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**STRENGTHENING EQUITY IN
RURAL DRINKING WATER SUPPLY
IN UTTAR PRADESH**

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A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines equity and governance issues in rural drinking water supply (RDWS) in Uttar Pradesh, North India, in the context of the current decentralisation reforms in the sector. It reviews the available literature on decentralisation and illuminates different perspectives and arguments to provide a rationale for understanding the reform initiatives in Uttar Pradesh. The study then analyses and discusses the key challenges towards achieving equitable RDWS. The focus lies on the potential and constraints of the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions, the elected local governments, to contribute to increased equity in RDWS. The study utilises an actor-oriented methodology focused on the perceptions of the relevant actors and is based on independent, qualitative field research conducted by the author from October to December 2010 in two rural districts and in the state capital Lucknow. A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with rural residents, elected government officials, bureaucrats, government and non-state experts. The research findings reveal that the initiated reforms have not yet achieved increased equity in RDWS due to insufficient implementation, flaws in policy design, and an external environment not conducive to reform. The study concludes that to achieve the set policy objectives, recognition of the complexity of the politico-economic context and its consideration in policy design are imperative.

Keywords: rural drinking water supply, equity, democratic decentralisation, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Uttar Pradesh

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GLOSSARY

Block	District sub-division
<i>gram panchayat</i>	Elected governing body of a village
<i>gram sabha</i>	Village assembly
<i>gram swaraj</i>	Village Self-Governance
<i>khettra panchayat</i>	Elected governing body of a block
<i>nyaya panchayat</i>	System of dispute resolution at village level
<i>pradhan</i>	Elected president of <i>gram panchayat</i>
<i>zilla panchayat</i>	Elected governing body of a district

ABBREVIATIONS

ARWSP	Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme
BRC	Block Resource Centre
DWSM	District Water and Sanitation Mission
GoI	Government of India
GoUP	Government of Uttar Pradesh
GP	<i>gram panchayat</i>
KP	<i>khettra panchayat</i>
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MLA	Member of Legislative
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRDWP	National Rural Drinking Water Programme
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PRI	<i>Panchayat Raj</i> Institutions
RDWS	Rural Drinking Water Supply
RTI	Right to Information
SWSM	State Water and Sanitation Mission
SC/ST	Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
TSC	Total Sanitation Campaign
WSSO	Water and Sanitation Support Organisation
VWSC	Village Water and Sanitation Committee
VHSC	Village Health and Sanitation Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	Uttar Pradesh
ZP	<i>zilla panchayat</i>

1 INTRODUCTION

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human right (UNGA 2010) and the social and economic benefits of improved drinking water access for the livelihoods of households and individuals are widely recognised (World Water Council n.d.).

Over the last decades, India has made significant progress towards achieving the goal of providing all its citizens with safe drinking water access and by 2010 had supplied 84% of its rural residents with access to improved sources of water (D-Sector 2010). However, the country is facing the challenge of sustaining the established infrastructure and of reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of its society (Van Dijk & Sijbesma 2006:7). Moreover, the rapid depletion and deterioration of groundwater resources in many regions threatens future water security and equity in water access (Cullet 2007; Kale 2010).¹

Historically, rural drinking water supply (RDWS) in India has been vested with the state governments; since the late 1980s, however, there has been a shift towards a decentralised, demand-led approach aimed at achieving more sustainable and equitable rural drinking water management (Sankar 2006:45). The adopted reforms seek to devolve legal powers over water resources to levels below the centre and state, giving a major role to the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions (PRI) at three levels: village (*gram*), block/sub-district (*khrettra*) and district (*zilla*) (Vani 2002).

The 73rd constitutional amendment in 1993 formalised the local governance system exemplified by the PRI. The PRI with the diverse functions assigned to them in law are commonly seen to have great potential to improve livelihoods of rural residents in India. They have inter alia been vested with a range of responsibilities regarding the management of water and other natural resources within their boundaries (Baumann et al. 2003:1).

Views on decentralisation vary widely and research shows mixed outcomes of decentralisation reforms in different countries and within countries. In some cases

¹ As announced by India's former Rural Development Minister Joshi, India has already achieved the MDG target of halving between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water (D-Sector 2010). While this is certainly a great success, it should be kept in mind that the MDGs have inter alia been criticised for low benchmarks and lacking indicators for accountability, participation and (women's) empowerment (see Kabeer 2010). Moreover, despite formally reaching the drinking water targets, India is lagging far behind with the connected goal of improving access to sanitation. This poses a continuous threat to safe drinking water access in the country (GoI 2002:35).

decentralisation has achieved policies that better reflect rural citizens' needs and improved public service delivery and resource use efficiency (Rondinelli et al. 1989; Crook & Manor 1998; Burki et al. 1999; Blair 2000). Other cases indicate that decentralisation can actually further elite capture, corruption and inequities (Dreze & Sen 1996; Blair 2000; Crook and Sverrisson 2001; Montambeault 2008) or exacerbate inefficient use of scarce resources (Oyono 2004; Resosudarmo 2004).

These different perspectives on decentralisation and the often wide gaps between assumed and de facto outcomes of decentralisation reforms motivated me to closely analyse and debate the current reforms in the Indian rural drinking water sector and to scrutinise the potential and constraints of the PRI in this context with a particular focus on equity in drinking water access.

1.1 AIM OF STUDY

The primary aim of the study is to understand rural drinking water management in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in view of its historical and current practices and perceptions of relevant actors. The devolution of drinking water related functions to the PRI in the context of the recent reforms and their potential and constraints to achieve more equitable access to drinking water is the primary focus of this research.

Considering the inequities in distribution of access to water, low maintenance of local water infrastructure and decreasing groundwater quantity and quality in UP, it is imperative to collect information from local communities, elected PRI representatives, bureaucrats, government and non-government experts in order to inform the ongoing debate on decentralisation in the rural drinking water sector and to contribute to theory promoting a more equitable approach to decentralised RDWS.

In coherence with the study's overall aim, I pose the following key research question:

- *What are the key institutional challenges towards achieving equitable rural drinking water supply in Uttar Pradesh?*

In answering this central research question I attempt to address two sub-questions:

- *How is RDWS in Uttar Pradesh organised? What are the roles of the different actors and in particular the Panchayat Raj Institutions?*
- *What are the prospects and constraints of the PRI to contribute to increased equity in RDWS?*

To answer the above research questions, the different actors' understanding and their interpretation of RDWS institutions were studied using a qualitative case study approach. An actor-oriented research methodology was employed focusing on the perceptions of the relevant actors (see Long 2001). The collected empirical material was analysed using an analytical framework for decentralisation reforms in natural resource management (see Agrawal & Ribot 1999).

1.2 DELIMITATIONS

The study does not cover water management in full; irrigation, sanitation, watershed activities etc. are not included in the analysis. Given the complex institutional set-up for water resources management in India and particular in Uttar Pradesh, I delimited the study to RDWS to allow for a feasible research design.

Moreover, while the current decentralisation reforms in the RDWS sector in India aim for economic, ecological and social sustainability, the focus in this thesis lies on the latter dimension that includes the meeting of basic needs, democratic and accountable governance structures (McKenzie 2004:34-5), equitable distribution of rights and control over decision-making processes, and equitable allocation of socio-economic benefits (Poteete 2004).

1.3 THESIS OUTLINE

The outline of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 2, I present my theoretical framework including a literature review on decentralisation reforms in developing countries and on decentralisation-equity linkages. This is followed by a presentation of the analytical framework which I will use to analyse the current reforms in the RDWS sector in UP.

The research methodology including a reflection on the trustworthiness of my research, methodological limitations and ethical conduct is presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 discusses the research context, including an overview of RDWS in India, an introduction to the *Panchayat Raj* system, as well as a description of major socio-economic factors influencing the local governments and RDWS in the study area. Thereafter, Chapter 5 describes the field study area.

In Chapter 6, I analyse and discuss the empirical material. Sections (6.1) and (6.2) deal with the research's first and second sub-question respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the conclusions.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 DECENTRALISATION: ARGUMENTS AND DEFINITIONS

Decentralisation essentially means the process of transferring meaningful powers from central government to local units of governance (Blair 2000:21). Since the 1980s, decentralisation has been at the forefront of the development agenda largely due to increasing dissatisfaction with central state planning (Manor 1999). International donors and NGOs have promoted decentralisation and many governments of developing countries have jumped on the “decentralisation bandwagon” and initiated reforms. While decentralisation should not be considered a panacea, it has the potential to improve governance (ibid.).

A major rationale for decentralisation is the perception of the inability of the central state to distribute appropriate benefits (Cullet 2007:7). The liberal economist Hayek suggested that central planners lack the “knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place” to be responsive to local needs (1945:524). Proponents of decentralization hence argue forcefully that decentralised governments are more accountable and responsive to local priorities (i.e. Blair 2000; Crook & Manor 1998; Ostrom et al 1993).

Local-specific knowledge is considered particularly important in the field of natural resources management and hence it is often pointed out that decentralised governance suits natural resources management better than centralised systems (Meinzen-Dick & Knox 1999:44; Blomquist et al. 2010:620). Conversely, powers over natural resources can also strengthen local governments: “They enable local authorities to act in ways that are useful to local people, giving local people reason to engage local government. When government has

meaningful powers and is open to influence by the people they represent, local people are transformed from managed subjects into engaged citizens” (Ribot 2004:13).

Many studies provide evidence that decentralisation reforms have effectively increased popular participation and improved quality of local governance (e.g. Blair 2000, Agrawal 2001; de Oliveira 2002; Faguet 2004). In numerous other cases, decentralisation has, however, also resulted in elite capture that has in turn led to decreased efficiency, increased inequities and corruption (Dreze & Sen 1996; Francis & James 2003; Woodhouse 2003; Montambeault 2008; Kakumba 2010) (see Chapter 2.1.1).

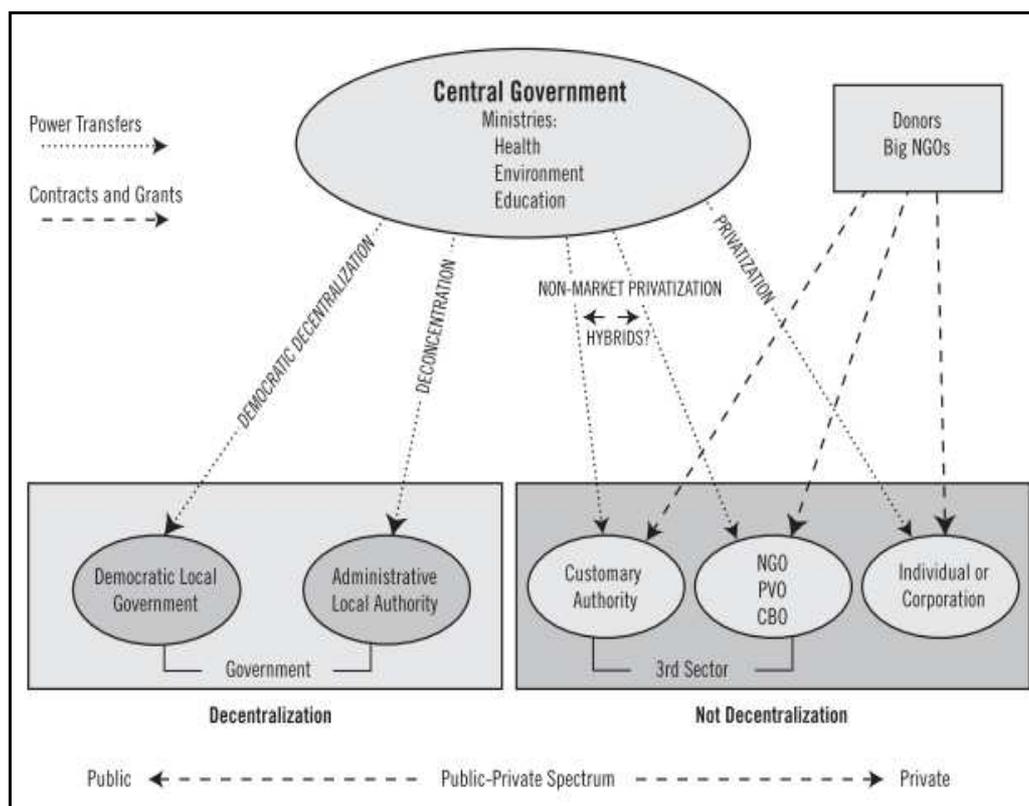
It should be kept in mind that decentralisation can serve different ideological interests and reforms have been pursued for various reasons, for example to:

- shift power away from a centralised state based on rent-seeking and patronage,
- give space to competing interest groups,
- give local communities opportunities for cooperation,
- obtain legitimacy and grassroots support without democratising the political system,
or
- make governments more responsive to local priorities (Crook and Manor 1998:1).

In the literature, numerous definitions of decentralisation can be found. For the purpose of this study an overview of two key definitions is sufficient:

- 1) **Deconcentration** or **administrative decentralisation** which merely transfers power to local administrative bodies such as line departments, and
- 2) **Devolution** or **democratic decentralisation** which creates representative local governments with autonomous powers (Crook & Manor 1998:6-7; Blair 2000; Ribot & Larson 2005).

Fig1: Different Types of Power Transfers from the State to the Local Level



Source: Ribot, 2004:10

Democratic decentralisation is considered the more far-reaching form of decentralisation since powers and resources are transferred to representative authorities which are downwardly accountable to local citizens (see Fig1). Fiscal decentralisation is not considered a form of decentralisation as fiscal transfers are a part of devolution (Ribot 2004:9). Also, it is critical to make a distinction between privatisation and decentralisation. According to Ribot, privatisation lacks the “inclusive public logic of decentralization” (ibid.).

2.1.1 DECENTRALISATION AND EQUITY

Equity means fairness and can sometimes entail but is not absolutely equivalent to equality, (sameness) (Poteete 2004:3)². Decentralisation is often mentioned in the same breath as good governance as it is widely believed to lead to improved equity through enhanced local

² People’s perceptions on fairness might vary in different situations and cultures and thus “measuring equity should incorporate the society’s norms, values and customs” (Nkonya 2008:144). Local perceptions, however, often discriminate against some groups in society and should therefore be carefully assessed in order to ensure “nondiscriminatory water access for all” (ibid.). The latter is a difficult task because who decides what is fair and nondiscriminatory and what is not?

participation (Meynen & Doornbos 2006:227-8)³. More specifically it aims to achieve political and economic equity, the former meaning democratic decision-making and recognition of the different demands of different resource users and the latter implying the equation of costs and benefits (Poteete 2004:13,17).

Meynen and Doornbos (2006:228) argue however that the good governance agenda that is influenced by public choice theory tends to overlook the opposition to decentralisation emerging from state bureaucrats who see their powers, control and clientelist networks threatened⁴. Furthermore, they point out that decentralisation advocates often overlook local power relations and patronage patterns (ibid.). Critics of decentralisation stress for example that decentralisation can increase economic inequities by reinforcing local social divisions (Poteete 2004.12-3). Elite capture is another commonly cited problem of decentralisation and a large body of literature provides evidence of local elites usurping power at the expense of less politically or economically influential groups (e.g. Pacheco 2002; Oyono 2002; Baviskar 2002; Resosudarmo 2002; Larson 2002). Frequently, local elites manipulate election outcomes for their own benefit and poor people vote for elite candidates because they are socially and economically dependent on them (Ribot 2004:27-8). However, according to Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000:135) there is a gap in the literature on the relative susceptibility of national and local governments to elite capture and the authors argue, that the extent of elite capture is location and context-specific. Olowu (2001:57) points out that elite capture is not always malevolent and stresses that local government systems in fact need the resources, knowledge and networks of local elites. In a similar vein, Mansuri and Rao (2003:42) argue that some form of elite domination might be inevitable in heterogeneous societies and that such domination can also take benevolent forms and must not lead to a capture of all benefits by the elites. An India-wide study (Foster & Rosenzweig 2001) found that decentralised governance had actually decreased elite capture in that it led to more pro-poor public investments.

³ Good governance was first introduced by the World Bank as a strategic concept in 1989 and aims at improving the administrative capacity and efficiency of the public sector. Improving accountability of officials, transparency of public decisions and rule of law are other key objectives of the good governance agenda (Mürle 1997:50).

⁴ Clientelism essentially means informal patron-client relationships between actors of unequal status. Clientelism does not only exist in its political form where politicians exchange favours for votes. It can also take on a bureaucratic form where politicians derive their power due to enhanced access to state resources through integration of bureaucrats into their patron-client relationships. Commonly, political supporters are given administrative positions in return for their favours (Kurer 1997:67).

2.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The study explores key equity issues of the current reforms in the RDWS sector in UP and analyses the potential and constraints of the PRI to contribute to more equitable drinking water management. The focus lies mainly on the effect of the PRI in terms of their organisational outcomes. This includes looking into their specific institutional characteristics, such as level of inclusion and elite domination, and their capacities and accountability. These characteristics largely determine the larger social impact these institutions are able to achieve (Sharma 2009:21).

2.2.1 ACTORS, POWERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

My analytical starting point for exploring the ongoing decentralisation process in the RDWS sector in UP is a framework developed by Agrawal and Ribot (1999) as a tool to analyse decentralisation reforms. The focus in this framework lies on changes in three areas: actors, powers (or responsiveness), and accountability.

Drinking water management involves many different actors at different levels of action. The nature of decentralisation efforts and their outcomes mainly depend on which actors receive power in the name of decentralisation and on the accountability relations between these actors (ibid.). Popular participation is widely believed to result in most of the local benefits caused by decentralisation, such as increased efficiency, equity and democracy (Ribot 2004:17). Representation of local authorities can be seen as the institutionalised form of participation and “can be a mechanism by which the knowledge, needs, and aspirations of local people are brought into public decision-making processes and translated into policy” (ibid.).

Manin et al. (1999:Chapter1) split up representation into two concepts: responsiveness (mandate) and accountability. Accountability means the population’s ability to sanction their representatives, and responsiveness means that actors have the powers and capacities to act on behalf of their constituencies: “Accountability provides signals, powers and abilities enable local authorities to translate signals into policies” (Ribot 2004:18).

2.2.1.1 Responsiveness

With respect to the powers that enable local authorities to be responsive, the concepts of discretion and subsidiarity become crucial. “Without discretionary powers, local government is an administrative extension of central government. Having discretion is what defines

meaningful authority in local democracy” (Ribot 2004:21). Three different kinds of powers constitute the foundation of decentralisation: executive powers (e.g. decision-making, implementation and enforcement powers), legislative powers (for making rules or bylaws), and judicial powers (for the solving of disputes) (Agrawal & Ribot 1999:4-5). For powers to be discretionary it is required that local authorities also possess the necessary financial means to exercise their powers (e.g. they need to obtain funds and/or taxation powers) (Ribot 2004:21).

Decentralisation – besides devolving discrete powers – should also adhere to the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity means to transfer powers to the lowest appropriate level (Blomquist et al. 2010). Criteria need to be developed to ensure that powers are transferred to the right level and to the right kind of authority.

Given that the various actors involved in decentralisation often have different or competing interests, transfer of the same powers to different actors will likely result in different outcomes (Agrawal & Ribot 1999:3). Since power “is the outcome of complex struggles and negotiations over authority, status, reputation and resources, and necessitates the enrolment of networks of actors and constituencies” it needs to be understood as “produced” rather than merely obtained and exercised (Long 2001:71). Moreover, the concept of power also entails a hegemonic dimension, meaning that actors shape perceptions and preferences in such a way that the existing order is accepted and powerless actors are kept excluded (Lukes cited in Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998:456). This dimension of power is particularly important for analysing equity outcomes of decentralisation as it implies that power can cause lack of resistance or demand for services from less influential groups (see *ibid.*).

2.2.1.2 Accountability

With regard to accountability, Agrawal and Ribot (1999:5) note “that if powers are decentralized to actors who are not accountable to their constituents, or who are accountable only to themselves or superior authorities within the structure of the government, then decentralization is not likely to accomplish its stated aims.” According to these authors downward accountability is the key element of decentralisation as it can enhance both local participation and responsiveness (*ibid.*:6). Downward accountability can be established through a range of mechanisms with elections being the most common one. Other means include political competition, legal recourse, independent monitoring and audit, a free media,

civic education, or central state oversight on local government, to name only a few (ibid.; Blair 2000:27).

2.2.2 THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT AND POWER STRUCTURES ON REFORM OUTCOMES

I chose the framework of Agrawal and Ribot for my thesis as opposed to alternative, more widely used theories and frameworks dealing with decentralisation in natural resource management (e.g. Ostrom et al. 1994) due to its strong focus on multilevel power distribution and relationships. Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework does not capture the multiple interactions between different actors (Fischer et al. 2007) and tends to overlook the politico-economic context in which institutions are embedded (Clement 2010). In a study on PRI and watershed management in India, Baumann et al. found that collective action by local resource users played a very insignificant role while political economy was the single most determinant factor for decentralisation outcomes (Baumann et al. 2003).

Institutions are to a large degree shaped by and interact with a specific politico-economic context (Ribot & Larson 2005:7; Batterbury 2006:1860). It is therefore my aim to contextualise my unit of analysis to better understand power relationships and the political and economic interests underlying decisions of different actors (Clement 2010:140). Reflection on discourses is also essential as they can undermine or reinforce the credibility of institutions (ibid.).

Complementary to Agrawal and Ribot's framework, data collection and analysis were also influenced by the actor-oriented approach (see Long 1999, 2001). According to Long, an actor-oriented analysis is needed for "understanding cultural diversity, social difference and conflict inherent in development intervention" (1999:1). He proposes the conception of an intervention as "an ongoing, socially-constructed, negotiated, experimental and meaning-creating process, not simply the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected behavioural outcomes" (Long 2001:25). In line with Long's argumentation, I attempt to go beyond an analysis of ideal intervention models in RDWS towards an investigation of the actual intervention practice shaped by the multiple realities of the actors involved (Long 1999:4).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The empirical material for the study was collected through qualitative methods using multiple sources. My research is mainly of an exploratory nature and is conducted as a multiple-site, single case study. An actor-oriented methodology was adopted in this study which aims at understanding the rationality of the relevant actors. This approach recognises the multiple realities and diverse social practices of different actors (see Long 1999).

3.1.1 CASE STUDY

A case study design seemed most appropriate for the purpose of the study as it allows for an in-depth investigation of the research problem (Yin 2003:1). Moreover, it enabled me to study decentralised drinking water management in a context-specific setting which is necessary to understand human action (ibid.:13; Long 1999). In order to obtain a “fuller” picture, I use multiple data sources and investigate multiple variables (Yin 2003:13-4).

3.1.2 META-SCIENCE POSITIONS

In line with its actor-oriented design, the study is rooted in constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stances since I believe that social life is composed of multiple realities constructed mainly through experience (Long 1999:22) and that “social phenomena and their meanings are continuously being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman 2008:692). To understand decentralised drinking water management in Uttar Pradesh and the rationality of the different actors involved, I do not only explore how my research participants interpret certain phenomena but I likewise provide interpretations of my interviewees’ answers (Kvale 1996:32). Thus, knowledge I gain as a researcher is never objective but limited to my own interpretations.

3.2 SAMPLING STRATEGIES

3.2.1 SELECTING THE STUDY SITES

The districts and villages chosen as sites for this thesis were purposively selected with the aim of having information-rich cases that allow for an in-depth analysis of my research topic. Maximum variation sampling was undertaken to explore RDWS and the performance of the local governments in both a reform and a non-reform context. The first site, a village in Jhansi district, was selected due to its participation in a water reform project and its location in a

district with the longest history of water reform in the state. The other three villages in Sitapur district on the contrary have no history of water reform and belong to a district that has not been covered by water reform projects implemented jointly by the GoUP and the World Bank since the 1990s.⁵

3.2.2 SELECTING RESPONDENTS AND INFORMANTS

I selected a number of government and non-government experts, local authorities as well as rural residents for an intensive case study. Due to the exploratory nature of my research I aimed to obtain a differentiated sample of respondents. In the two rural districts, I pursued field inquiries at two levels: semi-structured elite interviews and group interviews with ordinary citizens. Elite interviews were conducted with elected officials, bureaucrats and other key respondents knowledgeable about PRI and/or drinking water management.

Certain sampling strategies facilitated the selection of interviewees. The first one, snowball sampling, is “a form of convenience sampling” where “the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (Bryman 2008:184). Theoretical sampling was a second strategy used. Based on their relevance for and knowledge of the research phenomenon, I had identified potential informants and respondents at all local levels and at the state level (Silverman 2005:130-1). Participant recruitment at the local levels depended on my gatekeepers who arranged all interview appointments.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study builds mainly upon empirical material collected during field research in Uttar Pradesh from October to December 2010⁶. Qualitative interviewing, in both individual and group interviews, was my main data collection method. A total of 16 respondent interviews and 12 key informant interviews were conducted. A second method applied was document review. Some additional information was obtained through village mapping conducted during group interviews and through unstructured observations during interviews or walks in the villages.⁷

⁵ Originally I planned to study an equal number of reform and non-reform villages, but due to time and logistical constraints I was not able to visit more reform villages.

⁶ A number of pilot interviews and one key informant interview were conducted in August and September 2010.

⁷ For brevity, key respondent interviews, group interviews and pilot interviews will be cited as KR, GI and PI respectively, followed by the full interview date. Key informants will be referred to by their last name.

3.3.1 INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH RESPONDENTS

In line with the constructivist paradigm of my research, I have adopted a qualitative research design and have chosen qualitative interviews as the primary method (see [Appendix I](#) for list of interviews). This type of interviewing enabled me to get to know my respondents' points of view and to fully appreciate their multiple realities (Bryman 2008:437). All respondent interviews followed similar semi-structured interview guides and focused on certain themes (see [Appendix VI](#) for interview guides)⁸.

In individual interviews, key respondents at the local levels (mainly elected PRI officials) gave information regarding implementation of schemes and provided their perceptions on how they see their own roles and responsibilities.

Five group interviews were conducted with community members in order to access a "larger body of knowledge" (Mikkelsen 2005:172). The respondents told about their daily practices, needs and expectations and their view on the local government. Moreover, they provided information on their participation in planning and decision-making processes.⁹

To avoid what Chambers (1983) calls elite and male biases, I was especially interested in talking with the most vulnerable sections of rural communities: members of scheduled castes and women. Talking to these groups was crucial since political decentralisation processes in India specifically seek to empower these two groups through reservations. Their perceptions were therefore of particular importance for my research. After mixed experiences with a mixed-gender group, I tried to ensure greater homogeneity in group interviews and invited women and men to participate separately in the following interviews in order to give women equal space to talk (see [Appendix II](#) for Group Composition)¹⁰.

To ensure greater participation in the group interview, a village mapping exercise was conducted at the beginning of each group interview. This served as a good ice-breaker and

⁸ Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to probe my respondents and also enabled me to adapt interview guides over time to focus on emerging areas of particular importance.

⁹ I had originally planned to conduct focus groups but due to language barriers it was difficult to facilitate a discussion. Moreover, the translation process made it necessary to structure the interview to a higher degree than should be the case in a focus group. I still found "normal" group interviews very fruitful as they provided a bigger amount of perceptions than individual interviews (Bryman 2008:475).

¹⁰ In the mixed group conducted in one village in Sitapur, women were very shy in the beginning and felt uncomfortable to participate in the village mapping exercise. Only after a while they became more comfortable and frankly shared their opinions.

also provided me with important information on the study site (see [Appendix III](#) for Village Maps).

3.3.2 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

To complement the information obtained by local respondents with a more official view, key informant interviews were conducted in Lucknow with representatives of state government departments and agencies, a multilateral agency, NGOs, and think tanks. These informants provided information on state government priorities, strategies, and historical and recent developments in the rural water supply sector. These interviews followed a more unstructured approach where I only used a list of topics guiding me through the conversations.

3.3.3 CROSS-CHECKING OF INFORMATION

A substantial number of interviews were considered necessary to verify the information collected. This was partly due to the explorative nature of my research where new information was obtained constantly as a result of adapting interview guides and questions throughout the data collection process. Cross-checking was also necessary as a result of contradictory statements made by some respondents. Kvale argues that “it becomes the task of the interviewer to clarify, as far as possible, whether the ambiguities or contradictory statements are due to a failure of communication in the interview situation, or whether they reflect real inconsistencies, ambivalences and contradictions in the interviewee” (1996:34)¹¹.

3.3.4 DOCUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

Initially, I recorded the interviews with a tape recorder. Recording was however discontinued due to two reasons. First, the sound quality was often poor due to surrounding noises, and second, I could not afford to pay for a word-by-word transcription from Hindi to English. Hence, no direct quotes from respondents will be used in this thesis since deviations from the exact language would likely occur.

Instead of recording I took written notes during all interviews. To be able to write quickly enough and to avoid chaos in my notes, I had numbered all interview questions and put them

¹¹ One example of a contradictory statement during a group interview was when I asked if everybody in the village had sufficient water available for their needs. At first respondents replied positively while later on they stated that there is not enough water. I was able to clarify this situation and found out that the respondents were not so much speaking about water availability but more about insufficient water sources in the village leading to access problems.

into different categories. Though note-taking worked very well, I acknowledge the disadvantages of not recording my interviews, such as loss of exact language and a higher risk to insert my own interpretations into the data. All statements of respondents were thus carefully paraphrased trying to avoid inserting own biases and inaccurate interpretations.

Given my qualitative research approach, data analysis started already in the field (Mikkelsen 2005:181). My written field notes were typed in computer files after each interview and in addition I have kept a field diary to capture all my impressions during field trips and interviews. The interview notes were then put into a thematic order. The themes and categories for analysing the data were formed both from theoretical framework and from the collected empirical information itself.

Despite being guided by a theoretical framework, I used a research approach that is mainly inductive. I was not so much interested in testing a hypothesis but rather let collected empirical data influence theory during the research process. I found this approach suitable given that my research is of an exploratory nature.

The results of my analysis will be matched and discussed in relation to previous research.

3.3.5 DOCUMENT REVIEW

Document review has been utilised as an additional method to cross-check information obtained in the interviews. Most documents were available on government institutions' websites and some documents have been provided by key informants. The main documents used in this study are government policy guidelines, status reports and assessment studies. Document review was part of my triangulation strategy and was intended to enhance the credibility of my findings. However, since many of the documents were written for a particular readership or purpose and might thus not be entirely objective, I continuously tried to interpret the accuracy of the information (Yin 2003:87-9).

3.4 QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

The traditional criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity used by quantitative scientists to judge the quality of their research have increasingly been considered unsuitable for qualitative research. For assessing the trustworthiness of my research I will thus use alternative criteria for qualitative studies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (see Table1).

Table1: Research Quality Criteria

Conventional Criteria for Quantitative Research	Alternative Criteria for Qualitative Research
Internal Validity	Credibility
External Validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: based on Lincoln and Guba (1985)

While the trustworthiness of quantitative research depends on credible research instruments, in qualitative research “the researcher is the instrument”, and the research’s trustworthiness thus depends on the ability and effort of the researcher (Patton 2002:14).

Credibility seeks to evaluate whether or not I have interpreted the statements of my research participants in a “credible” way. To address this criterion I attempted to provide a “thick description” of the studied phenomenon within its contextual background in my thesis (Geertz 1973; see also Ponterotto 2006). Moreover, I investigated my research topic from different angles and different perspectives. A thorough understanding of the context was made possible through a triangulation of methods and through using different sources for my data collection (Bryman 2008:379). Triangulation also provided me with the opportunity to verify or falsify information and to interpret data obtained more accurately. Peer reviewing was used as another technique to enhance credibility (Creswell 2007:202).

Credibility is however compromised by the fact that I lacked the time to complete *member-checking* with the respondents. Through this technique every participant is given the opportunity to comment on the research findings and thereby ensuring that their statements have not been misinterpreted by the researcher (ibid.:202-3). Checking is crucial because in the end it is the respondents who can best judge if the research adequately reflects their realities.

Transferability of my research is enhanced through a detailed description of the study setting and the research process¹². This will allow the person who is doing the “transfer” to determine how applicable my findings are to the new setting (Lincoln & Guba 1985:316). It is however important to keep in mind the ontological and epistemological positions that form the foundation of my research. Constructivism and interpretivism both emphasise the subjectivity and uniqueness of reality meaning that the product of my research is a subjective description of reality. Generalisation is thus not a primary goal of this study.

To assure **dependability** (meaning consistency and repeatability) of my findings, I try to document my research process, from collection to analysis, transparently in my thesis (ibid.:299).

Finally, I addressed **confirmability** of my research by trying to constantly control for my personal biases, motivations or interests (ibid.:290).

3.5 LIMITATIONS

The research was limited to two districts in UP and utilises qualitative methodology, as such it cannot be used to generalise the state of drinking water management in UP with statistical certainty. However, it can be said to give examples of different cases in the south and central parts of the state involving stakeholders at different levels of water management.

I consider two limitations to have been key constraints for the research process overall and more particularly to achieving a “thick description” of the research phenomenon:

- My inability to communicate in the local language, Hindi.

In regards to qualitative interviewing Kvale states that, “it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaning level” and that “[i]t is necessary to listen to the explicit descriptions and meanings as well as to ‘what is said between the lines’” (1996:32). Unfortunately, at the local levels interviewing on a meaning level was hindered by language barriers.

- The urban bias I hold as an urban-based outsider.

¹² To provide a detailed description of the study setting without overburdening the main thesis body, I include more background information on the study sites and respondents as well as my interview guides in the appendices.

This bias was reinforced by my location in an urban centre during most of my research (Chambers 1983:9). Access to the field depended on my gatekeepers who due to practical reasons sometimes preferred roadside villages. I was however able to counter this spatial bias by choosing villages some distance from the district centres and by visiting a district (Jhansi) that is not neighbouring the state capital. Also, Sitapur despite its closeness to Lucknow is one of the poorest and most backward areas in India. Nevertheless, time and budget needed for travelling to remote areas were limited and thus no prolonged field stays were possible.

3.6 ETHICAL CONDUCT

Despite the mentioned limitations which have implications on my research findings and ethics, I attempted to adhere to the principles of ethical conduct at all stages of my research. Informed and voluntary consent of all respondents was obtained at the commencement of any interview and participants have been provided with the option to discontinue their involvement anytime. A consent form was provided in Hindi to all respondents and an interpreter was provided during all interviews at the local level. Interpreters were required to sign and comply with a confidentiality agreement. Respondents' names and the names of the studied villages and blocks are kept confidential. Key informants gave their consent that their names appear in the thesis.

I also undertook steps to reduce cultural biases and real and perceived power inequalities between me and the research participants (Scheyvens & Storey 2003:149-51) by ensuring that the research was carried out in a culturally sensitive mode. Interviews were conducted at a time and place preferred by the participants and I allocated enough time to socialise with them¹³. Given that my own knowledge on Indian culture is limited, my translators and gatekeepers helped to ensure that the research was conducted in a manner appropriate to the local culture.

4 BACKGROUND

This chapter first provides an overview of the current reforms in the rural drinking water sector in India (4.1) followed by a short account of the development of the *Panchayat Raj* System (4.2). The chapter concludes with a presentation of some key socio-economic factors which influence both RDWS and the PRI performance (4.3).

¹³ E.g. eating and drinking tea together, visiting respondents' homes, answering all questions respondents asked about my life and home country.

4.1 RURAL DRINKING WATER SUPPLY IN INDIA

The public sector has long played a significant role in RDWS in India. Large-scale government interventions in the RDWS sector were first initiated in 1972 with the nationwide launch of the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP). Since then, the responsibility for providing drinking water has lain mainly in the realm of India's state governments. Through the ARWSP, the GoI provided state governments with more funds and technical guidance and by this effectively scaled up its support to accelerate RDWS coverage and address water quality problems. The outcomes of the government efforts since the 1970s are notable: Between 1980 and 2000 drinking water supply coverage of rural habitations increased from 31% to 80% (GoI 2002:32).

However, while in 2009 universal coverage for 850 million people had almost been achieved, service delivery decreased sharply leaving 500,000 habitations with less than minimum water supply. Besides inadequate provision for infrastructure operation and maintenance (O&M), other challenges include increased water demand due to economic and population growth, increase in groundwater use leading to groundwater depletion, and worsening water quality largely due to poor sanitation (WSP 2011).

As a response to the problems mentioned above, India's RDWS policy framework aims to transform the rural water sector away from emphasising creation of new infrastructure towards focusing on provision of improved and sustainable services (GoI 2010). The new policy agenda was strongly influenced by the World Bank who in line with public choice assumptions promotes political decentralisation as a means to connect demand for services with the requirement that these services are paid for (Baumann 2000:16). Hence the principle of full cost recovery for O&M and partial capital cost recovery was pushed forward by the Bank and in the 1990s a pilot project that followed this new principle called Swajal was initiated in the RDWS sector in UP (Cullet 2009:49).

The World Bank and other donors influencing decentralisation policies in India emphasise the necessity to treat water as socio-economic good and not as social right in order to achieve its efficient use. This new premise of economic efficiency means a paradigm shift with the state changing its role from a provider to a regulator of water (ibid.). In line with this paradigm shift, the GoI initiated the demand-led Swajaldhara programme in 2002. In Swajaldhara, participation is seen as instrumental for realising the shift from a supply-driven to a demand-

responsive approach (ibid.:48) and the programme stresses the need for community participation in drinking water management to achieve sustainable O&M (GoI 2003a:1). The guidelines also recognise the statutory role of the PRI by vesting them with substantial powers and by ensuring that the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) set up under the scheme forms an integral part of the *gram panchayat* instead of being a parallel institution bypassing the local government (ibid.:4). This is consistent with the good governance agenda promoted by the World Bank which is based on the idea that “public goods and services should be provided by the lowest level of government that can fully capture costs and benefits” (World Bank cited in Baumann 2000:17).

In 2009, the ARWSP was renamed in National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) (Tripathi, 2010-12-02) and the Swajaldhara programme was subsumed into the NRDWP in 2010. Since then 20% of all RDWS funds are reserved for demand-responsive projects following Swajaldhara “principles” (GoI 2010:8-9). The NRDWP guidelines reconfirm the crucial role of the elected local governments in RDWS: “The fundamental basis on which drinking water security can be ensured is the decentralized approach through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and community involvement” (GoI 2010:6).

4.2 THE PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM

Originally, the term *panchayat* relates to the Gandhian ideal of *gram swaraj*, meaning independent village republics. *Gram swaraj* was based on the perception that a centralised system cannot be sustained peacefully (Sharma 2009:27). However, the constituent assembly in 1945 was against empowering villages. Many assembly members saw the *panchayats* as too embedded in backward socio-economic inequities (ibid.)¹⁴.

After independence, *panchayats* thus predictably did not emerge as autonomous local government institutions but were instead promoted as institutions for rural and agricultural development. This role was underlined by the Balwantray Mehta Committee 1957 which stated that the PRI’s “immediate objective is to ensure that the development of the country side is carried out as rapidly and efficiently as possible and through democratic processes” (GoI cited in Sharma 2009:29).

¹⁴ The chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Ambedkar (cited in Sharma 2009:27) called the village a “sink of localism, den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism” and other assembly members feared that empowering the *panchayats* would lead to elite capture as long as the majority of the rural population remained uneducated (ibid.).

Post-independence development policy and planning were characterised by economic centralisation. The centralised state was also to a large part the legacy of the British colonial administration which had established unprecedented centralisation. In the 1950s, the administrative departmental handling of development works was established. This background is important for our understanding of the present decentralisation context as it shows that for a long time villages had been reduced to mere objects of planning (Baumann et al. 2003:6-7). During the 1970s–1990s, a time of unparalleled centralisation of development planning, new social movements criticised state centralism and argued for local communities to play a key role in development planning. The adoption of decentralisation policies by the GoI in the 1990s can be explained by the pressure from those ascendant movements and by the discourse on decentralisation led by international donors (e.g. World Bank) that pushed forward participatory approaches and the good governance agenda (ibid.:7).

After the set-backs in previous decades, the year 1993 marked a defining moment in the history of PRI. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment formalised the PRI and ensured the existence of PRI at three tiers as well as mandatory elections held at intervals of five years. Moreover, one-third of all seats are reserved for women and reservations for SC/ST members proportional to their population are compulsory (Johnson et al. 2005:942).

According to Baumann et al. a power shift in the 1980s led to the institutionalisation of the PRI in 1993. Firstly, a newly emerged agrarian class used the PRI to bypass the states for their self-enrichment. Secondly, there was an emerging demand for greater federal polity in all states. The authors stress that “in neither instance were the ruling groups interested in passing power to the local level, but the importance of Panchayats derived nevertheless as a by-product of their aspirations” (2003:17).

Importantly, and as shown in this chapter, the PRI of today are not built from scratch but are a product of “a curious mixture of something close to Gandhian idealism, a concern for effective development and hard-nosed political calculations” (Manor 2002:1). To conclude the background chapter, the following section will now provide an overview on some major socio-economic factors influencing the PRI and decentralisation reforms in UP.

4.3 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

UP is the most populous Indian state with a population of more than 199 million people (GoI 2011). It is one of the most backward states and among the four most corrupt Indian states (Transparency International cited in IndiaServer 2008). UP heavily relies on agriculture with 73% of its workforce employed in this sector. 40% of all farmer households are indebted and farming is ranked very low in the social order (GoUP 2007:110-13).

Fig2: Location of Uttar Pradesh in India



Source: Wikimedia Commons 2006

4.3.1 RELIGION & CASTE

More than 80% of the population in the state is Hindu by religion (ibid.). Harriss-White (2002:7) notes that Hinduism plays a major role in the public domain and distributive policies are organised around religion. Personal and customary law are also often organised on religious lines and directly affect resource concentration and distribution through inheritance, marriage or family partition (ibid.:8).

Hinduism is based on the caste system, a hierarchical order of population groups. Social stratification similar to the Hindu caste system has also been adopted by many of India's religious minorities¹⁵. Caste has always been determining a person's social status and economic position in society. Dominant castes were traditionally not only almost exclusively controlling agricultural lands and ruling the informal village councils, they till date also remain "better placed to use caste solidarity, or other forms of influence, to obtain favours from politicians and other officials outside the village" (Jeffrey 2001:221).

4.3.1.1 Caste and Politics

In the political arena, lower caste leaders have effectively captured more power for their castes by mobilising their constituencies along caste lines. UP has observed a rise in political

¹⁵ Over 17% of UP's population is Muslim and members of this religious group generally fall behind higher caste Hindus and OBC with regard to economic performance and human development indicators (GoI 2003b:95ff).

competition, from one upper-caste dominated party (Congress) to four parties of which two claim to represent “backward castes” (Banerjee & Pande 2009:5-6).

In addition to increased political competition, reservations for OBC and SC/ST members also facilitated access to government positions for these groups (ibid.). One noticeable fact, however, is that while lower caste members have increasingly been elected into politics, this did not transfer into a higher influence in the state apparatus. Instead, well-paid positions in the public service are still almost exclusively held by upper-caste officers (Witsoe 2009:72).

Caste, despite legally prohibited since decades, remains an indicator for social and economic stratification in India and particular so in rural areas.

4.3.2 GENDER

While caste stratification is one problem in UP, gender stratification poses another. Rural Indian society is centered on the male as the primary authority figure. Women belong to their husbands’ families and have little freedom of movement and autonomy. They have very limited access to economic resources and their right to inherit resources is curtailed (Jejeebhoy & Sathar 2001:702).

Access to natural resources, such as water is crucial for women to carry out their daily activities, ranging from domestic chores to economic activities.

“Women and girls are usually the primary users, providers and managers of water in their households and are the guardians of household hygiene. If a water system falls into disrepair, women are the ones forced to travel long distances over many hours to meet their families’ water needs. Conversely, women and girls benefit most when services are improved” (WSP 2010:9).

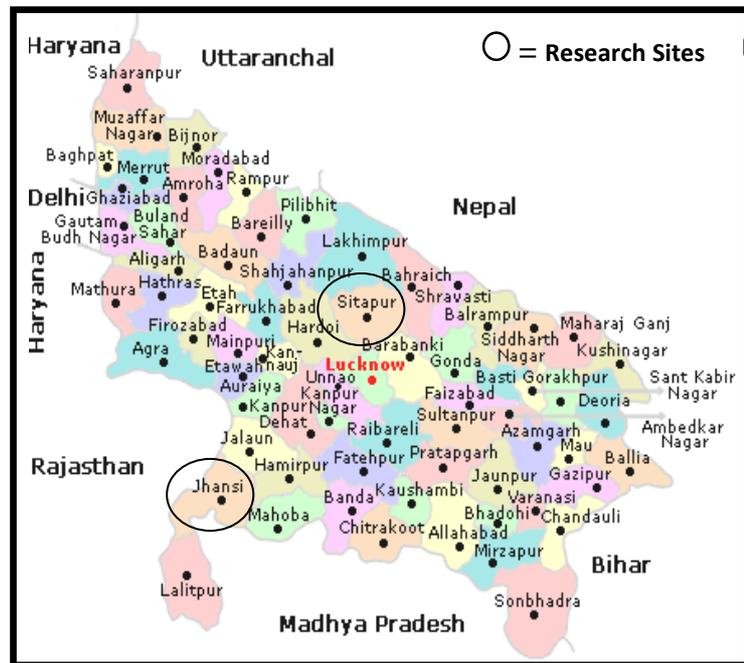
While women carry the burden of providing water, they are excluded from decision-making processes. Control of men over resources and lack of women’s intra-household bargaining power impede women’s access to resources and worsen their living conditions (Upadhyay 2004:10).

Keeping these significant socio-economic inequities in mind, the next chapter describes the field study area.

5 THE FIELD STUDY AREA

The field study area constitutes four villages in two rural districts of UP (see [Appendix IV](#) for overview of key village characteristics). While Village A and Village B in Sitapur were found to be relatively similar in socio-economic and physical attributes, Village C in the same district but different block was worse off. Village D in Jhansi was situated in a comparatively well-off block and hence socio-economic

Fig3: Districts of Uttar Pradesh



Source: adapted from districtsofindia.com

and physical attributes (e.g. handpumps, electricity supply) were superior to those in the other villages. Moreover, Village D had been selected to participate in a demand-led water reform project under Swajaldhara principles.

The population in the four villages varies from roughly 55 households in Village C to around 320 households in Village D. While the population in Village A, B and D is Hindu, many residents in Village C are Muslims. Local livelihoods are predominantly based on agriculture with wheat and rice constituting the major crops. Livestock rearing is another common activity in the villages with women being strongly involved.

Sitapur is a socially and economic backward district and according to a recent study belongs to the 69 most backward districts nationwide (Debroy & Bhandari 2003). The district is drought-prone and the last big drought has hit Sitapur in 2009 (GI1 2010-10-03).

Jhansi district lies in Bundelkhand, the most water scarce region in the state. Droughts are frequent and the granite soil in many blocks of Jhansi has low capacity for holding water (GoI 2008b). Village D however, is situated in an alluvial plain area allowing for unproblematic groundwater extraction and is thus less affected by droughts.

All four villages have different domestic water sources, including government and private handpumps and wells. The number of government handpumps ranges from 3 in Village B to 50 in Village D. Households with private handpumps range from 3-4 households with private pumps in Village C to 35-40 households in Village D and Village B. Open wells still exist in some villages but due to contamination their water can often not be used.

Groundwater tables show a declining trend in both districts for 1998–2007 (GoI 2008a, 2008b). A major problem regarding equity in water access in the study area is that groundwater ownership is attached to land ownership in India. While landowners can extract unlimited volumes of groundwater, poor people either lack the land to access groundwater or cannot afford to tap the groundwater under their land (Kale 2010).

6 ANALYSIS

In the first section (6.1) of this chapter I will investigate how RDWS in Uttar Pradesh is organised focusing on the role of the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions. Thereafter, in Chapter 6.2, I focus on the research's second sub-question and analyse the potential and constraints of the PRI to contribute to more equitable drinking water management.

6.1 THE INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR DEMAND-RESPONSIVE RURAL DRINKING WATER SUPPLY

The institutional set up for RDWS in India involves a myriad of different actors. In UP, the RDWS context is particularly fragmented given that no umbrella organisation coordinating the different sectoral demands and actors exists. While the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) guidelines stress that an integrated, multi-sectoral approach is needed to protect groundwater sources from excessive extraction (GoI 2010:iii-iv), this has not yet translated into practice in UP (Tripathi 2010-12-02; Mehrotra 2010-12-06)¹⁶.

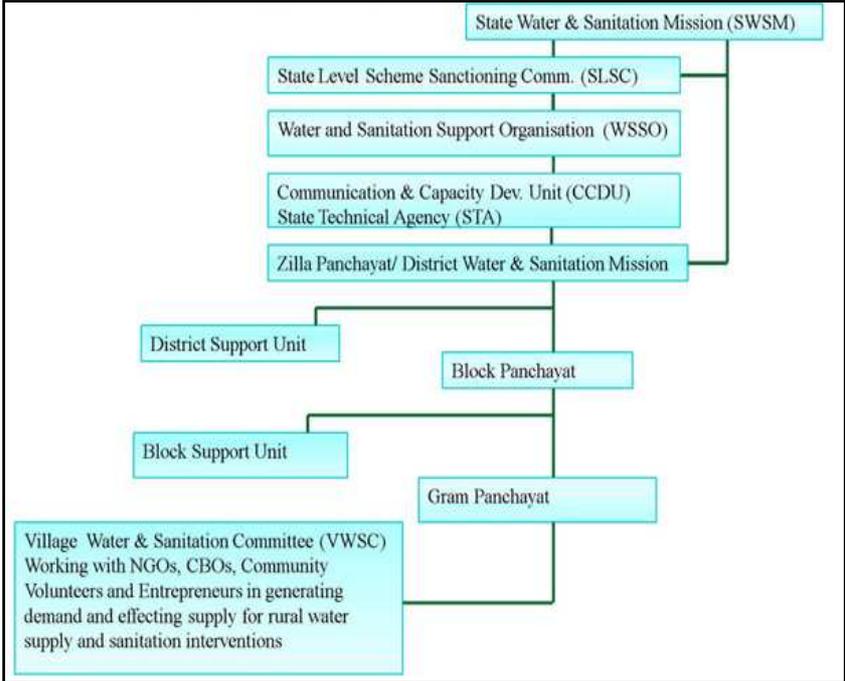
Moreover, equity in RDWS is threatened by the absence of groundwater legislation which delinks groundwater from land ownership (see Chapter 5), regulates groundwater use and prioritises domestic water uses over commercial uses (Cullet 2007). Also noticeable is that

¹⁶ Given that only 3% of all groundwater extracted is used for drinking purposes and 97% are used for agricultural and industrial purpose, water security can only be addressed successfully in cooperation with the seven departments dealing with the latter uses of water (ibid.; Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06).

despite the primacy of drinking water supply as defined in Indian water law, no drinking water legislation exists today (ibid.).

Before looking at the existing structure for RDWS, Fig4 shows the ideal institutional set-up for decentralised, demand-driven RDWS.

Fig4 Ideal Structure for Implementing RDWS



Source: SWSM (n.d.)

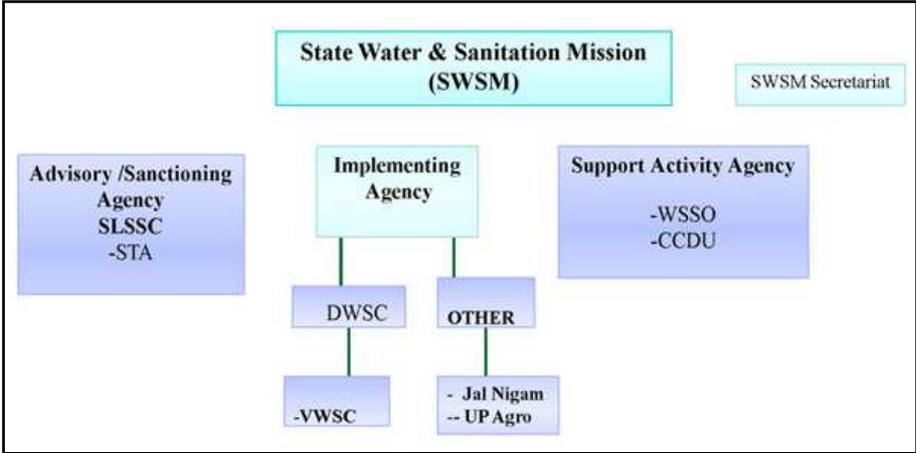
In 2002, the UP State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) was formed as governing body with the aim to coordinate activities of different departments. In particular the NRDWP and the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), a major central government sponsored scheme, shall be jointly implemented (GoI, 2010:70). The *Panchayat Raj* Department, responsible for the TSC, did however object to collaboration with the SWSM since the latter is set up under the Rural Development Department. Hence, a separate State Sanitation Mission was established and RDWS and sanitation continue to be dealt with separately (Mehrotra 2010-12-06; Tripathi 2010-12-09).

The primary executing agency for commissioning RDWS schemes at the state level is the 1972 founded UP Jal Nigam (Water Board). Employing 14000 staff members, the Jal Nigam receives 70% of the total funds earmarked for RDWS (Mehrotra 2010-12-06). Since the Constitutional Amendment 1993 the agency is supposed to work directly on behalf of the PRI

implying a change of its role from supplier to manager of rural drinking water. To date, however, Jal Nigam still works mostly as supplier on behalf of the state government since the intended shift from supply-driven to demand-driven RDWS has not yet occurred and only few communities actively express demand (Tripathi 2010-12-02). The coexistence of demand-driven and supply-driven approaches has been criticised in the literature for thwarting “any meaningful paradigm shift in terms of the philosophy or logic of the approach” (Das 2006:8).

This coexistence is evident in Fig5. While only some schemes are implemented by the PRI through the District Water and Sanitation Committee (DWSC) and the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), most of the schemes are still being designed and implemented by Jal Nigam without PRI involvement and community participation¹⁷. Another deviation from the ideal supply structure is that the district and block support units have not yet been set-up. Block resource centres are however currently being established to provide technical support to the KP and GP (Tripathi 2010-12-02; GoI n.d.) (see also Chapter 6.2.1.3).

Fig5: Existing Structure for Implementation of RDWS



Source: SWSM (n.d.)

Raghuvans Tripathi, Joint Director of UP Jal Nigam, recognised the problems resulting from the prevalence of the old supply-driven approach but stressed that the current reforms are built upon a wrong perception of demand (see also Cullet 2007; Sampat 2009). Demand from communities is generally very low and currently mainly expressed by privileged sections of rural society. Mr. Tripathi stated that as long as demand – specifically from underprivileged communities – is not increasing it is the responsibility of the state and Jal Nigam to ensure sufficient water supply (2010-12-02). In order to ensure distributional equity in RDWS in UP,

¹⁷ Less than one per cent of the rural residents in Uttar Pradesh (UP) own and manage water supply systems (Sarandha 2011).

Jal Nigam together with UNICEF is currently undertaking GIS mapping of public water sources. The first results revealed a skewed distribution of handpumps favouring richer villages and community sections (ibid.; Mehrotra 2010-12-06).

Given the persistence of the supply-driven approach, the transformation of Jal Nigam to a facilitator is making only slow improvements. Some reform initiatives have been launched by Jal Nigam itself such as the formation of a Community Participation Unit but more support from the state government is needed to achieve significant progress (Tripathi 2010-12-02; Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06).

In line with the NRDWP guidelines, a horizontal agency, the Water Supply Support Organisation (WSSO), was formed by the GoUP in November 2010 to provide technical, research and monitoring support to SWSM, Jal Nigam, and to the district level. It is facing resistance from the Jal Nigam whose staff is critical of the perspective of being guided by an inexperienced *and* external organisation like WSSO (Mehrotra 2010-12-06; Tripathi 2010-12-09)¹⁸. Experiences all over India show that Water Boards are often hesitant to assume the new role entrusted on them (Nayar & James 2010). One informant argued that due to their history as service providers these Boards have a technocratic bias and many engineers do not trust in the abilities of local governments and communities to manage their own RDWS schemes (Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06). He further stated that it is problematic that RDWS policies are still formulated in offices far away from the rural population, the actual beneficiaries of public policies (ibid.).

The case of Tamil Nadu however shows how important the cooperation of government engineers with local governments and communities is to raise community awareness (ibid.). This cooperation has led to improved RDWS and cost recovery and was made possible through a “Change Management Initiative which critically examined the organizational culture, practises, and values of the Board, and the individual attitudes of engineers and other stakeholders, in an intensive workshop-based exercise that lasted over two years with the 500-odd engineers” (Nayar & James 2010:418). Due to the success of this initiative and its

¹⁸ Under the WSSO, a Community and Capacity Development Unit (CCDU) was formed which primarily aims to promote new RDWS initiatives. Major tasks of this unit are to promote sustainability issues and new technologies, and especially to develop an IEC (Information-Education-Communication) Strategy for UP (GoI 2010:51). The RDWS set-up further includes agencies with sanctionary functions. The State Level Scheme Sanctioning Committee (SLSSC) is responsible for the approval of RDWS projects in the state. Another actor is the State Technical Agency which is responsible to fill existing technical gaps in the needs of the Jal Nigam (ibid:19-20).

positive effects on democratic governance in the sector, four other states have adopted similar processes with support from engineers from Tamil Nadu (ibid.:418-9)¹⁹.

One key informant stated that such attitudinal change is needed in UP and that the Jal Nigam needs to start working in partnerships with PRI and communities (Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06). To ensure that the PRI are able to implement their own schemes, a District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) was formed in each district in the course of the sector reform. The DWSM is guided by the *zilla panchayat* (ZP) whose president is also the chairman of the DWSM²⁰. The main tasks of the DWSM are guidance of the KP and GP for implementing water and sanitation schemes, awareness raising campaigns, and coordination among different departments (GoI 2010:77).

Finally at the village level, a Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) is to be set up in each GP. It is supposed to be an extended arm of the GP's statutory water committee and to have 6-12 members including reserved seats for GP members, women and SC/ST members (ibid.:78). Of the 12 members six people may be co-opted from within the community. While the national guidelines recommend reserving 50% of seats for women (ibid.), the official quota in UP is 33% (Kumar, 2010-12-03). The VWSC is mainly responsible for planning and implementation of drinking water and sanitation activities, ensuring community participation, organising and managing community contributions towards capital and O&M costs, and takeover of all completed schemes (GoI 2010:78).

While this section has shed light upon the stipulated role of the PRI in drinking water management, the next two sections analyse the nature and extent of their role in local drinking water management in practise. To do this, the drinking water related activities of the GPs and the participation of the local population in three non-reform and one reform village will be investigated.

¹⁹ National level consultations with UNICEF led to the adoption of such democratic governance initiatives by the governments and Water Boards of Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh (Nayar & James 2010:419).

²⁰ Other members include line department officials, the members of parliament (MP) and legislative assembly (MLA) of the district, the district magistrate and sometimes co-opted NGOs (GoI 2010:77).

6.1.1 DRINKING WATER MANAGEMENT AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL

Respondents in all four selected villages identified insufficient and inequitable water access as the major problem related to drinking water. Female respondents in Village A complained that their water access situation has not improved since years and that only five public handpumps exist for all households. They have to fetch water six to seven times a day and although the pumps are near their houses they spend one hour each day for this strenuous activity. They mentioned that fights over taking turns at the handpumps are very common (GI1 2010-10-03). The situation is better in the neighbouring Village B, which belongs to the same GP. Here 30 households had invested in private handpumps and the pump owners generously allow other households to use their pumps. During the summer months the situation worsens however since the private handpumps usually dry up and all 100 households in the village depend on the three existing government handpumps. Like in Village A, this situation leads to conflicts while queuing at the pumps (GI2 2010-12-15).

The *pradhan* of the two villages stated that it is the GP's responsibility to maintain handpumps. Handpumps generally have a high break-down rate and that all handpumps were working at the time of the visit indicates proper maintenance by the GP. Amit Mehrotra, water and sanitation specialist at UNICEF, confirmed that most GPs fulfil this task well as functioning handpumps are a primary need in the villages and GPs have sufficient pressure to repair pumps timely (Mehrotra 2010-12-06). Contrary to that, state governments all across India have demonstrated insufficient capacity to quickly repair handpumps (Narain 2006).

Fig6: Public Handpump in a Village



Source: Author

A VWSC did not exist in this GP but the *pradhan* had formed the statutory water committee. The committee members are appointed among the GP members and meetings are scheduled twice a month to discuss issues around water management (KR2 2010-10-03).

In Village C, a recent case of collective action around water management was discovered where respondents were very disappointed by the development work performed by the GP. People had been waiting for the GP to renovate a well in their village. When this did not happen they collected Rs10 from each household and renovated and decontaminated the well, enabling the use of its water for different purposes again (GI3 2010-10-05). However, this was the only case of collective action I learnt about. One plausible explanation for the dearth of collective action in the villages is the long history of state involvement in RDWS. Respondents knew that public handpumps are owned by the Jal Nigam and that O&M lie in the hands of the GP. Hence, they considered these actors responsible for maintenance (*ibid.*).

A second explanation for the absence of collective action could be that respondents in all villages perceived water availability as sufficient. So far, domestic water use is entirely unregulated and even during summer no massive efforts to save water are needed yet. Hence, community members might not feel pressure to become active (Tripathi 2010-12-09). The perception that water is sufficient reflects the situation in most parts of UP. Other than in states such as Gujarat where drinking water scarcity is severe, access to minimum drinking water supply in UP is secured²¹ and groundwater – despite becoming depleted – is still relatively abundant.²²

In regards to community participation, some interviews indicated that policy makers and implementers identify the mindset of local people as a major obstacle for successful development interventions. A ZP representative complained about local people's attitude regarding community works and blamed rural citizens for taking government services for granted and lacking an interest in common activities where benefits have to be shared with others. He further stated that public works are often not respected by the local population and that damage to public infrastructure and theft of materials are commonplace (KR9 2010-12-

²¹ Now on average about 60 people share one handpump, a situation much better than the legally stipulated 250 people per handpump (Tripathi, 2010-12-02).

²² In general, people's awareness of water as a scarce resource is rather low in UP. Projects implementing rainwater harvesting through storage tanks in UP have often failed due to lacking community acceptance. As long as other sources provided sufficient water, people did not feel the need to participate (Tripathi, 2010-12-09).

05). The *pradhan* of Village C (KR3 2010-10-05) also expressed dissatisfaction with the support of his constituents for the GP's work stating that often fights between different factions in the villages occur which hinder the implementation of schemes. Some key informants also mentioned the dependent mindset of local people as a serious constraint for successful decentralisation (Chaturvedi 2010-10-11; Tripathi 2010-12-02).

6.1.2 EXPERIENCES WITH A SWAJALDHARA SCHEME

Contrary to the GPs visited in Sitapur, Village D in Jhansi participates in a reform project. Under the Swajaldhara scheme a piped system with private connections will be constructed. A VWSC had been set up as extended arm of the statutory water committee. The project had started in 2006 but the system was still not working. Late fund disbursement has created problems for the construction and caused dissatisfaction and decreased interest in participation among the villagers (KR8 2010-11-28)²³. The future O&M costs could not yet be properly estimated since they depend on the number of households participating which at the time of the visit was still unclear. Still potential participants were told O&M costs will be around Rs15-20 per month (ibid.). Given that the village chose private connections this amount is highly unlikely as according to village surveys conducted by Cullet costs for this type of connection vary from Rs36 to 150 per month per household (Cullet 2009:52)²⁴. While the *pradhan* was optimistic that many people would participate, Technical Advisors of the SWSM indicated that frequently people who declare their interest in the initial phase, eventually do not buy pipes as costs are often higher than originally estimated. In many cases this hinders a successful project outcome (KR5&6 2011-27).

I observed many discrepancies between programme guidelines and actual practice in Village D. The GP had for instance not collected the obligatory 10% community contribution in cash. Instead the GP had paid the whole capital cost contribution of Rs150,000. 15 community members had later paid this money back to the GP in form of donations. The *pradhan* stated that – no matter if people have paid the initial contribution or not – everyone willing to pay for O&M will get equal access to water supply (KR8 2010-11-28). Unfortunately, it was not possible to find out if this will really happen but it seems unlikely that the 15 contributors do

²³ Material costs have increased since the time they had been estimated and the obtained project funding is now insufficient to realise the originally planned tank size. Hence, the GP considers using own funds to ensure the construction (KR8 2010-11-28).

²⁴ The village surveys were conducted in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (Cullet 2009:50).

not expect any returns from their investment²⁵. I learnt that it is very common that GP members and wealthier people pay the 10% community contribution as the GPs often fail to collect the initial contribution from the communities. Frequently, the money is later illegally taken back from the programme funds provided by the government (KR5&6 2010-11-27). It is beyond my knowledge if this is the case in Village D, but what is clear is that the majority of the community has not participated in cost-sharing as stipulated in the guidelines.

In the group interviews, all respondents were optimistic that their living situation would improve through the scheme. All of them intended to participate and one respondent stated that most likely only 15-20 people in the village might not be willing to pay and would instead continue to use the existing infrastructure. None of the respondents had contributed financially nor was anyone sitting in the VWSC or had participated in capacity trainings (GI4 2010-11-28). Female respondents stated that they did not know anything about the scheme except that they will soon be provided with private water access. They explained that they could only afford to pay a maximum amount of Rs15-20 monthly for O&M since they need to spend most of their annual savings on health issues (GI5 2010-11-28). Paying O&M fees will inevitably reduce the money available for healthcare and other vital needs.

The cost-sharing component of Swajaldhara has been heavily criticised for increasing inequities in water access (Sampat 2006; Cullet 2009; Joshi 2004; Das 2006)²⁶. Sampat argues that “with so many people dependent on wage labour daily and almost never making even the minimum wage per day, imposition of costs for drinking water provision will lead to a violation of the right to water” (2006:9)²⁷. Noirhomme et al. (2007) in their study on user fees in the health sector in Cambodia found that user charges excluded poor people from services while health equity funds paid by the government to the service provider positively impacted poor people’s access to health care. While the NRDWP guidelines state that “[u]ser charges of the water supply system should have an in-built component of cross-subsidy to ensure that

²⁵ Cullet (2009:51) in his study on Swajaldhara found that poorer people who could not afford paying the initial contribution had to pay “interest” on top of the normal fees when becoming users at a later stage.

²⁶ Cullet (2009:50-1) describes a case where upper caste Hindus intentionally destroyed a public handpump in a SC hamlet to disconnect poorer people from water access thereby forcing them to pay. He also found that in some places people willing to contribute to the initial costs were excluded from participating in the scheme because they did not enjoy the favour of powerful actors (ibid.). Sampat (2006) made similar observations.

²⁷ Sampat (2006:121) also states that imposing costs for a fundamental need like drinking water is contradictory to the ideas behind a major job guarantee scheme introduced by the GoI in 2005. The NREGA scheme aims to improve the livelihood security of the poorest in the country through guaranteeing 100 days of wage labour per annum for one member of each rural household (ibid).

the economically backward groups are not deprived of this basic minimum need” (GoI 2010:1), this component appears to be missing in practice.

Nayar and James’ research (2010:419-20) in Tamil Nadu shows that fixed user charges did not lead to improved O&M of water supply. Based on their research findings, the authors argue that an approach focused on raising community awareness on the scarcity of water works better than a purely target and infrastructure-driven approach. Interestingly, in Village D scarcity issues had not been addressed at all by the project although the Swajaldhara guidelines explicitly state that conservation measures should be taken up in programme villages (GoI 2003b:3). Respondents’ perceptions on the project were thus tinged by the scheme benefits and not by the worth of drinking water in ecological and economic terms. This perception was confirmed by key informants who argued that Swajaldhara has largely failed to create community awareness (Sinha 2010-11-23; Tripathi 2010-12-02).

However, Nayar and James (2010:417) do not disavow cost-sharing per se but instead argue for flexible targets defined by the communities themselves. In line with this, my informant at WaterAid stated that cost-sharing is the right approach but is currently not undertaken properly in most Indian states (Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06). He argued that it is a wrong perception that poorer people in communities are unwilling to pay for services and that often people are simply unwilling because they are excluded from planning and decision-making processes or because services do not reach them (ibid.). In their study on community-based rainwater harvesting in Rajasthan, Cochran and Ray (2006:435) indeed found that poor community members were keen to share costs for infrastructure construction and maintenance equally with richer community members to acquire what the authors call “symbolic capital”. Poor people perceived cost sharing as an opportunity to gain equal membership of the village, to contribute to village unity and to have their stake in decision-making (ibid.). Given that much symbolic capital was acquired, villagers even considered it fair that all people shared costs equally while benefits were distributed unequally (ibid.:439). The study thus challenges conventional conceptions of equity in the development literature and practise that focus only on distributional outcomes of equity. The two studies from Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan also demonstrate that equity goals can not be addressed by blueprint approaches but only if projects are non-prescriptive and cautiously assess local perceptions. Nevertheless, local standards of equity need to be treated carefully since they must not necessarily reflect local culture but can as well have been promoted by local elites to marginalise others (Poteete

2004:4; Chapter 2.2.1.1). Given that power structures likely influence local equity perceptions, Poteete argues that decentralisation can hardly achieve equity goals without measures enhancing empowerment of marginalised community groups (ibid.:4-5).

The Swajaldhara project appeared to not have empowered women in Village D. Female respondents stated that women had not attended any project meetings. Moreover, the VWSC which consisted of GP members only, had one female member which none of the female respondents knew (GI5 2010-11-28). The NRDWP guidelines stress that “since women are the principal beneficiaries of this programme and are the pivot around whom sustainability revolves, it is of critical importance that women are involved at all the stages of planning, implementation and management of rural water supply schemes” (GoI 2010:13). In practise such an inclusive approach appears to be missing and apart from the 33% quota for women (which was not met in Village D), no other strategies or mechanisms to empower women exist (Kumar 2010-12-03). The guidelines do however suggest the establishment of women’s associations and the training of women handpump mechanics to increase women’s participation (GoI 2010:13). Such initiatives have successfully been initiated in other parts of India. One example is the Women, Work and Water Campaign of the NGO SEWA in Gujarat. SEWA has successfully empowered women by training them to repair handpumps and to operate and maintain piped water supply systems (Panda 2007).

6.1.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this chapter suggest that O&M of RDWS is a suitable task for the local government given that the state government lacks the capacity to ensure adequate O&M and given that access to drinking water is a fundamental need for local people and communities hence sufficiently pressure the GPs to fulfil this task. The chapter has however also shown that community participation in local drinking water management is very low in the studied villages and that collective action around drinking water management is largely lacking. Also, the empirical evidence collected in the reform village suggests that the project has failed to increase community participation in this village and to create community awareness on water scarcity issues. The community has not participated in cost-sharing and the project seems to have turned a blind eye to local inequities and institutional weaknesses of the PRI. Apart from prescribing reservations for marginalised groups in the VWSC the programme design does not include any mechanisms preventing elite capture in these committees or empowering women and scheduled caste members.

6.2 RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF PRI

I now embark on my second sub research question and analyse the degree of responsiveness and accountability of the PRI since these broader institutional characteristics considerably determine if the PRI are able to contribute to more equitable drinking water management.

6.2.1 RESPONSIVENESS

“Having local leaders who are willing [...] to serve the people well is not enough to ensure that local people are well served. Local leaders also must have both the power and the ability to serve the people. Without power and the ability to use it, they cannot be responsive” (Ribot 2004:47).

6.2.1.1 Functions

In line with the 1993 Constitutional Amendment, states are supposed to devolve 29 functions to the different PRI tiers together with the necessary funds and functionaries (Venkatesan 2002:11). Activity Mapping is supposed to clearly demarcate the functions of the three different PRI tiers (GoI 2009; GoI 2010:8). States have considerable freedom in devolving functions and to date most states have only transferred few of the recommended functions (Misra & Srivastava 2011:5). In UP only 16 of the recommended 29 functions have been devolved to the PRI after activity mapping was conducted in 1997 and only for ten of these functions have funds also been released by the respective line departments (GoI 2007)²⁸. Insufficient activity mapping is problematic as it leads to confusion and overlap of mandates at different PRI tiers (Chaturvedi 2010-10-11; Misra & Srivastava 2011:5). While O&M of rural water supply was formally devolved to the PRI in UP (GoI 2007)²⁹ we will see in this chapter that these powers are not fully discretionary.

All GPs visited except in Village C had formed water management committees to carry out their functions. The *pradhans* had to look up the names of the committee members which gave the impression that these committees were rather inactive. Key informants confirmed that committees in UP often only exist on paper (Jeyaseelan 2010-09-03; Mehrotra 2010-12-06). According to one informant, committee members are often unaware to which committee(s) they have been elected to (Kumar 2010-12-05). Another informant argued that too many committees dealing with water issues exist at the village level: the standing

²⁸ All other functions still remain centralised in the hands of the different line departments.

²⁹ The other nine functions that have been devolved with the necessary funds are: poverty alleviation programmes, construction and maintenance of rural markets and fairs, rural sanitation programme, social welfare and distribution of scholarships, maintenance of assets created under different schemes (e.g. ponds, or roads), rural library, youth welfare programme, mid-day meal and maintenance of rural lamp posts (GoI 2007).

committee of the GP, the VWSC as extended arm of the former, and the Village Health and Sanitation Committee (VHSC) financially supported by the Health Department. In addition, more user associations are often set up by NGOs or donors in specific projects. This co-existence of different committees with different signatories is undermining the effectiveness of the GP (Mehrotra 2010-12-06; Chaturvedi 2010-10-11)³⁰.

6.2.1.2 Funds

Most of the literature on PRI emphasises that PRI lack adequate funds to carry out their responsibilities (e.g. Sharma 2009:73-76; Venkatesan 2002:121-123). But according to several informants, under the 13th finance commission (2010-2015) a significant amount of funds is being devolved to the PRI (Mehrotra 2010-12-06, Chaturvedi 2010-09-13). Two *pradhans* told me that funding is generally sufficient but that they lack powers to allocate funds according to local needs. Too many funds are tied to certain government schemes, which means that often money is not available for purposes for which there is a demand at the village level (KR2 2010-10-03; KR8 2010-11-28). Venkatesan (2002:143) in his study on PRI found that Kerala is the only Indian state where untied funds are of significant magnitude (with 25% of the total plan outlay consisting of untied funds). Another recent study on empowerment and equity outcomes of PRI found that the PRI's agenda "is skewed toward the creation of new physical assets and shaped by the state-government sponsored schemes rather than by the local needs and initiatives" (Bonu et al. 2011:55). According to the authors this is likely due to the dependence on government transfers and the long history of PRI as mere implementing agencies (see Chapter 4.2) which has undermined local initiatives and also given that human development issues might be more difficult to communicate to the largely illiterate constituency than physical development (ibid.:56). My informant at WaterAid also mentioned that the PRI often prioritise big infrastructure projects such as road construction because such projects require many raw materials and provide enhanced opportunity to siphon off funds through inflating costs and manipulating accounts. Water-related works are often neglected due to fewer opportunities for self-enrichment (Jeyaseelan 2010-12-06)³¹.

³⁰ Numerous studies on community-based resource management have shown that established single-purpose user groups are often undemocratic and prone to elite capture (e.g. Manor 2004, Venkatesan 2002; Sahu 2008). The increasing number of these groups (e.g. SHGs, water user groups, irrigation committees) has major implications for the PRI since many NGOs and donors bypass the local governments and give financial support to these non-elected groups. Such approaches often undermine the legitimacy of the PRI (Manor 2004:206-7).

³¹ My informant explained that while 9 of 11 works under the NREGA scheme that is implemented by the GPs are related to water management, most of the works actually undertaken by the GPs under the scheme deal with road construction (Jeyaseelan 2010:09-03).

Regarding overdependence on government transfers, two *pradhans* stated that raising taxes is extremely unpopular and therefore not done by many GPs (KR3 2010-10-05; KR8 2010-11-28). Sharma indicates that PRI might indeed not be appropriate actors for tax collection given their closeness to the people (2009:74). Nevertheless, many authors underline the need for fiscal decentralisation to increase fiscal responsibility and efficiency (e.g. De Mello 2000). Regional imbalances in terms of resource endowment and intra-*panchayat* inequities would however require equalisation grants to avoid increasing inequities through fiscal measures (Rani 1999).

6.2.1.3 Technical and Administrative Capacities

According to many respondents a lack of support staff is a key constraint for the PRI's functioning. Although every *pradhan* should have his own secretary transferred by the PRI department, there is only one secretary for 12 *pradhans* in the area of Village C. The *pradhan* pointed out that his work is very difficult because the secretary hardly finds time to visit his *panchayat* (KR3 2010-10-05). Similar problems were mentioned by the *pradhan* in Village D (KR8 2010-11-28).

Key informants argued that lacking support staff is indeed the major constraint hindering the effectiveness of the PRI in UP (Chandola 2010-12-10; Chaturvedi 2010-10-11). Although there should be one secretary for all 50914 GPs, only 7000 secretaries have been transferred (Chandola 2010-12-10).

Moreover, only three line departments have transferred technical support staff to the PRI, not including the Drinking Water Department (GoI 2007:807). According to a key informant this is clearly a sign that the bureaucracy still has a strong hold on the PRI and effectively undermines that the PRI receive the necessary capacities (Chaturvedi 2010-10-11). Considering the huge mismatch between PRI functions and manpower, the GoUP is certainly facing an immense challenge to provide all PRI levels with adequate support staff.

Lacking staff appears to be a systemic problem not constrained to the GP level. A district official in Jhansi argued that lacking technical support staff at the KP level is one of the most urgent constraints for the PRI's effectiveness (KR4 2010-11-27). Due to insufficient functionaries, GP and KP lack the technical and administrative capacities to properly fulfil their duties related to local water management. At the block level, the GoUP tries to tackle

this issue through supporting the formation of Block Resource Centres which will be staffed with experts in community participation, IEC and water technology. The BRCs

“will provide continuous support in terms of awareness generation, mobilisation, training and handholding to village communities, GPs and DWSCs. The BRC will serve as an extended delivery arm of the District Water & Sanitation Mission in terms of software support and act as a link between it and the GPs/ VWSCs/ village communities” (GoI n.d.:1).

The BRC support is crucial since the GPs lack skilled personnel for proper O&M of water infrastructure. One informant noted that while GPs usually quickly repair damaged handpumps, the major problem is wrong operation. Pumps often get damaged because they are used by unskilled people and hence break-down rates of handpumps are high, making their O&M costly (Mehrotra 2010-12-06).

A critical point made by the Joint Director of Jal Nigam is that the current decentralisation approach gives insufficient attention to the lack of technical expertise at the village level. Trainings for handpump mechanics at the village level are insufficient and moreover there are not enough people interested to work as a mechanic since the salary is very low (Tripathi 2010-12-02).

As shown in this chapter, responsiveness of the PRI is limited by unclear and overlapping mandates, insufficient allocative powers, overdependence on centre and state government funding, and severe staff shortages. The next chapter now analyses the local government's downward accountability to the rural constituency. Enhancing the accountability of the PRI to the entire local population is crucial to achieve equity in RDWS, especially in the context of severe social stratification, such as in UP.

6.2.2 ACCOUNTABILITY

A major strength of the PRI system is that free and regular elections take place based on universal suffrage. Democratic elections are instrumental for ensuring downward accountability of elected officials to their constituents³².

³² In UP elections are overseen by the State Election Commission and according to an NGO expert remarkable progress has been achieved during the last four election rounds (1995-2010). Earlier many votes have been invalid due to incorrect filling out of ballots by a largely illiterate electorate; nowadays most people know how to cast their vote and voter awareness on development issues has greatly increased (Chaturvedi 2011-10-11).

Elections and their outcome are however often manipulated by local elites (Ribot 2004:27-8; see also Chapter 6.2.2.2). Another problem is that if certain candidates are affiliated with certain parties voters might still vote along caste and political lines (Witsoe 2009)³³. Hence elections remain a rather crude instrument of accountability and need to be complemented by other more fine-tuned mechanisms (Blair 2000:27). This study does thus not place elections at the centre of the analysis but looks more into the role of non-electoral channels through which rural constituencies can hold their elected representatives accountable. I agree with Peruzzotti who states that the role of the constituents is “particularly relevant for the good exercise of representation” (2010:157).

6.2.2.1 The Role of the Constituency: Participation of Rural Citizens

During group interviews with villagers I strived towards obtaining a picture of local people’s awareness on issues regarding local government and development and of the extent of their participation in decision-making processes. I thus asked the respondents from whom they received information on government programmes. The answers received indicate reluctance among elected government representatives to engage with their constituents. With the exception of Village D where the *pradhan* consults people regarding new schemes (GI4 2010-11-28), in all other villages the *pradhans* do not approach and inform people (GI1-3). On the other hand only very few respondents replied positively when asked if they actively consult the elected government representatives at the village or at higher *panchayat* levels. One respondent stated that people only contact the *pradhan* in very urgent cases and others argued that they lack the time to contact *panchayat* officials at the block and district levels since they are too busy working on their fields (GI2 2010-12-05). Many people were dissatisfied with the work of the *gram panchayat* but they also argued that contacting the officials does not result in any positive outcomes. In Village A, many respondents voiced complaints that the *pradhan* only helps his own family and affiliates (GI1 2010-10-03). Besley et al.’s study on South India (2005:23-4) appears to support these findings by showing that GP households and households affiliated with the political party of the *pradhan* benefit more from government programmes.

³³ Noticeable, however, voting patterns in the region appear to change with voters increasingly voting for development agendas. The re-election of Nitish Kumar as Chief Minister in UP’s neighbour state Bihar 2010 was widely perceived as a vote for development as against a vote based on caste (Menon, 2010-12-10). Given that Bihar is even more caste-ridden than UP and was ranked the most corrupt Indian state in a 2005 survey (Transparency International India 2005:10), many in India hope that this election outcome will positively influence the next state election outcomes in UP in 2012 (Kumar 2010).

Contacting the other *gram panchayat* members in case of problems with the *pradhan* also does not seem to be an option for people. While almost all respondents knew the name of the *pradhan*, the vast majority could not name the other elected *panchayat* members. In Village C respondents all agreed that knowing the names of the other councillors is “useless” given that these people are entirely under the control of the *pradhan* and have never visited the villages after the election campaign (GI3 2010-10-05).

A critical point made by a key informant is that adjudication is still unsolved in UP and formal grievance procedures are insufficient. While a provision for establishing *nyaya panchayats* (a system of local dispute resolution) has been made by the GoUP, elections for these bodies have not yet taken place (Chaturvedi 2010-10-11). At the moment local disputes are thus being dealt with at general courts which are increasingly overburdened. The setting up of quasi-judicial bodies or an independent ombudsman could help to enhance legal recourse opportunities (Venugopal & Yilmaz 2009)³⁴. Also, as suggested by Alsop et al. (2000:30), district administrators could enforce village assemblies and the setting up of vigilance committees.

Given the relative absence of informal exchange between PRI representatives and local people, my interviews also focused on the institution of the *gram sabha*, the mandatory biannual village assembly of all voters in a *panchayat*. The *gram sabha* is the most important organ in the PRI system and as long as it is dysfunctional, accountability of the PRI towards the communities will be weak (Baumann 1998:8). To ensure transparency and accountability of the PRI the *gram sabha* is supposed to conduct mandatory social audits where PRI development initiatives and accounts are scrutinised by the local population (Vision Foundation 2005:4). Many studies have however demonstrated that *gram sabha* frequently fall short of fulfilling their intended role (e.g. *ibid.*; Alsop et al. 2000; Nambiar 2001). One study found that in UP only 10% of the interviewed beneficiaries at the village level was aware of social audit (Vision Foundation 2005:66). The vast majority of my group interview

³⁴ An ombudsman which investigates complaints against local governments has so far only been established in Kerala. However, in practise it remains largely ineffective due to lack of manpower and failure to form appellate tribunals where citizens can appeal against decisions made by the ombudsman (Venugopal & Yilmaz 2009:323).

participants also did not know the Rights to Information Act 2005 which mandates timely response to citizen requests for government information³⁵.

All group interviews revealed that local people in the studied villages are not sufficiently holding the GPs accountable through the *gram sabha*. Communities have a low awareness on their rights and the government's responsibilities and so far *gram sabha* are often either scarcely attended or do not take place regularly. Many respondents even perceived *gram sabha* and *gram panchayat* to be one and the same and none of the respondents knew about social audit. While one respondent stated that he has not been to a village meeting in the last 15 years, another stated that he attended two meetings in the past five years (GI2 2010-12-05). Moreover, in Village D, women told me that women never attend village meetings (GI5 2010-11-28)³⁶.

In Villages A and B, many people stated that the *pradhan* does not announce meetings and only invites people close to him. Although the *pradhan* stated that he announces meetings with two weeks notice by beating drums (KR2 2010-10-03) none of the group respondents in the two villages had ever heard the sound of these drums (GI1 2010-10-03; GI2 2010-12-05). The interviews also revealed that other reasons for non-participation are that villagers lack the time to participate due to work in the fields or do not hold faith in the usefulness of the *gram sabha* (ibid.).

6.2.2.2 Participation of Women and Scheduled Castes

Through political decentralisation new constituencies have gained representation through public office in UP, with women and scheduled caste members being the most prominent ones due to their mandatory inclusion. Still, a high number of women representatives does not automatically lead to increased women's empowerment. Reservations are often usurped by other forms of power and dominance. In many cases elected women remain silent in council affairs or even worse their husbands or sons manage public affairs through them as was the case in Village C where the elected female *pradhan* was set-up as a proxy candidate during the elections by her son (KR3 2010-10-05). Similar outcomes were observed for SC members

³⁵ The ongoing nationwide "Right to Information Campaign" carried out by civil society and media has resulted in the adoption of the RTI Act in 2005. The RTI Act gives civil society opportunities to uncover corrupt practises in different projects and states. However, a study conducted in 2009 showed that only 12% of the rural population knew about the RTI Act and suggests that the GoI initiates a mass awareness campaign to increase awareness on the act (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2009).

³⁶ This is the case all over Jhansi because society in this region is still more patriarchal than for example in Sitapur and *pardah*, the custom of concealing women from men, is still widespread (Jeyaseelan, 2011-09-03).

who also often fail to exercise real power³⁷. In both observed cases of proxy candidates, this procedure was justified on the grounds that the elected candidates are illiterate and thus not able to fulfil the duties entailed with the *pradhan* office. It was stated that the present arrangement is thus in the best interest of the community (ibid.; PI2 2010-08-31)³⁸. Given the immense mismatch between devolved powers and available support staff it is indeed already an almost impossible task for a well educated GP representative to effectively advance village development. These findings therefore highlight the need for the GoUP to invest in primary education focused on women and scheduled caste members.

Despite the shortcomings of reservations it is argued by some that the huge number of positions reserved for vulnerable groups will certainly positively impact empowerment in the long term (see Blair 2000:26). Ban and Rao in their study on women representatives in South India (2008) found that women *pradhans* become more effective when they have gained political experience in office. Although affirmative action is no guarantee for rapid empowerment, the number of positive cases where underprivileged groups exercise increased voice in local affairs is rising (Chaturvedi 2011-10-11).

While this section has analysed downward accountability of the GP to the constituency, the next sections deal with downward accountability of the higher PRI tiers and with the downward accountability of the bureaucracy to the PRI since these accountability relations are also critical for the performance of decentralisation.

6.2.2.3 Downward Accountability of the khettra and zilla panchayats

A contested topic directly concerning the downward accountability of the higher *panchayat* tiers to the local constituents is the issue of direct versus indirect elections. Currently, direct *panchayat* elections only take place at the village level. According to Sharma (2009:62), experiences with indirect elections in the past have shown that this form of election is more

³⁷ During pilot research for this study a higher caste Hindu openly revealed that he had not been elected *pradhan* but that he had set up a SC member as proxy candidate in the past elections given that the *pradhan* office in this *panchayat* was reserved for SC members. Due to his political influence the candidate supported by him got elected *pradhan*. While the SC member enjoys a higher reputation and access to financial resources, he leaves the actual decision-making to his benefactor. According to the latter this agreement is satisfying for both parties and also the block and district level PRI officials sanctioned it (PI2 2010-08-31).

³⁸ It is important to keep in mind that elite capture must not always be detrimental to village development and equity. In Village D the *pradhan* seat is “captured” by one higher caste family since more than 50 years (see [Appendix V](#)). Nevertheless, the SC respondents were satisfied with the work of the *pradhan* and with the communication with him. Relations between interviewed SC members and the *pradhan* were much better than in Villages A and B. Here it became obvious that a *pradhan* from the SC does not necessarily represent the interests of SC members since many SC members complained that the *pradhan* only favours his own affiliates.

prone to manipulations such as the use of bribery and violence. A KP president in Jhansi told me that KP and ZP presidents should be directly elected like the *pradhans* at the GP level (KR7 2010-11-27). He was elected by all *pradhans* in his block which results in problems regarding accountability. He stated that he is more accountable to the *pradhans* than to the general public. The UP PRI Department has sent a proposal to the government to introduce direct elections at all PRI levels. Its Joint Director stated however that a change of the electoral system requires a constitutional amendment and that it is thus unlikely that the initiative will be successful (Chandola 2011-12-10).

Other problems related to downward accountability of the PRI result from corruption within the PRI system. The *pradhan* in Village D stressed that he only receives KP support if he bribes the KP officials. He further expressed dissatisfaction with the approval of GP development proposals and stated that the KP does not approve schemes according to communities' needs but only approves those schemes where the KP members can make profit through higher commissions (KR8 2010-11-28; see also Srivastava 2006)³⁹. This was confirmed by a KP president interviewed. He argued that cooperation between GP and KP largely depends on the personality of the actors involved. Those KP members that are only interested in personal gain often do not work properly for the block development. According to the interviewed KP president KP members lack an incentive to work hard since they do not receive any salary (KR7 2010-11-27)⁴⁰.

Another issue raised was the lack of direct meetings between ZP and GP members. Till date the only contact between these two levels occurs every three months at the KP meetings where all *pradhans* and the ZP member of the respective block are invited to participate. A district official interviewed recommended inviting all *pradhans* to the ZP meetings in order for the ZP to better understand the problems at the village level (KR4 2010-11-27).

³⁹ While corruption is certainly widespread within the PRI, Crook and Manor (1998:61) in their study on Karnataka, indicate that while incidences of corruptions increased through devolution of powers to the PRI, the absolute amount of money stolen has decreased significantly. They found that decentralisation increased transparency of political processes and made it easier to detect cases of corruption. In a similar vein, a report by the GoI (2006:398-410) argues that corruption is most severe among high ranking bureaucrats as they have greater immunity from being persecuted.

⁴⁰ Currently neither KP nor ZP representatives receive any salary. Only the *pradhans* receive a small honorary salary each month (Chaturvedi 2010-10-11).

6.2.2.4 Downward Accountability of the State Bureaucracy to the PRI

The transfer of authority from state bureaucracy to local government has been incomplete in UP. Salaries and postings of line department officials are still determined by the state departments making these officials upwardly accountable to the departments rather than downwardly accountable to local government officials (Sharma 2009:209). Moreover, the PRI representatives lack the power to sanction bad performance of state servants or dismiss them (Chandola, email correspondence 2011-03-31). The resistance of the line departments to let the PRI work outside their control is a major constraint for the latter's functioning. A ZP representative complained that due to lacking support from the line departments only about 50% of the schemes suggested by the ZP are realised. He explained that the ZP representatives are supposed to be the "bridge" between the communities and the district authorities but that he feels very powerless in his attempts to fulfil this task (KR9 2010-12-05).

It is a common problem of the PRI in many states that the management and control over the bureaucracy remains centralised and that state servants remain upwardly accountable to the state departments (Sharma 2009:209). PRI representatives also often face negative consequences for their careers if they do not support the elected members of the Legislative of their district (Chandola 2010-12-10). The MLAs and MPs have large independent funds which they can transfer directly to the villages. These transfer processes are very intransparent and a district official in Jhansi urged that funds for MLAs and MPs should instead be given to the ZP and be included in the annual district development plans (KR4 2010-11-27). Co-option of MPs and MLAs into the PRI is a highly contested issue all over India (Sharma 2009:65) and a World Bank study (2000:21,73) on decentralisation in Madhya Pradesh has for instance shown that MLAs and MPs have successfully usurped the powers of the ZP and abused the District Planning Committees to channel their funds to local clients.

6.2.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this chapter show a patchy picture of the PRI performance. For a better overview, I have summarised the strengths and weaknesses of the *panchayat* system together with external opportunities and threats to the functioning of the PRI in the following table.

Table2: Internal and External Factors shaping the Potential and Constraints of PRI⁴¹

INTERNAL	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ democratically elected, local government (devolution) ▪ institutionalised popular participation ▪ incorporates mechanisms for the inclusion of the most marginal groups (SC/ST, women) ▪ sustainable over time and through changes in leadership ▪ already institutionalised and replicated in most Indian states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lack of allocative powers ▪ overdependence on government funds ▪ input-based approach to development ▪ lack of administrative and technical capacities ▪ lack of downward accountability ▪ elite capture ▪ greed and corruption of elected officials
EXTERNAL	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activity Mapping conducted followed by adequate financial and staff transfers ▪ successful transition of government agencies from suppliers to facilitators ▪ enhanced performance of elected officials through trainings and incentive structures ▪ improved accountability mechanisms (e.g. through legal recourse, enforced <i>gram sabha</i>, media and civil society) ▪ improved community awareness through investments in (civic) education ▪ development of mechanisms to enhance women's empowerment ▪ increased anti-corruption efforts by the GoUP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lack of political will to devolve discretionary powers (including support staff and untied funds) ▪ resistance from and vested interests of bureaucracy (e.g. line departments, Jal Nigam) and legislative ▪ lack of performance incentives for elected officials ▪ weak independent accountability mechanisms ▪ uneducated electorate ▪ persistent social inequities ▪ endemic corruption (political and bureaucratic) at all levels of state government and administration

The table and the foregoing analysis show that many of the constraints of the PRI are not inherent flaws of the PRI system but are largely the result of insufficient implementation of decentralisation. Moreover, it appears the PRI do not function outside the larger politico-economic context but reflect the existing social inequities and endemic corruption in the state.

⁴¹ While all the listed threats presently exist, most of the listed opportunities do not reflect existing initiatives but refer to chances that could be realised with adequate political will.

Sharma therefore indicates that macro-policy is what matters most and that “if corruption is weeded out of Indian government, it will be stemmed in the PRIs too, and if society becomes more egalitarian and politically active, PRIs will be parallely transformed” (2009:218-9).

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to study some of the major equity and governance issues affecting the rural drinking water sector in Uttar Pradesh. A comprehensive analysis of the key challenges for the current decentralisation reforms and of the potential and constraints of the local governments to contribute to equitable drinking water management was undertaken. From the research, which addressed levels from village to state, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, despite the ambitious policy framework guiding the sector reforms, community participation in RDWS which is crucial for creating equitable supply has not been achieved through the current reform approach. To reach this goal it will be necessary that service providers sincerely commit to work on behalf of the PRI and the local communities and share their knowledge and power. In traditional development discourses, rural people are often represented as irrational, conformist, fatalist or even parasitic (Nygren 1999:271). These perceptions – some of which were encountered during this research – fail to appreciate local heterogeneity and might lead to the misrepresentation of the local population as “a scapegoat for backwardness” (ibid.:282). Rural residents need to be regarded as active agents or otherwise the likelihood that they will behave like dependent, needy objects increases. Policy makers and implementers need to engage in dialogue with the local population and their elected representatives to ensure that policies are informed by ground realities.

Second, the study highlights the danger of basing project allocation decisions on the demand of communities. Allocation should be based on the real needs of the community, so that underprivileged groups are not left out from service delivery. The current drinking water policy lacks a poverty and equity focus and increases inequities in water access. I believe that it is necessary to reconsider the current policies since the apparent substitution of the social right to water with the principle of economic efficiency threatens the right to water for all. The current demand-led paradigm with fixed cost-recovery targets tends to provide benefits only to the more affluent sections of rural society and to neglect the needs of poorer communities. If cost-sharing is to be successful an understanding of the entire community’s

needs and expectations is imperative and targets need to be flexible and defined by the entire community. Moreover, imposition of user fees without cross-subsidies for the poor can result in exclusion from improved water access for those with no means to pay.

Third, the study has shown that to achieve greater equity in RDWS it is crucial that local governments hold discretionary powers and are accountable to the local population. Drinking water supply appears to be a suitable function to be devolved to the PRI as it is something central to local people's lives and therefore creates strong popular demand towards the PRI. Nevertheless, the study highlights the need for a clarification of PRI functions through activity mapping and the need for adequate allocation powers as well as technical and administrative personnel to be responsive to local people's needs. Moreover, the findings suggest that downward accountability of the PRI to their constituents and of the bureaucracy to the PRI need to be significantly increased to ensure that decentralisation achieves its objectives. Investment in primary and civic education is needed to ensure that people can hold their elected representatives accountable. Awareness on rights it is crucial and will also depend on the emergence of a strong civil society that can mobilise marginalised groups to demand truly representative local governments and the provision of adequate services.

Fourth, the study revealed that existing power differentials influence the PRI significantly and direct the attention towards the danger of elite capture. Meaningful participation of disadvantaged groups is not guaranteed by the decentralisation mechanisms that have been adopted in the RDWS sector in UP. Social exclusion of women and lower caste members has been practised for centuries in India and it is impractical to impose unrealistic expectations on the local governments. Entrenched social inequities can not be abolished quickly by the PRI or quota systems. The research thus highlights the importance of a strong state for the performance of decentralisation. Decentralisation needs to entail new commitments of the state to ensure equity in drinking water access and to protect the reforms from elite capture.

Finally, the legal problems concerning water management need to be addressed. To decrease inequities in access to drinking water an integrated approach to water management and the adoption of a groundwater legislation which delinks groundwater access from land ownership and prioritises drinking water uses over other uses are urgently required.

After having considered the practical implications from my research for decentralisation, what implications do my findings have for theory and future research in this field?

The case of the reforms in the RDWS in UP shows that decentralisation does not unequivocally lead to enhanced equity but might actually perpetuate or reinforce social divisions. The findings in this study support Larson and Ribot's assumption (2005:7) that decentralisation reforms fail to deliver the positive outcomes suggested by theories firstly due to insufficient implementation of reforms and secondly due to the influence of factors theories do not account for. The study has implications for theory in showing that the dominant theories underlying the current policy framework for RDWS fail to account for key variables determining decentralisation outcomes. Given that the public choice and good governance theories which shape the investigated policies do not sufficiently take social inequities and multi-level power relations into account, the theoretical assumptions that underlie current policies are not applicable for a society as divided as UP. Institutional changes are embedded in the wider political economy and thus the theoretical models underlying RDWS policy need to contextualise institutions geographically, socioeconomically and politically to achieve practical policy solutions. They need to be modified so that all major factors that influence reform outcomes (e.g. social stratification and political costs of transition) are covered (ibid.).

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APPENDIX I: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Key Respondents (KR)	Position	Interview Date
KR1	Elected <i>khrettra panchayat</i> Representative, Sitapur	2010-10-03
KR2	<i>Pradhan</i> , Sitapur	2010-10-03
KR3	<i>Pradhan</i> (de facto but not elected), Sitapur	2010-10-05
KR4	Senior district official (state servant), Jhansi	2010-11-27
KR5&6	Technical Advisors, Swajaldhara in Jhansi	2010-11-27
KR7	<i>khrettra panchayat</i> President, Jhansi	2010-11-27
KR8	<i>Pradhan</i> , Jhansi	2010-11-28
KR9	Elected <i>zilla panchayat</i> Representative, Sitapur	2010-12-05

Group Interviews (GI)	Participants	Interview Date
Group1 (Village A)	15 women	2010-10-03
Group2 (Village B)	9 men	2010-12-05
Group3 (Village C)	25 women and men	2010-10-05
Group4 (Village D)	10 men	2010-11-28
Group5 (Village D)	8 women	2010-11-28

Pilot Interviews (PI)	Position	Interview Date
PI1	<i>Pradhan</i> , Unnao District	2010-08-18
PI2	<i>Pradhan</i> , Fatehpur District	2010-08-31
PI3	Former <i>Pradhan</i> , Sitapur District	2010-09-14

Key Informants (in alphabetical order)	Position	Interview Date(s)
Chandola, Sudhan	Joint Director, Department of Panchayati Raj UP	2010-12-10
Chaturvedi, Shalini	Director Government Resource Centre. Sahbagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK) (NGO)	2010-10-11
Jeyaseelan, Johnson	Programme Officer at WaterAid Lucknow (INGO)	2010-09-03, 2010-12-06
Kumar, Raj	Programme Manager, Shashwat Sahbhagi Sansthan (NGO in Sitapur District)	2010-12-05
Kumar, Seema	IEC Coordinator, UP State Water and Sanitation Mission	2010-11-22, 2010-12-03

Mehrotra, Amit	Water and Environmental Sanitation Specialist, UNICEF Lucknow	2010-12-06
Menon, Sunil	Consultant, Department of Panchayati Raj UP	2010-12-10
Sinha, Utkarsh Kumar	Director, Centre for Contemporary Studies and Research Lucknow; Member, Freshwater Action Network UP	2010-11-23
Tripathi, Raghuvans	Joint Director Community Participation Unit, UP Jal Nigam	2010-12-02, 2010-12-09
Vidyarthi, Amla	Director, Manavodaya (NGO)	2010-12-07

APPENDIX II: GROUP INTERVIEWS – GROUP COMPOSITION

Village A

No of Participants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Education	Religion	Caste
15	all female	mixed	12 married, 3 younger women not married	12: 0 years 2: 10 years 1: 12 years	all Hindu	all SC

Village B

Partipants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	No of children	Education (in years)	Occupation	Religion	Caste
1	male	35	married	4	8	Farmer	Hindu	General
2	male	20	not married	0	12	Student	Hindu	SC
3	male	38	married	2	8	Farmer	Hindu	OBC
4	male	72	married	2	0	Farmer	Hindu	OBC
5	male	52	married	6	10	Farmer	Hindu	OBC
6	male	60	married	3	0	Farmer	Hindu	OBC
7	male	51	married	5	10	Farmer	Hindu	OBC
8	male	44	married	2	12	Farmer	Hindu	OBC

Village C

No of Participants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Education	Religion	Caste
~25	mixed	Mixed ages; estimated average age: 40 years	not asked	~15: 0 years 4: 5 years 4: 8 years 2: 10 years	~75% Muslim; 25% Hindus	Muslim (OBC), Hindus (mainly SC)

Village D
Group 1

No	Sex	Age	Marital Status	No of children	Education (in years)	Occupation	Religion	Caste
1	male	85	married	2	0	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
2	male	42	married	0	5	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
3	male	45	married	4	5	Farmer	Hindu	SC
4	male	22	married	0	B.A.	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
5	male	70	married	3	0	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
6	male	65	married	3	5	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
7	male	52	married	0	11	Wage Labourer	Hindu	SC
8	male	34	married	4	5	Farmer	Hindu	SC
9	male	30	married	3	0	Farmer	Hindu	SC
10	male	55	married	2	0	Farmer	Hindu	SC

Group 2

No	Sex	Age	Marital Status	No of children	Education (in years)	Occupation	Religion	Caste
1	female	40	married	3	0	Household	Hindu	SC
2	female	20	married	2	10	Household	Hindu	SC
3	female	50	married	5	0	Household	Hindu	SC
4	female	22	married	3	12	Household	Hindu	SC
5	female	35	married	3	0	Household	Hindu	SC
6	female	35	married	0	0	Household	Hindu	SC
7	female	38	married	2	0	Household	Hindu	SC
8	female	38	married	3	0	Household	Hindu	SC

APPENDIX III: RESULTS OF VILLAGE MAPPING EXERCISE

Village A (Group I, female)



Village B (Group II, male)



Village C (Group III, mixed)



APPENDIX IV: CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY VILLAGES

(based on respondents' statements)

	Village A	Village B	Village C	Village D
Main village of <i>panchayat</i>?	No	No	No	Yes
# of villages in <i>panchayat</i>	3	3	11	2
# households (hh)	110	100	55	320
# average hh size	5-6	5-6	7-8	5-6
Religion	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu & Muslim	Hindu
% SC population	100%	70%	Not asked ⁴²	30%
Main occupation	Agriculture	Agriculture	Farm wage labour	Agriculture
Land owners	50% of hh, others work as wage labourers on fields	100%	Only 3-4 hh own land, others work as wage labour	100% own land or have lifelong lease
Main crops grown	Wheat, rice, sugarcane, pulses	Wheat, rice, sugarcane, potatoes, pulses	Wheat, sugarcane, pulses	Wheat, rice
Distance to district capital	22km	23km	53km	35km
Distance to block capital	1km	2km	15km	8km
Approach road to village	Brick-mud road	Brick road	Brick road	Concrete road
Electricity supply	Few hh only, powercuts every 5-10 minutes	Few hh for 4-5 hours per day	No power	Every hh for 14 hours per day
# government hand pumps	5	3	3	50 (mainly obtained through MLA and MP funding)
# private handpumps	Few hh	30	4-5	35-40

⁴² Indian Muslims officially belong to the Other Backward Castes. However, lower caste Muslims face similar or worse discriminations than Scheduled Caste members and hence many argue that they should be included in the Scheduled Castes (see e.g. Deshpande & Bapna, 2008. *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge*. Delhi: National Commission for Minorities.)

APPENDIX V: DATA ON *PRADHANS* INTERVIEWED

	Village A & B (same GP/ <i>pradhan</i>)	Village C	Village D
Age	~ 50 years	~ 50 years	64 years
Caste	Scheduled Caste	Yadav (OBC)	Upper caste Hindu
Status	Married, no children	Married, two children	Married, 7 children
Education	Secondary (12th grade)	Secondary (12 th grade)	Intermediate (8 th grade)
Received any trainings after being elected <i>pradhan</i>?	No	Annual trainings at block level; twice he also participated in a training conducted by NGOs	Participated in a one-week training organised by the block development officer at 50
Was elected GP member before 2005?	No	No and he was also not elected in 2005; his mother is the official <i>pradhan</i> but he is the actual <i>pradhan</i> and she has only signatory role	Not asked
Was elected <i>pradhan</i> before 2005?	No	No	Yes
Any relatives who have been elected GP members before?	His mother was <i>pradhan</i> earlier	Father from 1995-2000, In 2000 and 2005 <i>pradhan</i> seat in the GP was reserved for a woman and hence his mother was elected.	<i>Pradhan</i> seat in his family since 55 years
Re-elected in 2010?	He was running again but not re-elected	Mother ran again in Nov. 2010 and was re-elected	He did not run again. His son got elected in Nov. 2010
Party Affiliation	Not asked	Samajvadi Party supported mainly by OBC members (esp. Yadav caste) and Muslims	Congress Party

APPENDIX VI: INTERVIEW GUIDES

GUIDE FOR GROUP INTERVIEWS

(Questions 1-9 were asked during Village Mapping Exercise)

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

- I. Name
- II. Age
- III. Gender
- IV. Education
- V. Social Group (SC, ST, OBC, Minorities, General/Others)
- VI. Number of children
- VII. monthly income
- VIII. main source of income for household

Water Situation

1. What are the major water related problems in your village?

Water Access

2. How do you access water (*private pipe, public tap, handpump, open well/tank/pond*)?
3. Do you and your families have access to sufficient water to meet your domestic needs (*drinking, cooking, food processing, cleaning, laundry, personal hygiene*)?
4. Do you have access to water for any productive uses (*live stock, irrigation, small vegetable gardens, other income generating activities*)?
5. Does everyone in the village have the same right to access water?
6. Do you find the current rights allocation fair? How could it be improved?

Water Use

7. How is water use regulated?
8. Who are the major water users?
9. In your opinion, how could rules of water use be improved?

Awareness about water-related schemes/programmes

10. Who provides you information on government schemes? (*GP/PRI, state department official, school teacher/opinion leader, politician, NGO, district magistrate etc*)
11. What information do you normally receive? (*details about scheme, benefits from the scheme, implementing agency for scheme, whom to approach (department), where to approach (place), what to do, etc.*)
12. Do you have any doubts after receiving this information? If so, what kind of doubts?
13. Do you approach someone else for information?

14. Are you a beneficiary to any of the schemes? (*name of scheme*)
15. Did you receive the expected benefits?
16. What water related schemes are currently being implemented or have been completed in your village this year?
17. What do you know about these schemes?
18. Has water management in your village improved through any of the schemes/programmes? If so, how?
19. Can everyone have access to scheme activities and better water supply?
20. Do you or others pay for drinking water? If so:
 - a) Who collects the user fees?
 - b) Can you afford paying?
 - c) How do you pay (*cash, labour, in kind*)?
 - d) How often do you pay?
 - e) What is the money used for? Who makes the decision about this?
21. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the financial management?
22. Who owns the water facilities in your village (*pipes, wells, ponds, hand pumps etc*)?
23. Who is responsible for the management of water facilities?
24. Is there a water management committee? If so:
 - a) When and by whom was it established?
 - b) Can you please list the names of the committee members?

Awareness about *gram panchayat* and *gram sabha*

25. Are you aware of the *gram sabha*?
26. How many meetings does the *gram sabha* hold annually? (*2 meetings are mandatory: after each harvest*)
 - a) Do you participate in these meetings? (attendance by 20% of all members is mandatory)
 - b) Do you know why some people do not come to the meetings? (*no invitation, no interest, no time, problems to come to the meeting place, no attendance of district/state officials*)
 - c) What is discussed in *gram sabha* meetings? (*information and news about programmes/schemes, update about previous programmes/schemes, income and expenditure on programmes/schemes, allocation to beneficiaries etc*)
 - d) Are you involved in identifying beneficiaries for the government schemes?
28. What are the names of the *pradhan* and the other GP members?
29. Please describe some activities and responsibilities of the GP.
30. Are you satisfied with the implementation of schemes by the GP?
(*Rank from 5 – Excellent, 4 – Good, 3 – Average, 2- Bad, 1 – Poor*)
31. Are you satisfied with the dissemination of information by the GP?
(*same Ranking*)
31. Do you think the GP conceals information from you?
32. If so, what kind of information? (*funds received, expenditure incurred, allotment of beneficiaries, details and progress about programme, etc*)

Swajaldhara (*only for Village D*)

1. Since when is Swajaldhara carried out in your village?
2. Are you a beneficiary to Swajaldhara?
3. Can you explain what is done under this programme in your village? (*which trainings conducted, which water structures created?*)
4. Are the created water structures functioning? If no, why? If yes, who is maintaining them?
5. How are payments regulated? How does the decision-making process look like?
6. Are there different fees depending on hh income?
7. If yes above: Is the *gram panchayat* responsible for operation and maintenance?
8. Who is paying O&M costs at the moment?
9. Which NGO was the Support Organisation?
10. How was the cooperation between you and the NGO? Did you feel sufficiently supported?
11. Do you expect your access to water and/or other participants' access to water will improve?
12. Do all participants receive equal benefits?
13. Are some people unable to participate? If so, for which reasons (*inability to pay, resistance from other community members, no interest etc*)?
14. How was the VWSC formed (*elected, nominated*)?
15. Was that a fair process? Are there quotas?
16. Were/are you a member? Is the committee still active?
17. Who are the members (*e.g. Elite, poor*)?

GUIDE FOR *PRADHAN* INTERVIEWS

(similar interviews guides were also used for interviews with block and district level representatives)

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

- I. How old are you?
- II. Are you married? How many children do you have?
- III. How many years of education do you have?
- IV. Have you received any formal training after you were elected?
- V. Have you been elected a member of this GP before 2005?
- VI. Have you been elected *pradhan* before 2005?
- VII. Are there any other members of your family who are/ were GP member or were elected *pradhan* in this *panchayat*?
- VIII. Have you been re-elected in 2010?

Accountability

1. How many villages belong to this *panchayat*?
2. How many households?
3. How many members does the GP have?
4. How many GP members are women? (*30% quota*)
5. How many GP members belong to the SC and ST? (*UP average: 21%, 0.06%*)
6. How many meetings does the *gram sabha* hold annually? (*2 meetings are mandatory: after each harvest*) If less meetings, why?
7. How many members of the *gram sabha* do participate in these meetings? (*one fifth is mandatory*) Why do many people not come? (*no invitation, no interest, no time, problems to come to the meeting place, no attendance of district/state officials*)
8. Do you convey the information on schemes and their benefits to the villagers? If so, how?
9. How do you ensure participation of the villagers in the activities of the GP?
10. How do you ensure that people receive benefits from the schemes?
11. Is the GP involved in the selection of beneficiaries for the schemes? If so, please describe the procedure.
12. Do you think that the villagers need to be informed about government policies and schemes and about the stages of implementation/success/budget and expenditure?
13. In your opinion, do you think that the villagers have the right to question the government officials and elected leaders on the implementation of schemes in their village/*panchayat*?

Powers

14. Please list all water related responsibilities that have been given to you by the government. (*e.g. maintenance of traditional drinking water sources, management and setting up of water supply schemes, preservation of ponds/water tanks, maintenance of water ways, maintenance and implementation of minor irrigation projects*)
15. What are the major water related problems in your *panchayat*?

16. Have there been or are there any conflicts over water in this *panchayat*? If so, please describe them.

Cooperation with other actors

17. Which water related activities require coordination with the *khrettra* and *zilla panchayat*?
- Do you find the cooperation positive or negative?
 - Do you find the cooperation sufficient?
18. Do you cooperate with the line department workers of the different ministries?
- Please give one example of how you have been supported.
 - Please give one example where you needed support but did not receive any.
19. Who else is working on water issues in your *panchayat*?
20. How do you cooperate with them?
- Is it good or bad that they are working on issues that lie within your responsibilities?
 - Is there confusion regarding your water related functions and the functions of other actors? (*duplication, legal problems, personal problems*)

Funding

21. Does this GP collect taxes for different water uses?
22. Do you have sufficient funding for water-related activities provided by the government/by others?

Planning & Management

23. Are schemes equally distributed among all *panchayat* villages or are most schemes carried out in your own village?
24. Who is responsible for the planning and management of water schemes?
25. What are the priorities for planning? Is a needs assessment done? If yes, please describe the procedure.
- Who decides the priorities? (*pradhan, gram sabha, external actors*)
 - What is the status of implementation?
26. Have you established any standing committees for water management?
- Are they functioning? (*members, decision-making, how often do they meet?*)
 - What powers do they have?
 - Do you have committees for other issues? (*e.g. Administrative, Planning & Developing, Construction, Health & Welfare, Education, Land*)

Swajaldhara (only for Village D)

27. Since when is Swajaldhara carried out in your village?
28. Can you explain what is done under this programme in your village? (*which trainings conducted, which water structures created?*)
29. Were there sufficient trainings for GP members and beneficiaries?
30. Are the created water structures functioning? If no, why? If yes, who is maintaining them?
31. How are payments regulated?
32. How does the decision-making process look like?

33. Are there different fees depending on household income?
34. Who is paying O&M costs at the moment?
35. Which NGO was the Support Organisation?
36. How was the cooperation between you and the NGO? Did you feel sufficiently supported?
37. Did participants' access to water improve?
38. Do all participants receive equal benefits?
39. Are some people unable to participate? If so, for which reasons (*inability to pay, resistance from other community members, no time etc*)?
40. How was the VWSC formed (*elected, nominated*)? Who are the members (*elite, poor etc*)?
 - (a) Was it a fair process?
 - (b) Were/are you or other GP members a member of the VWSC?
 - (c) Are there regular elections and is there a quota system?
 - (d) In your opinion, is the programme successful?
 - (e) What are the major problems for the GP to fulfil its intended role?

General Constraints

39. What are the major constraints for you to fulfill your water related responsibilities?
40. Under what circumstances could the GP function better?