just leadership. The humanness of relationship is very important to the relationship.' Another member recollected having a similar relationship with Akhtar Hameed Khan: 'Dr Sahib used to order a lot, but no one used to listen. In our relationship there was a lot of love, so we can fight with each other.'

Interviews with the junior staff members suggested a strong bonding with OPP and its mission. As the IT officer, who was himself from Orangi, explained, 'I came here as a student. Then I got a chance to work with a multi-national company, where I worked for two years on Geographic Information System. It was a two-year work contract.

When it ended they offered me extension but I refused and rejoined the OPP.' A field officer made a similar point:

> This is a hard nut to crack. It is social work. It requires passion for work. I've been working here for last 25 years. I've seen riots, ethnic and sectarian killings, bullet-riddled bodies, dead bodies in gunny bags [jute bags]. There is no payment [reward] for this for you from anyone and vice-versa. It is very easy for the one who is willing to do this but very difficult for one who is not motivated.

During the fieldwork it was easy to observe that the working arrangements for the staff were quite flexible, and that even the junior staff enjoyed a great deal of flexibility in deciding when and how they performed their duties. Many of the staff members came to work after 10.30 am. One of the female workers interviewed noted that this flexibility had enabled her to work with OPP for the last 16 years. She was from the community and was allowed to have flexible working hours during the years when she had small children. Further, OPP constantly tries to provide new opportunities for training. One of the respondents interviewed during the fieldwork, who now runs an independent organization for developing maps, was trained in Orangi for several years before he was encouraged to start an organization of his own. The organization that he established has in turn given mapping training to more than 10 other organizations.

Partnering with local activist networks

As outlined above, the OPP model works because it has made the government and the community collaborate and pool resources. While convincing government officials to commit to the model required a demonstration of its effectiveness, it also involved working closely with the independent networks of associations, local activists, and local media outlets to ensure that the political representatives came to support the model. From the start, OPP placed great emphasis on working alongside the local activist organizations to build pressure on the government. A local activist who had worked with OPP for a long time elaborated his community work as follows:

> When there is a problem people get together. In *katchi abadis*, people know about each other and they know about each other till the time that they face a common problem. When these people sit in the evening they talk and discuss the problems. When there is no electricity there is also no Star TV. When there is no Star Plus so where will people sit. They will sit together and share things.

After living in Orangi for four years, this activist had established a local organization, Ghaziabad Welfare Tanzeem (GWT), working very closely with OPP. GWT routinely held meetings within the community to prepare members to lobby the local councillor to arrange a system for taking away dirty water from the area and to provide water tankers. It took a while, but eventually the councillor yielded to pressure from the community lobby and granted both the concessions.

This example very effectively captures OPP's approach to lobbying. It encourages the community to demand its rights, using all legitimate platforms and political processes, but does not take the lead on it. It supports the indigenous process of lobbying, whereby the community undergoes the internal mobilization process; it retains its own

focus on providing technical solutions. As one of the activists working with OPP commented:

> Our relationship with OPP is that we look at it as our '*darsgah*' [place of learning]. You can come and learn here and understand. From OPP we have been able to learn mapping skills. The mapping, costing and estimating skills are very important. OPP does not give any support of material kind.

Highlighting how OPP and the community work together, he noted that the difference is that OPP is outside the community, while he is inside the community: 'OPP is a Bank where people from different communities come and leave their problems as well as their ideas. This way they spread their message to other people.'

It was this community-embedded lobbying that helped OPP to influence the relevant government authorities to prioritize its model over more expensive alternatives offered by international financial institutions. In the 1990s, OPP worked closely with the local community lobbying networks to resist a loan being offered by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to the Karachi city government. The ADB had in the past conducted a sanitation project in the same area, which had been both costly and largely ineffective; OPP presented details of that failed project to convince everyone that the proposed project was too expensive and not designed to respond to local needs. OPP highlighted the problems with that project and provided a low-cost alternative. By providing community activists with this technical information, OPP helped the process of community-embedded lobbying which resulted in the Mayor of Karachi refusing the ADB loan. From then on the city sanitation authorities started to engage with OPP regularly and agreed to apply its model to all the *katchi abadis*. The

importance of combining community lobbying with technical expertise was summed up by one of the OPP's leaders in these words:

> We encourage the local associations and networks to undertake direct advocacy with the government functionaries. We then go in to support them with technical expertise. We have realized that just doing advocacy does not work; you have to provide concrete suggestions and estimates. We don't go in as leaders; we go in as technical experts.

In the words of another senior member of OPP:

> Basically there are three rules that we follow: working with the people, organizing the people, and facilitating the people. We aim to organize them to use their capabilities and resources. Why? Because that is the way they get confidence in themselves. This is the way to make them confident. And they love it. Once they have confidence they lobby with the government effectively.

He further added:

> We want to see a partnership between people, technicians, and politicians. The government officials are competent. They have technical expertise but the problem is that there are no work ethics in the government departments. The question is how to utilize this technical capacity? Once the community, the government, and organizations like us come together, it is possible to develop understanding on how to utilize each party's capabilities to the maximum. This is the way of developing a partnership in development.

The OPP's success in mobilizing community participation thus supports the emphasis accorded by Mansuri and Rao (2013) to recognizing the importance of 'punctuated equilibrium', and Joshi and Houtzager's (2012) support for the 'watchdog approach', which allows for building on existing relations and networks to develop social accountability. It is thus understandable why the strong professionalization of community-mobilization processes, and turning social-accountability mechanisms into 'widgets', has restricted donors' ability to induce community mobilization from outside. The question then is: what enables OPP to engage with the community in the way that it does?

Section 4. Why did community participation work?

The above section has shown how appreciation for local knowledge, involvement of the community as staff members, and skilfully combining technical knowledge with locally embedded lobbying structures were key to unlocking the threefold benefits of community participation: low cost, social accountability of state agencies, and sustainability. It is now important to ask what enabled OPP to engage with the community in this way. The lessons outlined in the preceding section are arguably not new, so why are aid-funded projects and donor-supported organizations often unable to achieve these benefits when claiming to involve the community? This section argues that this has much to do with the characteristics of the NGO leadership and the nature of the incentives upon which it draws to mobilize its staff, community members, and government officials.

Ideational commitment

OPP was established in the early 1980s, which was the time when the NGO culture was budding in Pakistan; yet the key to OPP's success is that it has been able to retain its own identity, very distinct from the broader NGO community (Bano 2008a; 2012b). The general reputation of OPP within the NGO sector matches these claims. It is well known that OPP has never taken to the NGO culture whereby offices are normally located in elite localities, salaries are high, and four-wheel drives are considered a necessity (Khan, 1998; Bano, 2012; Banks et al., 2015). Dr Akhter Hameed Khan is widely respected for living a very simple life despite the fact that he could have chosen a very luxurious lifestyle. As one OPP staff member explained: 'Akhtar Hameed Khan always said that you cannot work with the community and win their confidence if you have salaries five to ten times higher than what they get.'

From the beginning OPP attracted many individuals from the political left. They were motivated to undertake this work not by monetary incentives but out of a sense of commitment. Many of them joined only due to their respect for Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan. The two main figures who took over the leadership of OPP–RTI after the death of Dr Khan had political backgrounds. Before coming to OPP, one of them was a lecturer in Karachi University and had spent several years engaged in the politics of the left. By his personal example, Akhtar Hameed Khan was able to set the incentive structure within the organization in such a way that monetary compensation was never allowed to be the primary motive for the work of the senior management. Not surprisingly, many of the senior members of OPP are therefore critical of the general NGO culture. As one senior OPP member argued, 'Micro-finance has become a mafia now. They are out to make money. I criticize them openly in meetings and they now say that I should not come to these meetings. I have told all members of Pakistan

Poverty Fund [a donor-funded programme] that they have made all partners of this platform beggars.'

To be able to demonstrate that one is not driven by money has also been critical to forging a good relationship with the government. OPP does not take any money for the work it does for the government. The OPP leadership argues that if they take money they will lose the power to influence the government. ‘By not taking money for our services we are able to have a bigger influence on their policies, which is our main purpose,’ explains one senior official. The government officials interviewed also mentioned how OPP–RTI even helps them to design the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the consultants without taking any fee. These officials also noted how in fact OPP–RTI is providing a supporting role to the government officials by taking on some of their workload, rather than acting as a rival.

Avoiding development aid

The main reason why OPP never adopted the typical NGO culture (Bano, 2012; Banks et al., 2015) is that OPP was very selective in its choice of donors and maintains very low organizational costs in order to remain independent. This has enabled it to stay committed to its core philosophy and to one specific community. Its annual running costs are quite low, and OPP remains very selective in deciding which donor funding to accept. Its core funds come from the seed endowment given to it by a Pakistani bank at the time of its establishment. It does not take money from international financial institutions, or even the United Nations (UN) agencies. As one of the senior members explained:

> Initially, we did not know much about them, so we engaged with these institutions like World Bank, ADB, and the UN agencies. But our experiences with them did not prove good, so we decided not to work with them in future. Even with the UN we do not enter into formal contracts. They can, however, take our trainings where they are free to send their staff members. But, we do not enter into any agreement or contract with them.

If a donor approaches OPP, the leadership asks it to first come and see OPP's work. If the two sides find a mutually agreed goal, then they consider collaborating further. 'The issue is not the money. For example, Water Aid and Homeless International, from whom we have taken funds in recent years, had been our friends for a long time before either party talked about funds,' explains one senior member. She further added: 'Our philosophy is that if someone comes to you, we have to see them, but we don't have to go to their meetings unless we feel they fit our work ethics. For example, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank always get time when they want to come to Orangi, but we have a policy not to take on their consultancy work.' OPP was thus very conscious of the perverse incentives that often come with development aid and was aware that such incentives can distract the staff and leaders from their core commitments.

Perseverance and patience

OPP's experience with the government also shows that (as would be expected) it is not easy to win government co-operation. As one senior member of OPP noted, when Akhtar Hameed Khan would initially visit the city officials they used to entertain him with a cup of tea out of respect for him, but they did not take him seriously. The only option that was left to OPP was to go to the community. It became clear to OPP that if

it wanted to work it would have to focus on mobilization of the community and improving its technical expertise. From 1980 to 1987 there was therefore hardly any co-operation with the government. But OPP got through to the government in a serious way in 1992, when ADB tried to promote a large loan for a sanitation programme in Karachi. It was at this time that OPP encouraged the community to use the local activist networks to undertake strenuous lobbying of government representatives. By this time OPP had been working in Orangi for almost a decade, and the team had developed the necessary technical expertise as well as strong community networks. In particular, its mapping process had dramatically progressed, and this really increased its bargaining power with the government. The government officials had also seen by now that OPP had stayed the course and had developed good and low-cost responses to local needs. At this time the community, supported by OPP, successfully challenged the ADB consultants and provided much cheaper alternatives to what was being proposed.

The government officials interviewed during fieldwork themselves placed heavy emphasis on the importance of the gradual evolution of this relationship. One of the officials from the city government added:

> I have known OPP since 1992, when I was posted in Orangi. I have seen how their model evolved gradually in consultation with the community and with us. Initially, they had resistance from our lower staff. But over time they have also won their co-operation. They invite our field staff in Orangi area over to their office for a meeting every week. We have asked our field staff to attend their meetings.

Another senior official from the Karachi Water and Sanitation Board (KWSB) similarly recounted how he had seen the relationship between OPP and KWSB evolve over time:

> It was in 1990 that we started formal partnership with OPP. There has been a growing realization that the government alone cannot address the sanitation needs of the entire population. There is scope for the private sector and the NGOs to come in. OPP had been working in the area for a long time, so we engaged with them in 1990. Now we are using their component-sharing model in all the *katchi abadis* and slum areas in Karachi..

Conclusion

Looking at the case of OPP, this article has identified the factors that have enabled it to successfully mobilize the community and also the lower tiers of the government to ensure efficient delivery of a social service. The fact that most donor-funded community participatory projects are failing to engineer sustained community participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mansuri and Rao, 2013) does not mean that the alleged benefits of community participation are exaggerated. What the case of OPP helps to illustrate is that nurturing these benefits of community participation requires a long-term commitment, flexibility, and a willingness to learn from the community instead of dictating to it. It has shown that effective community participation requires observing and learning from the community what its needs are and how it copes with those needs. Similarly, it requires cultivating a solid knowledge of the locally embedded activist networks that can help to lobby the government once a technical solution has been found. Finally, the OPP model shows that true community-based solutions work not because the community takes on all the load but

because the community members, having learned the importance of self-help, work together to lobby the government to shoulder its responsibility. These findings are very consistent with those recorded in studies noted at the outset (Ostrom, 1991, 1996; Putnam, 1994; Tendler, 1998) that helped to establish the importance of community participation in development in the first place.

The donor-funded community-participation projects, on the other hand, work on totally different principles, following an entirely different approach (Bano, 2008, 2012). Most of these projects are implemented by NGOs within a specific timeframe, with a pre-set agenda and a clearly defined list of desired outcomes (Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Within a mechanical time-bound development project it is very difficult to build the kind of trust that marked OPP's relationship with the community as well as with the government officials. As a result, the NGOs as well as the donors that are funding these participatory projects routinely resort to buying consent by offering small monetary benefits for one-off participation in the project activities: per diems, sumptuous lunches and teas at community-mobilization events, and making actual cash commitments to the production of specific community goods. This ability of aid-funded participatory projects to buy consent is the biggest challenge to building genuine consent; it erodes the capacity for real community negotiations to take place: negotiations that are essential for genuine community participation to come about (Putnam, 1994; Tendler, 1998). The search for quick fixes replaces local negotiations with a focus on buying one-off participation through offering material incentives. This aid-induced incentivization erodes the original community dynamics so that community members do turn up at meetings but desired ends are rarely achieved.

The learning from the case of OPP reinforces the growing consensus that donor agencies either need to abandon the agenda of community participation — instead of following the charade which time and again fails to deliver the actual benefits of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Bano, 2012; Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012) — or they should seriously rethink how aid is disbursed through NGOs. The current modes of incentivizing the NGOs and the community to deliver participatory development have not worked to date and, to judge by the evidence available, neither will they in the future.

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Notes

[1] Based on fieldwork observations and interview responses.

[2] Mansuri and Rao (2013) make a similar distinction between organic and induced participation; the former is understood to emerge from within the given community, while the latter is induced by a government bureaucracy or a development agency through a pre-planned intervention.