



# Contested terrain: International development projects and countervailing power for the excluded

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## ABSTRACT

Conventional international development project approaches to enable participation of the excluded often fall short of building countervailing power, which is key for accountability. This study analyzes possible exceptions to identify causal pathways, as well as long-term effects beyond projects. The methodology combines the identification of positive outliers, process tracing and comparative analysis of five World Bank projects from the 1990s that were also the focus of subsequent academic research. Tangible openings from above that enabled countervailing power took two main forms: 1) institutionalized power-sharing over allocation of social funds – at local, subnational and national levels and 2) support for autonomous, multi-level social organizations, including collective titling of ethnic territories. Over the longer term, projects lacked strong national allies and their most innovative contributions were reversed, watered down or at best contained – though these differences mattered to social actors on the ground. The most analytically significant finding is that projects can have not only contested and uneven outcomes (“mixed results”), but also contradictory interaction effects. This poses the methodological challenge of how to measure and explain the relative weights of both countervailing power shifts and elite capture.

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## 1. Introduction

Analysts have long debated whether pro-participation initiatives by large development agencies can enable empowerment of the disenfranchised. Numerous studies have found that top-down, governmental or international aid attempts to induce participation tend to result in elite diversion or capture. Both mainstream and radical analysts concur that structural obstacles and pre-existing power imbalances usually prevent official development agencies’ ostensibly pro-participation initiatives from enabling significant power shifts (e.g., Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Stated project goals are transformed as they pass through layers of aid bureaucracies, national government agencies and local power brokers. Official reports document numbers of meetings rather than power shifts. Institutional ethnographies spell out how this works in nuanced detail (e.g., Mosse, 2005; Corbridge, Williams, Srinivastava, & Veron, 2005; Li, 2007). While some critics contend that official participatory development initiatives are *always* captured, others contend that exceptions are possible and emphasize the importance of “multi-scaled citizenship” to achieve more transformative goals (Hickey & Mohan,

2004: 13). How can aid-backed governance reforms open up space to bolster “slow-burning processes of democratization?” (Corbridge et al., 2005: 258).

This study seeks to identify the causal pathways through which international development projects can transcend dominant patterns of elite capture and instead enable forms of countervailing power.<sup>1</sup> The point of departure draws on a concept borrowed from the study of social movements. The idea of “political opportunities” suggests that even partial openings from above can change the context within which social actors assess whether and how to engage in

<sup>1</sup> This study addresses the broader theoretical debate over the relationship between structure and agency. While structural constraints usually block external actors from enabling collective action at sufficient breadth and intensity to drive sustainable power shifts, the question is whether and how action – from both above and below – can ever push back those constraints. The analysis here is grounded in the “state-society synergy” approach (e.g., Evans, 1996; Fox, 1992, 1996). At more micro levels, this dilemma is often posed in terms of the limits and possibilities of official “invited spaces” for social actors to engage with the state. While “invited spaces,” convened from above, are often superficial, co-opted exercises that reproduce social exclusion, grassroots agency can also make autonomous deliberation possible, transforming them into “claimed spaces” (Cornwall, 2002; 2004; Cornwall & Coelho 2006; Fox, 2007).

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collective action.<sup>2</sup> When seen from below, divisions among elites can constitute cracks in the system. For social actors, official development agencies' participation agendas – if implemented at scale – are part of the political opportunity landscape.<sup>3</sup> Yet critics point out that the concept of “political opportunities” is often applied so broadly that it is synonymous with the all-purpose “context matters” (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). Analysts call for more consistent operationalization of the concept to address: “what counts” as a relevant political opportunity? This study is informed by sociologists' recommendation to identify specific mechanisms that link context to action by focusing on issue-specific openings that are directly relevant or targeted to distinct social actors (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004: 1464).<sup>4</sup>

This study uses a “positive outlier” approach (also known as “positive deviance”) to identify possible exceptions to dominant patterns. Here that refers to internationally-funded government projects or programs that may have gone beyond conventional superficial approaches to participation.<sup>5</sup> Methodologists argue that the goal of explaining surprising results is to provide a “generalizable hypothesis about the phenomenon” (Gerring, 2017: 74–75). In contrast, here the goals of focusing on outliers are to identify their causal pathways, to make visible hidden methodological challenges, and to encourage analysts to focus more explicitly on countervailing power.

This study uses process tracing to explain the trajectories of five outlier cases and concludes that they all shared two key characteristics: 1) elements of projects supported tangible state actions that enabled some degree of autonomous collective action, either directly or indirectly, and 2) elite responses rolled back, watered down or contained power shifts. Yet for social actors, the difference between rollback vs. containment of their inherently limited countervailing power matters, since containment can allow them to fight again another day.

This contested terrain raises unanswered methodological questions. A key finding here is that even the most promising-looking projects can have simultaneous *contradictory* effects, yet such outcomes are rendered invisible by the conventional impulse to draw summary conclusions regarding whether innovative projects or policies “worked.” This recognition challenges researchers to

develop methods that can identify and explain the *both* the drivers and the relative weights of *both* blockages and power shifts.

## 2. Where is countervailing power in the participatory development agenda?

Diverse practitioners have long attempted to harness the clout of large international development agencies to promote “participatory development,” under various labels.<sup>6</sup> Both advocates and analysts often recognize the risks of co-optation, reversal and elite capture, as well as the possibility that what makes participation work at micro levels tends to get significantly watered down in the process of scaling up, even in the best-case scenario.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is precisely the allure of scale – the prospect of opening civic and social space for large numbers of excluded people to have more autonomous voice and influence in governance – that leads advocates to keep trying. However, promoting participation “at scale” can be understood in diverse ways. Large numbers of meetings cited in program reports may not add up to any power shift.<sup>8</sup> The most common repertoire for official participatory development, including what is currently called social accountability, is limited to controlled consultations whose deliberations can be easily captured or ignored by authorities – and they rarely address multiple forms of “invisible power” that limit the exercise of voice.<sup>9</sup> Whether such convenings involve participatory rural appraisals, community interface meetings with frontline service providers or national technical meetings with capital city civil society organizations, they usually involve some voice but no teeth (Fox, 2015).

Scholarly debates over participatory development rarely explicitly address a core dimension of accountability: *countervailing power*. As Fung and Wright put it, countervailing power refers to “a variety of mechanisms that reduce, and perhaps even neutralize the power advantages of ordinarily powerful actors” (Fung and Wright, 2003: 260, emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> Countervailing power involves *bargaining power* – the leverage needed both to question authority without reprisals – and to get those in power to listen.<sup>11</sup> Countervailing power can be expressed in either adversarial or

<sup>2</sup> In spite of the central concern with empowerment throughout the field of development studies, analysts rarely engage with the political sociology literature on social movements. This study addresses “political opportunity” as a standalone concept, not its more elaborate “political process theory” framework. As Tarrow summarized the approach: “Triggered by the incentives created by political opportunities, combining conventional and challenging forms of action and building on social networks and cultural frames is how movements overcome the obstacles to collective action and sustain their interactions with opponents and with the state” (Tarrow 1994: 1). See Caren's literature review Caren's (2007) and Boudreau's early application to the global South (1996). Though building on political process theory, the “polity” approach to analysing the politics of inclusion explains state-society interaction more broadly (Houtzager & Moore, 2003). The focus here is on multiple possible forms of collective action rather than exclusively on protest.

<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on the *nature* of openings from above is consistent with Mansuri and Rao (2013). They conclude that for “induced participation” to “work,” key conditions include a strong central government oversight role, along with vigorous transparency and accountability reforms – “sandwich strategies” that align pressure from above and below (2013: 287–288, citing Fox, 1992). Such strategies are absent from conventional, locally bounded, tactical, tool-led approaches to induced participation (Fox, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, development analysts often describe changes in context in terms of “political space” – a concept almost as elusive as “political opportunity.” One definition includes three elements: institutional channels, political discourses and the social and political practices of the poor (Webster & Engberg-Pederson, 2002). More recently, on “civic space,” see Hossain et al. (2018).

<sup>5</sup> “Positive deviance” and “positive outlier” are synonyms, although in sociology the concept of “deviance” has a controversial history. For influential applications to development studies, Andrews (2015) and Pascale, Stermin, and Stermin (2010). For a conceptual review, see Herington and van der Fliert (2018).

<sup>6</sup> There was a boom in research and debate on these issues during the period addressed in this study, including, among others: Bebbington, Guggenheim, Olson, and Woolcock (2004), Gaventa (1998); Francis (2001), Bebbington, Woolcock, Guggenheim, and Olson (2006), Blackburn and Holland (1998), Blackburn, Chambers, and Gaventa (2002), Hickey and Mohan (2004, 2005), Joshi and Moore (2000), Long (2001), Kumar and Corbridge (2002), Nelson and Wright (1995), World Bank (2003a), among others. During that period, rights-based analysts focused primarily on aid agency efforts at consultations and assessments (e.g., Blackburn & Holland, 1998; Holland, Brocklesby, & Abugre, 2004; Webster & Engberg-Pederson, 2002). See also Hickey and Mitlin (2009) Gaventa (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Hickey & Mohan conclude that participatory development efforts are most likely to be successful when they meet three criteria, where: “they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project; (ii) where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups; and (iii) when they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions” (2005). The study here is consistent with this expectation, with an empirical focus on cases where official aid agencies were involved.

<sup>8</sup> For a multi-level approach to scale for analysing state-society interaction for governance reform, see Fox (2016) and Anderson, Fox & Gaventa (2020).

<sup>9</sup> See, among others, Nelson and Wright (1995), Veneklasen and Miller (2002), McGee and Pettit (2019).

<sup>10</sup> The concept's original formulation addresses checks and balances between large national institutions in society as well as the state (Agrawal and Ribot (1999), Galbraith, 1952).

<sup>11</sup> This concept underscores: 1) the relevance of *tangible* rights – defined as “enforceable claims” (Tilly et al., 1998), which go beyond seats at the table or promises of entitlements – as well as 2) the capacity of the excluded to exercise bargaining power with collective action at scale. In the discourse of power analysis, this involves “power over” (see note 9). For social actors to exercise “power over,” they need to have *already* addressed invisible and hidden power. Since power is often understood in terms of capacities, countervailing power involves the capacity to limit others' capacity to abuse power.

collaborative terms, but it is constituted by actors or institutions with some capacity to tangibly push back and *constrain* the abuse of power. This study's point of departure is that the specific empirical expressions of countervailing power will vary widely depending on context.

### 3. Research strategy and case selection criteria

The broad framing question here is: how can openings from above enable autonomous collective action that bolsters countervailing power for the excluded, even though such efforts usually fail? This puzzle is addressed by asking: how can official aid agencies contribute to enabling countervailing power that survives the end of the project? Analysts distinguish between top-down initiatives that attempt to mobilize the poor directly, versus indirect institutional changes that bolster the enabling environment for collective action (Joshi & Moore, 2000), and this study will look at both. The methodology combines positive outlier identification, the comparative method and within-case process tracing to identify the mechanisms, causal pathways and long-term outcomes.

The conceptual point of departure is that large, unaccountable institutions are often better understood as contested terrain than as monolithic entities. This approach differs from the widely-held assumption that powerful elite institutions are homogeneous actors whose apparently disparate actions necessarily follow a single, consistent logic. Examples of top-down institutional pillars of the status quo that have been internally divided, partially and temporarily influenced by pro-participation factions, include the Catholic Church, with the rise and fall of the "preferential option for the poor," authoritarian, post-revolutionary one-party regimes that include competing factions (e.g., Mexico from the 1930s through the 1990s), corporatist unions (e.g., Brazil and Spain under dictatorship) as well as the US government in the 1960s, with its expansion of official community participation and anti-poverty programs while simultaneously deploying security forces to attack dissidents. In diverse times and places, competing agendas among elites created spaces for autonomous organizing of the excluded, which sometimes generated forms of countervailing power.

This study's empirical focus is on an especially unlikely enabler of induced participation – the World Bank.<sup>12</sup> The first rationale for that choice is methodological, to ground the comparison by holding a single actor constant across varied national contexts.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, what is being held constant is a very distinctive *subset* of World Bank projects, since the cases here are limited to projects that were perceived at the time by diverse stakeholders to be pro-participation outliers (see below). The second reason for this focus is analytical, to address a "least likely" case. The proposition is that if such a technocratic institution can contribute to exceptions to the dominant pattern, then the dynamic identified here may be possible in other official development agencies. In contrast, if this study were to address overtly pro-participation aid agencies, those findings would say less about official development agencies more generally. A third rationale for focusing on the World Bank is empirical, since it continues to play a significant global agenda-setting role in the field of

participatory development – now rebranded as citizen engagement and social accountability (see below).

The second criterion for case selection focuses on projects that were widely seen by practitioners at the time as especially promising and innovative.<sup>14</sup> This follows the "positive deviance" method of relying on key informants to identify perceived pockets of progress (Andrews, 2015).<sup>15</sup> The third criterion focuses the analysis on even more unlikely cases, selecting projects that were carried out in fragile, violent or conflict/post-conflict settings (broadly defined).<sup>16</sup> The fourth criterion selects projects that were carried out between 15 and 20 years ago, providing a long-term perspective that allows for an assessment of whether apparent progress was sustained over time. A final, crucial selection criterion is that the study addresses only cases that generated a diverse body of directly relevant empirical academic research (reinforced by key informant interviews). The study addresses five cases rather than a smaller number for two reasons – to inductively search for multiple possible pathways and to indicate that anomalies are not necessarily unique. To sum up, cases selected share the following characteristics: the same agency, participatory innovation (according to contemporary practitioner reports), fragile/conflict settings, the same time period and an independent evidence base.

In terms of enabling institutional factors, each World Bank project was either designed in response to advocacy or was led by a staffer who self-identified as pro-participation – based on previous research that confirmed the relevance of these path-dependent factors (Fox & Brown, 1998; Fox & Gershman, 2000). These projects' participatory elements were different from the then-growing portfolio of World Bank projects that contracted with NGOs as apolitical service providers (e.g., Covey, 1998; Nelson & Wright, 1995). The projects were all managed by staff who the World Bank called "non-economist social scientists" – environmental policy analysts, institutional development specialists or anthropologists.<sup>17</sup> Table 1 summarizes the key project characteristics.

<sup>14</sup> This assessment is based on the author's participant-observation in four different roles during the period under study. As an academic consultant to the Participatory Development Learning Group, the author co-led third-party field-based monitoring of the Mexico Decentralization and Regional Development project between 1992 and 1994, analysing a representative sample of Oaxacan municipalities (Fox & Aranda, 1996). In 1995–1996, as a visiting researcher embedded with the Bank Information Center, an independent public interest group – and later serving on its board of directors – the author was also involved in diverse related debates over participation (cf. Bebbington et al., 2004). In addition, as a researcher in the Mexican public interest group *Transparencia* (1995–2005), the author was involved in independent project monitoring and advocacy at multiple levels (Fox & Gershman, 2000; Fox, 2007). The author also engaged in independent assessments of the World Bank's transparency and public accountability reforms during this period (Fox & Brown 1998; Clark, Fox, & Treacle, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Peiffer and Armytage propose an innovative, mixed methods approach to identify even less visible breakthroughs (Peiffer & Armytage (2019): 99).

<sup>16</sup> This additional case selection criterion addresses a recent recognition that the research evidence base on accountability innovations has been drawn primarily from stable settings (Joshi, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Note that this study does not address the much broader comparative question of why these projects were exceptions and not others, keeping the focus on how they may have contributed to countervailing power. Nor does this study address the interaction between these projects and the rest of the World Bank agenda in the same country – though their expected legitimating effects probably account for why senior managers would approve proposals from heterodox staff. Analysis of this broader question would involve a different methodology, informed by the classic political economy agenda that addresses the relationship between a state's dual legitimization and accumulation roles (e.g., O'Connor, 1973). For an example of such a contextual political analysis of one of the five cases studied here, involving the World Bank in Mexico during the period under study, see Fox (1997, 2000). The bank's Mexico portfolio shifted in the early 1990s from its 1980s emphasis on structural adjustment to social and environmental projects, in order to bolster the ruling party's social base and to support NAFTA.

<sup>12</sup> The devastating social and environmental consequences of many World Bank projects are widely-documented – the dynamics of its projects that directly attempt to reduce poverty have received much less independent research attention.

<sup>13</sup> For an alternative methodological approach that addresses a related comparative question about international organizations and peace-building, Campbell compares different agencies in the same national context, with a similar finding about the significance of outliers: "[t]o create informal local accountability... country-office staff must circumvent standard operating procedures... This circumvention is necessary because country offices are designed to respond to the demands of their headquarters and donors, not to those of local stakeholders" (Campbell, 2018: 4).



#### 4. Methodological considerations: outliers vs averages

The positive deviance approach addresses “outliers who succeed against the odds” (Green, 2016: 25). The rationale for trying to explain anomalies is that they can reveal possible pathways of change that would otherwise be hidden by dominant trends or rendered invisible by averages.<sup>18</sup> However, the goal of identifying exceptions to dominant patterns of elite capture poses methodological challenges. Mainstream innovations for measuring empowerment at scale are not new (e.g., Alsop, Bertelson, & Holland, 2006; Narayan, 2005), but development agencies have few incentives to deploy them.<sup>19</sup> Independent scholars address these questions eloquently, often with deep, ethnographic perspective. Yet complementary methods are also needed to determine broader patterns involving large-scale programs or policies that reach hundreds or thousands of communities. As a result, both official and independent evidence bases often have difficulty with addressing what is “the mix of the mixed results?” In other words, what are the *relative weights* of different outcomes?<sup>20</sup>

The positive outlier approach is especially appropriate for analyzing ambitious change initiatives whose goals are likely to be met at best partially and unevenly – as in the case of efforts to overcome extreme gender, racial, ethnic and class exclusion. Limited increases in capacity and space for action may represent significant steps forward for the excluded – while being difficult to assess externally in any consistent way. At the same time, violent elites can be quite adept at capturing and disguising themselves in the appearances and discourses of grassroots development (e.g., Ballvé, 2013), which underscores the importance of “first do no harm” for external actors. This underscores the methodological challenge of determining which is which – elite capture vs limited yet still meaningful openings.

This ambiguity suggests the relevance of looking for outliers on two levels – first, to identify exceptionally pro-participation openings from above to begin with, and second, to look for exceptional spaces that manage to resist elite diversion or capture *within* those

openings. This *nested* positive outlier agenda can help to identify lessons that are relevant to current discussions about how to bolster enabling environments for social and political action for empowerment and accountability.

#### 5. From “participatory development to “citizen engagement at the World Bank

The institutional context for pro-participation projects involves two internal countervailing forces: 1) ostensibly mandatory social-environmental policies created in response to external pressure and 2) internal staff advocacy. First, to avoid or reduce projects’ social and environmental costs, the World Bank’s “safeguard policies” mandate elements of open government and social participation.<sup>21</sup> These policies were created in direct response to international protest campaigns against high profile “problem projects” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. What advocacy campaigners at the time called the “case study approach” revealed costly system failures. Though subsequent implementation of safeguard policies in practice was notably uneven and incomplete (e.g., Rich, 2013; World Bank, 2010), they nevertheless created a set of institutional handholds that allowed subsequent advocacy campaigns to question, change and sometimes even block socially and environmentally damaging projects.<sup>22</sup> This is a case of a broader issue addressed by scholars who specialize in the study of international organizations – the systemic distance between their discourse and their practice, known as the “hypocrisy trap” (Weaver, 2008).

During the 1990s, while the new safeguard policies ostensibly raised the “floor” with minimum socioenvironmental standards, a small number of World Bank projects also attempted to raise the “ceiling” by creating space for public participation. Here its staff Participatory Development Learning Group contributed to agenda-setting (1990–1994).<sup>23</sup> Though these advocates lost many internal policy debates, such as the technocratic capture of the social capital agenda, they managed to influence some projects (e.g., Bebbington et al., 2006).

This study’s focus on outliers is also informed by an earlier scholarly analysis of whether and how World Bank projects put the pro-participation elements of the ostensibly mandatory social-environmental safeguard policies into practice (Fox & Gershman, 2000). Substantive openings were rare and partial. Of the ten projects studied, only one complied consistently with safe-

<sup>18</sup> The positive outlier approach is very different from the conventional evaluation framing of the “what works” question, which implicitly privileges “yes or no” answers (X does or does not “work”). For example, if an authoritarian government launched a supposedly participatory program in a context where no freedom of association had been previously tolerated, and the ostensible opening was captured by elites *most* of the time, then conventional criteria would conclude that the program “doesn’t work.” Indeed, a “first do no harm” approach would warn against a “net effect” of reinforcing the authoritarian status quo. At the same time, if contestation *within* the same program created unprecedented freedom of association in a substantial *minority* of a program’s area of influence, then the same project “worked” for possibly millions of disenfranchised people. This is precisely what happened in then-authoritarian Mexico in the 1980s and early 1990s, when three waves of top-down rural development reforms became contested terrain that allowed autonomous, multi-level peasant and indigenous organizations to emerge, forming an archipelago of countervailing forces of varying scope and density that survived for decades – amidst a sea of persistent authoritarian rule (Fox, 1996, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> This is one dimension of a broader internal incentive problem within the World Bank, which discourages high quality monitoring in most of its projects. Its own Independent Evaluation Group’s assessment of the quality of project level monitoring and evaluation has found a consistent pattern of self-described inadequate quality, both in a 1994 review and again more than twenty years later (World Bank, 1994b, 2016). The IEG’s 2016 review found that the quality of M&E was *less than* “substantial” in 70% of all projects that closed between 2006 and 2014 – in other words, unreliable (World Bank, 2016: 37). IEG rated only a miniscule share of projects as having high quality M&E. This indicates that the “knowledge bank” lacks robust information on what actually happened in more than two-thirds of its projects.

<sup>20</sup> This raises the issue of the methodological distinction noted in the literature on case studies between extreme vs deviant cases. Extreme cases are close to ideal-types, “often regarded as prototypical or paradigmatic of a phenomenon” (Gerring, 2017: 68). Deviant cases, in contrast, diverge “from an expected causal pattern... thereby registering a surprising result...” (Gerring, 2017: 74–75). Because of the dominant trends of elite capture or diversion noted earlier, even partial progress towards building actual countervailing power is more likely to be anomalous rather than an extreme along a continuum. This study’s focus on “least likely” cases does not address “ideal-types.”

<sup>21</sup> For its recently-revised Environmental and Social Framework, including a new commitment to “stakeholder engagement,” see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework>.

<sup>22</sup> Notably, the local/global advocacy campaign against mass evictions by India’s Narmada dam led to an official World Bank exposé of its management misrepresentation. This empowered campaigners and governmental allies to pressure its board to concede previously unimaginable public information access and accountability reforms (Fox & Brown, 1998, Udall, 1998). This external pressure also bolstered insider reformers who then waged a bureaucratic “war of position” to push conventional staff to come closer to complying with the safeguard policies – a process most evident in the intense internal struggle over the official resettlement policy (Fox, 1998). One key element of the package of safeguard policy reforms included the creation of a precedent-setting, public-facing Inspection Panel, a semi-autonomous investigative body with the capacity to respond to requests from affected people to document and spotlight the World Bank’s violations of its own policies (Clark et al., 2003).

<sup>23</sup> To address skepticism from other staff, this internal mutual support group generated evidence to show that participation could produce tangible development benefits (e.g., Narayan, 1995). Following the Bank’s 1994 board approval of a pro-participation strategy paper, insider advocates of participation clustered in the regional and central Environmental and Social Development units (Aycrigg, 1998; Bebbington et al., 2004, 2006; Miller-Adams 1999; World Bank, 1994a). The “pre-history” of this approach is identifiable in at least two outlier projects in the late 1970s and early 1980s, including integrated rural development in Mexico (Cernea 1983, 1992) and urban sanitation planning in Brazilian cities (Ostrom, 1996; Watson, 1992) – both then under authoritarian regimes that included pockets of more open development planners.

**Table 1**  
World Bank project cases (1991–2002).

Country	WB Project	Key project contribution to political opportunity for countervailing power	Enabling factor that allowed WB staff to encourage opening	Country context
<b>Mexico (1991-1995)</b>	Decentralization and Regional Development (\$350 m)	Participatory municipal social funds, including new entitlements for outlying villages	Project manager identified with WB participatory development	<i>Subnational:</i> Authoritarian, violent & conflict (Guerrero, 1994 Chiapas rebellion). <i>National:</i> Government legitimacy weakened by 1988 electoral fraud
<b>Brazil (1992-2002)</b>	Rondônia Natural Resource Management Project (Planaflo) (\$167 m)	Funding for land use zoning, including for smallholder associations & demarcation of indigenous territories & rubber-tapper extractive reserves	Project designed in direct response to international advocacy campaign	<i>Subnational:</i> Fragile and violent region (frontier Amazonian state) <i>National:</i> Recent transition to democracy, new constitution
<b>Colombia (1994-2001)</b>	Natural Resources Management Project (\$39 m)	Strengthening of nascent environmental agencies & funding for large-scale collective titling of Afrodescendant & indigenous territories, plus regional oversight by ethnic organizations	Project influenced by insider WB environmental & ethnic rights advocates	<i>Subnational:</i> Fragile and conflictive region (Pacific). <i>National:</i> New 1991 Constitution created democratic opening and ethnic rights provisions encouraged community organizing to promote implementation
<b>Indonesia (1998-2002)</b>	Kecamatan Development Program (\$253 m)	Funding for participatory social investments with accountability processes, plus public media oversight	Project manager was advocate of participation and public accountability	<i>Subnational:</i> Project areas included conflict & post-conflict regions (e.g., Aceh, Sulawesi, Maluku, Borneo) <i>National:</i> Project coincided with 1999 fall of authoritarian regime
<b>Ecuador (1998-2002)</b>	Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples Development Project (Prodepine) (\$50 m)	Project co-designed & co-managed with national indigenous organizations, to fund second-level groups	Project designed in response to indigenous protest & influenced by insider WB ethnic rights advocates	<i>Subnational:</i> Primary focus on indigenous highlands, also Amazon & Afrodescendant coastal region) <i>National:</i> Mass indigenous protest waves in 1990 & 1994, fragile regime (one coup, 6 presidents between 1997-2005)

guard policies, creating an enabling environment for autonomous grassroots membership organizations. Seven others did not even address relevant policies. Progress was possible where three factors converged: 1) internal World Bank staff champions, willing to invest their own political capital, managed to control project design and substantially implement safeguard policies involving environmental assessment, indigenous peoples and public access to information – 2) project design targeted pro-reform government agencies and 3) projects focused on regions where social constituencies already had some degree of representation and voice (Fox & Gershman, 2000).

The World Bank's evaluation department carried out an internal process review that focused on this 1990s wave of projects that were considered to include participatory elements, based on a random sample of investment projects (World Bank, 2001a).<sup>24</sup> The study found that while those reporting “using participatory approaches rose from 40 percent of new projects approved in 1994 to 70 percent in 1998... (m)uch of the participation was quite limited, to only small parts of projects, too rushed or superficial, or has been too ineffective to make much difference” (World Bank, 2001a: vi.). Long-term impact on institutions was considered unlikely because “participation usually involved an enclave within the community, project, or government—partly because Bank-assisted projects often bypassed existing processes or organizations” (World Bank, 2001a: vi–vii). In addition, the evaluation considered participation to be “undermined” because it was often limited to tailoring small subprojects to local conditions; indeed “(t)he absence of participation in project identification and evaluation greatly reduces the accountability of the Bank and implementing agencies to primary stakeholders” (World Bank, 2001a: 10).

Fast forward almost two decades and the World Bank's current Citizen Engagement Framework committed to build “beneficiary feedback” mechanisms into *all* new investment projects (World Bank, 2014b). Both internal and external observers expected that this official commitment would be watered down, turned into a “tick-the-box” exercise, dominated by belated, pro forma customer

satisfaction surveys, controlled consultation meetings that do not permit informed decisions, feedback loops that never close and grievance redress mechanisms that fail to redress grievances. These are likely outcomes, insofar as the World Bank's clients are governments and internal staff incentives still prioritize the infamous “pressure to lend” over the quality and impact of investments, according to its own evaluations (Portfolio Management Task Force, 1992; World Bank, 2014a). A recent official evaluation of the “Citizen Engagement” framework found both ambitious combinations of multiple pro-participation commitments that it described as “thick”— and minimalist “thin” approaches (World Bank, 2018). An independent academic review concurred, finding a substantial fraction of recent World Bank-funded projects that commit, at least at the design stage, to multiple measures to create space for citizen action (Nadelman, Le, & Sah, 2019). This persistent pattern of mixed results underscores the relevance of distinguishing between superficial openings for participation versus tangible, targeted actions with the potential to enable countervailing power – which will be the main focus of the evidence review that follows.

## 6. Case analysis

Process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015) is applied below to each case in the following ways: 1) the enabling factors are identified – in the national, World Bank and relevant territorial contexts; 2) the project's mechanisms for both enabling and blocking countervailing power are identified; 3) the actors and processes involved in building some form of countervailing power are analysed, including elite backlash; 4) countervailing power outcomes over the long term are identified.

### 6.1. Mexico: Decentralization and Regional Development [DRD] (1991–1995)

At the time, in most rural areas Mexico's authoritarian regime relied on local boss rule, which did not tolerate freedom of association. Yet after the 1988 electoral fraud, the incoming government attempted to restore legitimacy with the National Solidarity Program, which funded ostensibly participatory social funds and

<sup>24</sup> This review was approved at the highest level, yet the evaluation department did not publish it.

reformed laws to allow public oversight for the first time (Cornelius, Craig & Fox, 1994). In this context, Mexico's Decentralization and Regional Development project supported state and local governments to fund small-scale, anti-poverty infrastructure investments in four very low-income states, as part of a broader shift in World Bank lending to Mexico from structural adjustment to social and environmental investments (Fox & Aranda, 1996; Fox, 2000). These municipal social funds were the first large-scale source of funding available to rural municipalities, responding to longstanding unmet demands for self-governance in a historically very centralized system.<sup>25</sup>

Mexican Social Development Ministry policymakers, supported by World Bank project staff, used the federal government's discretionary administrative power to make a national policy change that created an enabling environment for previously excluded outlying villages. In 1992, new national rules governing the distribution of rural municipal funds capped the fraction allowed to be spent in town centers.<sup>26</sup> This was the first time in Mexico that outlying villages had an entitlement to government funding for public goods, which created an incentive for them to engage in collective action and broader public oversight of municipal authorities. In much of rural Mexico, these sub-municipal communities were the primary expression of even partially autonomous indigenous territorial self-governance (Fox, 2007).

The state of Oaxaca offered a best-case scenario for these participatory municipal social funds because they engaged with its surviving legacy of autonomous village self-governance based on indigenous customary law. According to a state-wide study of a representative sample of rural municipalities, participatory community bodies made the key project decisions in 58 percent of the municipalities – a relatively high rate for Mexican social programs at that time. State officials induced project decisions in the rest (Fox & Aranda, 1996). Following the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in the neighbouring state of Chiapas, Oaxaca legally recognized indigenous municipal governance systems. Subsequent research showed that Oaxacan municipalities governed by customary law (*usos y costumbres*) performed better in terms of local public goods provision than did conventionally-governed municipalities, sustained highly deliberative processes of citizen engagement and most did not fall into the hands of local bossism (Díaz Cayeros, Magaloni & Ruiz Euler, 2014).<sup>27</sup>

The same municipal funds program had very different outcomes in states with different pre-existing local governance regimes. In the three other states funded under the same project – Chiapas, Guerrero and Hidalgo – most rural mayors represented local elites who were accustomed to using violence and clientelism to impose class and racial domination. Then the Zapatista rebellion erupted in Chiapas in 1994, bringing the Mexico's systemic oppression of indigenous peoples to global attention. Widespread perceptions of municipal authority as symbols of boss rule in Chiapas were revealed when indigenous dissidents took sledgehammers to the “municipal palaces,” creating images reminiscent of the collective dismantling of the Berlin Wall just five years earlier. In the

aftermath of the rebellion, the government used the federal municipal funds (and redistricting) as counterinsurgency measures, in order to divide communities and weaken the Zapatistas' social base.<sup>28</sup> Because of these differences in pre-existing governance systems, the national municipal social funds program that created unprecedented civic and social entitlements for Oaxacan indigenous communities also bolstered authoritarian boss rule in other states.

The World Bank project's potential contribution to countervailing power was not its support for municipal social funds per se – that was a pre-existing national program. Its main innovation was to encourage the provisions that mandated pro-village targeting, weakening the municipal center's monopoly control of public funds. Yet this reform turned out to be temporary. In 1998, as part of Mexico's gradual transition to multi-party rule, a national decentralization law bolstered municipal autonomy – and in the process removed the centrally-imposed limits on town centers' claims to federal funds.<sup>29</sup> The promise of entitlements to official social funds lived on, however, informing numerous long-term village advocacy campaigns to gain standing and resources vis-à-vis traditionally centralized municipal authorities.<sup>30</sup> Yet even in Oaxaca, both scholars and municipal governance advocates agree that most central municipal authorities continue to control allocation of social funds to outlying hamlets.<sup>31</sup>

The political opportunity for bolstering countervailing power in this case involved funding for rural municipalities to follow ostensibly participatory processes to support demand-driven community development investments, including a brief window of opportunity that established entitlements to outlying villages to make claims on those municipal funds. However, the long-term legacy of this early 1990s policy shift to enable voice of excluded communities is very limited. Throughout rural Mexico, widespread, persistent claims by outlying villages to municipal authorities for recognition and funding persist, but still lack the consolidated countervailing power needed to exercise enforceable rights.

## 6.2. Brazil – Rondônia Natural Resource Management Project [Planafloro] (1992–2002)

In the context of the high-profile 1980s debate over the World Bank's contribution to tropical deforestation by paving roads that

<sup>28</sup> See extensive details in Burguete Cal y Mayor & Leyva Solano (2007) and Burguete Cal y Mayor (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Legally, a formal enabling environment for submunicipal community voice existed in about half of Mexico's states because they mandated self-governance for community authorities, but this was not backed up with pro-poor municipal funding allocation rules (Fox 2007: 208–210). Plus, rules for community representation on municipal councils were widely ignored in practice.

<sup>30</sup> Hernández-Díaz & Martínez found that in Oaxaca central municipal control was “changing, and villages (*agencias*) increasingly demand that the municipal center treat them differently” (2007: 180). They found that official complaints by villagers to the state congress against municipal centers for discrimination in resource allocation increased from 50 in the first half of 2002 to more than 200 in 2003. See also Fox (2007: 185) and Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales/Comunica (2014) for practitioner accounts in the Mixteca region – where a municipal democracy campaigner reports that mayors continue to allocate social investment funds at their discretion (Bernardo Ramírez Bautista, Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, personal communication, Dec. 3, 2019). In Guerrero, a long-term advocate of municipal governance reform finds that while village committees make persistent claims, municipal resource allocation continues to be discretionary and electorally-driven (Carlos García Jiménez, People's Union, personal communication, Dec. 5, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> For example, Eisenstadt cites the state's former election director's report that villages had little say in municipal fund allocation (2011: 124). Martínez found that Oaxacan municipal authorities' responses to entitlement claims from outlying villages were ad hoc and politicized rather than consistent or rule-based, which suggests a lack of countervailing power (Martínez, 2013). Moreover, in the absence of proactive anti-corruption measures – according to one longtime participant-observer of Oaxacan rural municipal governance: “the decentralization of resources to the municipalities has also contributed to decentralizing practices of corruption and strengthening local elites” (Fernando Melo, email communication, June 28, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> In practice, the political character of the Solidarity program varied across both its subprograms and regions, ranging from top-down clientelism to more pluralistic and inclusionary relationships with autonomous social organizations (Fox, 1994). The municipal funds component was no exception.

<sup>26</sup> The first official reference to this pro-poor targeting measure is in a Planning and Budget Ministry report prepared as part of the World Bank project (Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto, 1992). Though the project covered only four states, the targeting measure was applied to the program nationally. See details in the government's program handbook (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 1992: 19).

<sup>27</sup> See also Hernández-Díaz & Martínez (2007) and Velásquez (2000). Access to the standing needed to participate in community assemblies is male-dominated, however, with limited female access to voice, vote and the right to be elected (Velásquez, 2004; Eisenstadt, 2011).



promoted the burning of the Amazon, international and national advocacy organizations used their “boomerang” leverage to persuade the World Bank to fund a Brazilian government project that created space for social participation (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The Rondônia Natural Resource Management Project (Planaflo) funded integrated rural development and technical approaches to ecological zoning and environmental conservation in Brazil’s western Amazon, in response to a predecessor World Bank project that became widely seen as an emblematic ‘development disaster’ (Keck, 1998; Feeney, 1998; Redwood, 2002; Rodrigues, 2004). Yet the political context in Rondônia was institutionally fragile, violent – and because many residents were recent migrants from other Brazilian states – lacking in the social networks that are widely associated with autonomous capacity for self-representation and collective voice. In contrast to the pioneering, more well-known rubber-tappers movement of the neighboring state of Acre, they were less organized in Rondônia.

Planaflo focused on land-use zoning and included agricultural extension, territorial demarcation, rural credit, education, creation of protected areas, institution building – and some road building – with the stated goal of benefiting small-scale farmers, rubber tappers and indigenous peoples (Garrison & Aparicio, n.d.). Yet the state government limited the project’s participatory council to “window-dressing” (Keck, 1998: 204). Moreover, the World Bank moved the project forward in spite of government noncompliance with its environmental preconditions (Rodrigues, 2004: 54). Not long after the project launched, in 1994, the failure of stakeholder participation mechanisms led a local civil society coalition to campaign for the World Bank to suspend disbursements, with international advocacy support. Critics filed one of the first formal complaints to the World Bank’s new public grievance redress mechanism, the Inspection Panel (Garrison & Aparicio, n.d.; Keck, 1998; Millikan, 2001; Rodrigues, 2004). The claim led the World Bank to bolster support for demarcation of indigenous and rubber-tapper territories and mandated a mid-term review that restructured the project to include more participation – though its board did not authorize a formal investigation (Rodrigues, 2004: 75). Advocates criticised the belated reforms for not adequately addressing the capacity of the state’s elites to block and capture project goals (Feeney, 1998).<sup>32</sup>

The project restructuring in response to the Inspection Panel claim included an unprecedented fund for social and civil society organizations in the state, with some power-sharing over resource allocation (Garrison & Aparicio, n.d.; Rodrigues, 2004). A review of this fund found that “although the economic development impacts are mixed, approximately 50% of the projects delivered tangible benefits to local communities” (Browder, 2002; Browder et al. 2008). The reform package also expanded protected areas that were directly managed by social organizations (small farmers, rubber tappers, indigenous peoples), as well as environmental conservation areas and parks that were to be co-managed by civil society organizations (Alves et al., 2008). Incipient local organizations turned to the program to address needs that existing government agencies should have met, and they were “stretched... too thin” by the government’s extensive bureaucratic requirements and “unable to confront the backlash that the Rondonian conservative forces ... unleashed since 1998 against many of the gains of the Planaflo” (Rodrigues, 2004: 85, 88). Indeed, the governor illegally

diverted program funds for electoral purposes with impunity, paralyzing operations for an entire year in 1999 (Rodrigues, 2004: 86).

Yet most of the funded organizations were politically progressive, focused on bolstering grassroots associational life – for example, building meeting halls in remote communities (Brown, Brown, & Deposato, 2007, 2008). This concentrated wave of funding had measurable political effects, significantly bolstering the Workers’ Party vote between the 1994 and 1998 presidential elections – though starting from a low base-line in a conservative state (Brown, Brown, & Deposato, 2002, 2007). Yet, unexpectedly, the funding also bolstered electoral support for the political machine associated with economic elites in the more closely contested gubernatorial elections. It turns out that “while the governor did not control who received the money, he could control when it was released. As projects were completed and funds released, the governor made appearances to claim credit for delivering funds to communities” (Brown et al., 2007).

A decade after Planaflo, its contribution to collective titling still survived, with indigenous territories accounting for 21% of the state’s land, and another 7% in rubber-tapper extractive reserves (Alves et al., 2008: 9). Yet their actual control of their land was precarious, lacked external support and subject to land invasions, repression and bribery of leaders (Alves et al., 2008). According to the World Bank’s own evaluation: “protection of conservation areas and indigenous lands is hampered by weak or absent management and enforcement procedures... Organizational arrangements for protecting boundaries are inefficient and unsustainable. There is little control of deforestation because licensing and enforcement procedures have not been implemented and land tenure is disputed in many areas” (World Bank, 2004b). Indeed, the state government actively tried to shrink and undermine protected areas, while the federal government – including under the Worker’s Party federal government – did little to strengthen them. Both levels of government failed to uphold the rule of law. The Amazon Working Group concluded that the underlying driver of the devastation of protected areas in Rondônia was “a crisis of governance... characterized by the subordination of public institutions and the Rule of Law to the private interests of economic and political groups involved in the illegal appropriation of the public patrimony (invasion of public lands, logging theft)” (Alves et al., 2008: 56). As Keck concluded, “Planaflo is a compelling example of the limits of outside leverage: the limits of the World Bank’s ability to get governments to do things they were not prepared to do anyway and the limits of the NGO community’s ability to support local partners who have not established a strong local base...” (1998: 205).

The political opportunity for countervailing power in this case involved a power-sharing body that directed funding to rural grassroots organizations, as well as official titling and demarcation of extensive indigenous and rubber-tapper collective territories. On balance, however, the available evidence suggests that project efforts to bolster countervailing power were offset by contradictory political effects and did not survive beyond the end of the project.

### 6.3. Colombia Natural Resources Management Program [NRMP] (1994–2001)

Colombia’s 1991 Constitution constituted a political opening that inspired a wave of effervescent optimism, both within civil society and the state, about the prospects for deepening democracy and peace with justice – and it included bold new commitments to indigenous and Afrodescendant rights. Its Article 55 led the Congress to pass Law 70 in 1993, granting black communities territorial land rights in the Pacific coast region, a biodiversity hotspot. This new political opening encouraged an unprecedented wave of Afrodescendant grassroots organizing and advocacy campaigning, including calls for the right to territory and the formation of the ethno-

<sup>32</sup> The official World Bank evaluation later concurred: “The conservation agenda was pushed strongly by the Bank but was resisted by state interests which were primarily concerned with development activities. There were no clear targets for the zoning of land use and no commitment to enforcement. The substantial pressures for land clearing were underestimated... The mid-term review failed to address the principal shortcomings of the project, grafting on a community-driven development component (in deference to NGO pressure) without adequately engaging the private sector and state and local government” (World Bank, 2004a).

territorial organizations required to petition for land.<sup>33</sup> National advocacy debates that informed Law 70 addressed trade-offs involved in the associated “ethnicization of blackness” (Paschel, 2010: 739; 2016: 197–198).<sup>34</sup> This was the Colombian government’s first tangible recognition of black rights since the abolition of slavery.<sup>35</sup>

Law 70 was followed by a 1995 decree that government agencies should demarcate collective lands to Afrodescendant community councils, which were required to solicit and manage the land. Between 1996 and mid-2003, the Colombian government demarcated five million hectares, titling 122 black territories to councils that represented 270,000 people, which was one of “the most ambitious and radical territorial re-orderings ever attempted in Latin America” (Offen, 2003: 44).<sup>36</sup> Plans for large-scale infrastructure investments for extractives and trade in the region were put off (Cárdenas, 2012; Escobar, 2008). Community-based advocacy organizations like the Process of Black Communities, as well as technical advisors from universities and reformist government staff, documented the ethnohistorical land claims needed to formalize titling, which reached half the region’s land (Grueso, Rosero, & Escobar, 1998; Agnew & Oslender, 2013). Yet shortly after the titling began to take off, the nation’s civil war intruded into the region. Collusion between government security forces and paramilitaries displaced thousands of recently titled community land-holders.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the indigenous districts (*resguardos*) and black community councils survived. Consolidated second-level organizations now manage vast territories and work together in an inter-ethnic coalition in the department of Chocó. Community land titles bolstered bargaining power and self-governance while promoting environmental sustainability (Ng’weno, 2000: 5; Vélez, 2011: 19).<sup>38</sup>

This World Bank project was part of a small cluster of outliers that actively supported collective titling of black and indigenous territories in Latin America during this period (e.g., Davis, Uquillas & Eltz, 2004; Hale, 2011). The 1992 Yanacónas region-wide consultation between black movement leaders and World Bank staff was pivotal, leading the National Planning Department (a key government agency) to support what became Law 70 (Ng’weno, 2000:

13, 53). In 1993, World Bank staff conditioned loan approval on regularizing ethnic land rights – citing both their own recently-approved Forestry Policy and the Colombian congress’ passage of the law to support “intensification” of the project’s funding for collective ethnic titling.<sup>39</sup> The NRMP project then funded consultations leading up to the important procedural Decree 1745 in 1995 (Offen, 2003: 45), as well as all of the actual processing of the collective ethnic titles for Afro-Colombians and 17% of indigenous titles in the region (Ng’weno, 2000: 7). The project also supported Regional Committees with community representation, to do monitoring and oversight of project implementation (World Bank, 2001: 13).

This external support was significant because the Colombian state was slow to create institutions with the commitment and capacity needed to carry out large-scale ethnic titling of ethnic territories. Meanwhile, inter-ethnic conflicts over title boundaries emerged because project design and the legal framework did not include measures that recognized the cultural legacy of shared territories. The unresponsiveness of the national land reform agency, INCORA, contributed to tensions between indigenous and black communities. A combination of pressure from communities, interethnic disputes and World Bank social specialists eventually obliged INCORA to create a dedicated unit and to begin to hire Afro-Colombian staff (Ng’weno, 2007: 212). Indigenous and black community advocacy to address INCORA bottlenecks led sympathetic World Bank staff to encourage the Colombian government to remove key regional directors for “inefficiencies and irregularities” (Ng’weno, 2000: 28). The World Bank later restructured the project, in an effort to address inter-ethnic tensions (Sánchez Gutiérrez & Roldán Ortega, 2002; Ng’weno, 2000: 64). Collective ethnic titling in the Pacific region eventually peaked between 2000 and 2002, followed by national political changes that blocked further progress.<sup>40</sup> To an unusual degree, the NRMP project sided with advocates of Afrodescendant and indigenous collective titling.<sup>41</sup> In this case, the political opportunity for countervailing power involved external funding and political support to bolster insider-outsider coalitions that created community councils and titled ethnic territories on a large scale, carried out during a brief window of opportunity by a state usually not known for effective implementation of land reform. These ethnic territories continue to be managed by broad-based, scaled-up social organizations that constitute building blocks of countervailing power. Community councils still face mining and agribusiness interests, violent repression with impunity and electoral clientelism.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>33</sup> On this mobilization of Colombian Afrodescendant civil society in the 1990s, see Asher (2009); Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar (1998); Oslender (2016); Hoffmann (2000); Paschel (2010); Pardo (2002); Restrepo (2002) and Wade (2012), among others. This social and civic process did not have electoral spillover effects, as political representation in Afrodescendant territories continued to be dominated by clientelistic machines (Agudelo 2002).

<sup>34</sup> According to Wade, Law 70 “indigenized, regionalized and ruralized the question of blackness in Colombia” (2012: 141). Pardo argues that government support for organizing rural black community land councils for titling led them to focus more on their own consolidation than on continued collaboration with urban organizations. The land councils “realized that they don’t need intermediaries to dialogue with and access the resources of the state” (2002: 74). This finding could be interpreted as contributing to self-determination.

<sup>35</sup> As Charo Mina-Rojas of the Process of Black Communities put it: “The process of formulating Law 70 and collective titling created the opportunity to document and ‘systematize,’ within the framework of the law and with academic and intellectual foundations, the communities’ existing practices of *buen vivir*, as a counterproposal to capitalist development – including ideas about collective property, territoriality (in contrast to ideas about land as a commodity to exploit) and the complex relationship between people, nature and territory in this mega-biodiversity region.” (email communication, July 7, 2019)

<sup>36</sup> This was more of a land *restitution* program than land redistribution, insofar as the government had legally dispossessed these ancestral community territories in 1959 by unilaterally declaring them “vacant lands.”

<sup>37</sup> See Grajales (2015); IDMC (2007) and Oslender (2007). The Inter-American Court of Human Rights later found the Colombian government responsible (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2013).

<sup>38</sup> For a nuanced analysis of the limits and contradictions of the collective titles in the face of agribusiness efforts at dispossession, see Cárdenas (2012). She finds: “The changes in land tenure brought about by Law 70 created new multicultural subjects – black communities – and new spaces of agricultural production – collective territories... But this visibility has a dark side, too. Law 70 has also made it possible for those same agents of the state and international capital to identify, negotiate with and coopt the new political actors” (2012: 320).

<sup>39</sup> Internal World Bank project appraisal memos from Ewald Goetz “Colombia – Proposed Natural Resources Management Program – Consensus Building on Forest Policy,” April 14, 1993 and Nicholas Kraft, Division Chief for Agriculture in Latin America, August 19, 1993 (accessed via World Bank Archival requests).

<sup>40</sup> Of the land titles officially listed in 2015, 96% had been finalized before 2006 (República de Colombia, 2015). The government also declined to bolster the Law 70 with comprehensive implementing legislation. More recently, new initiatives in Afrodescendant territories outside the Pacific region are advocating for a revival of collective land titling (e.g., Guerrero Lovera et al., 2017).

<sup>41</sup> While the internal influence of pro-“ethno-development” World Bank insiders peaked during this period, bolstered by environmental protection arguments, at the same time other World Bank staff pursued efforts to develop a large-scale loan for “negotiated,” or “market-assisted” land reform in the rest of Colombia. Both independent and World Bank analysts recognized that the implementation of Colombia’s 1994 land reform law was imposed arbitrarily, biased in favor of better-off farmers and its transactions were largely secret (Deininger, 1999; Borrás, 2003, 2007; Deininger and Lavadenz, 2004). The Bank supported a pilot effort ostensibly to address those problems, to justify a \$300 million loan in the design phase. That project was dropped from the pipeline, however. Its once-public, preparation phase summary is no longer listed on the World Bank’s Colombia country page (World Bank, 1993). Critics were apparently successful.

<sup>42</sup> For longer-term research on the significance of second level federations of community councils as the principal expression of autonomous institutional power for Afrodescendants in Colombia’s Pacific region, see Gracia Hincapié (2013); García Sánchez (2017); Peña et al. (2017); Vélez (2011); Vélez et al. (2019).



#### 6.4. Indonesia: Kecamatan Development Program [KDP] (1998–2007)<sup>43</sup>

KDP was Southeast Asia's largest "community-driven development" (CDD) project, designed shortly before the 1999 fall of Indonesia's New Order dictatorship. Its emphasis on village level democracy resonated with the national transition to democracy (Wong & Guggenheim, 2005). KDP architects gained policy leverage in the wake of international protest against mega-projects, drawing on social theory and agrarian studies to design an explicit participatory institution-building strategy in an effort to address the authoritarian legacy of patronage and corruption.<sup>44</sup>

KDP's block grants invigorated existing, but weak village councils. KDP deployed a tiered system of trained "social and engineering facilitators" to supported participatory village planning processes that submitted proposals to a competitive review process at the subdistrict level (Guggenheim, 2006: 114). Projects were selected by village representatives who were not part of the formal executive. Subdistricts (Kecamatan) included 20–50 villages, with between 10,000 and 75,000 people. Project architects chose the subdistrict level of government as their key site of intervention because its weakness and prior lack of resources meant that it was often not already under the entrenched control of local elites. KDP architects expected local project success to vary depending on pre-existing levels of village level capacity, which were studied in detail (Bebbington, Guggenheim, Olson, & Woolcock, 2004; 200; Gibson & Woolcock, 2008).

KDP's competitive proposal selection process was intended to encourage villages to negotiate internally and with each other to decide which proposals moved forward, including proactive measures for gender inclusion. Villages could submit two proposals, and the second had to be from a women's group (Chavis, 2010: 266). Project monitoring was designed to identify and address corruption risks with multiple complementary approaches, including unprecedented village level transparency requirements and the funding of independent media to play a proactive watchdog role (Woodhouse, 2005). Where those measures were insufficient, project authorities sanctioned or dropped problem districts. Conflict zones were also closely monitored to determine whether KDP was contributing to or aggravating tensions. KDP also had to negotiate the revival of traditional customary authorities (*adat*), in an effort to offset their tendency to exclude women and the poor. Yet KDP's standardized approach to convening "invited spaces" limited its capacity to engage in proactive inclusion of the poorest villagers (Guggenheim, 2006: 131–132).<sup>45</sup> As Gibson and Woolcock put it, "KDP's spaces provided open, accessible forums in which marginalized groups contested the power of governing elites to make development decisions unilaterally by engaging them in

face-to-face relations of deliberative contestation, often for the first time. The prospect of choosing, managing, and evaluating a shared, tangible development project provided a material incentive for engaging in such relation" (2008: 175). Their comparative case analysis found that "these spaces, incentives, and resources, in addition to KDP's complaints mechanisms, can help incrementally shift power relations in favor of local marginalized groups" (2008: 159). As Chavis summarized: "The core idea of KDP is not only to make elite capture more difficult but to change the cultural and political environments that make elite capture possible" (2010: 267).

Meanwhile, senior World Bank and government authorities backed KDP because it injected large amounts of funds to quickly build numerous public works in low-income regions during a delicate political and economic transition. This led to a series of large follow-on loans and, in 2007, the project's eventual full transformation into a national government program (PNPM). This legacy in turn influenced the 2014 Village Law, which includes provisions that institutionalize local government participatory budgeting nationwide.<sup>46</sup>

KDP was informed and accompanied by an unusually extensive series of evaluations and scholarly research projects. Social science field experiments were deployed to test democratic decision-making innovations and combinations of top-down and bottom-up anti-corruption audits (Olken, 2007, 2008); post conflict reintegration (Barron, Diprose, & Woolcock, 2001); and community oversight of government service delivery. In addition, intensive, large-scale, multi-sited comparative ethnographic research addressed whether and how KDP affected conflict. Several regions had recently had civil conflict and much of the rest of the countryside experienced pervasive everyday violence. In the latter regions, Barron, Diprose, and Woolcock found that "elites have the autonomy to capture KDP process in the way they do other projects; whether they do so is a partial measure of KDP's efficacy in providing constraints on elite power" (2011: 115). Because KDP was designed to encourage a power shift, it generated friction – the question was whether that conflict was bounded and – in effect – productive. The most common answer was yes; KDP forums tended to solve project problems and avoid conflict escalation (Barron, Diprose, & Woolcock, 2011: 121). Key informants surveyed in two provinces were asked whether village-level decision-making in KDP areas had become more or less democratic. In one province, 33% reported "much more democratic," 44% "somewhat more democratic," and only 3% "less democratic. In the other, 22% reported "much more democratic," 35% "somewhat more democratic," and only 3% "less democratic" (2011: 191). Yet numerous studies found that KDP's innovations did not influence the rest of village governance; its forums, facilitators and local leaders were not used to address conflicts outside the program – in contrast to the hopes of project architects.<sup>47</sup>

The most extensive scholarly critique of KDP found ethnographic evidence of elite capture and argued that the program "envisaged empowerment as a product that could be manufactured by technique" (Li, 2007: 269). KDP's approach to democratization of

<sup>43</sup> This first project ended in 2002 and was followed by two continuous loans through 2007, so the research discussed here covers the entire period.

<sup>44</sup> As KDP's lead architect put it "to have social specialists sitting in the belly of the beast has allowed a translation of ethnographic findings into project designs and mechanisms..." [yet] "much of the overall impetus to reform the Bank came from the growing criticism of international groups who no longer accepted the Bank's self-perpetuating calculations of the costs and benefits of giant development schemes" (Guggenheim 2006: 134–135).

<sup>45</sup> A pilot civil society-led program started under KDP supported for innovative leadership training for widows and other female household heads. The Women-Headed Family Empowerment initiative (PEKKA) is a very unusual case of a World Bank-incubated project that became a broad national movement (Zulminarni et al., 2018). According to its founder, Nani Zulminarni: "[This support] was our blessing, and we continue [to] grow as an independent movement long after KDP ended – even though at the end they did not scale it up as we wished. We realized that our approach and organizing strategy could not be fully implemented with the bureaucracy, development approach and its procurement system. Becoming an independent movement, separate from the KDP administration, gave us more freedom and space to experiment and exercise the community-based approach and grow grassroots women leaders" (email communication, June 19, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> For example, "The Village Law, enacted in 2014, incorporated principles and practices from KDP and PNPM into village government and governance" (<https://localsolutionstopoverty.org/engagementarea/village-law-and-community-empowerment.html>, accessed May 12, 2019). See also Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan (2016) and Salim et al (2017), among others. Compared to KDP and PNPM, the Village Law strengthens the power of village heads.

<sup>47</sup> See Pollock & Kendrick (2015). As one impact evaluation finds: "The fact that institutions other than PNPM do not yet emulate the transparency and governance features of the program indicates that a key objective of increased social accountability is not being met... [This] points to the need for a sustained period of facilitation and a greater emphasis on the skills and institutions of the community themselves, to build up community capacity for more effective collective action and demand for better governance" (PNPM, 2012: 3, 6; Voss 2008).

governance was limited to "proper channels" and did not address forms of citizen voice and higher-intensity conflicts outside the context of local social investment projects, such as where the state was complicit in conflicts, or where illegal logging provoked protest (Li, 2007).<sup>48</sup> Li observes "KDP's designers understood very well that there is little natural solidarity in Indonesia's villages. Yet they still believed they could intervene on the side of the poor simply by insisting on procedures for including their voices, and their choices, in the planning process" (2008: 114). Yet she also found that "KDP was much tighter than the old system – there were far fewer opportunities to steal funds" (Li, 2008: 114).

KDP deployed an unusually multi-faceted monitoring system, including support for independent investigative journalists as watchdogs (Wong, 2003). In spite of efforts, however, this monitoring system was not able to determine the overall relative weights of elite capture vs democratic transformation scenarios in such a vast project. Senior staff attention gravitated to the "tails" of the distribution in the variation.<sup>49</sup> The survey reported above gives a sense of the range of scenarios, but the results are not based on a representative sample of the thousands of villages where KDP was active. These findings underscore the risks, and therefore the relevance of monitoring systems that can identify the nature and frequency of elite capture. As result, the overall mix of democratizing outcomes vs elite capture is not clear – nor is how scaling up in the national PNPMP program may have affected the quality of the implementation of KDP's civic innovations. That said, the available empirical evidence finds that KDP's combination of new rules and incentives enabled a significant, sustained and large-scale transition to stronger village governance in large parts of the country, eventually informing participatory budgeting elements in the 2014 national Village Law.<sup>50</sup>

The political opportunity for creating some degree of countervailing power included the following elements: bolstering of participatory subdistrict councils, grounded in local deliberative spaces for proposing community development projects and proactive gender inclusion. The project both encouraged and bounded collective action, with additional leverage provided by transparency and accountability reforms.

#### 6.5. Ecuador: Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples Development Project [Prodepine] (1998–2002)

By the 1990s, Ecuador's indigenous movement had gained national political influence, combining mass protests to challenge neoliberal policies with extensive institutionalized power-sharing in governmental education, health and development agencies. The national movement was grounded in a dense web of multi-level indigenous organizations that originated in earlier peasant land reform struggles and then became key actors in a pan-ethnic, anti-racist movement (e.g. Pallares, 2002). This context made possible the Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples Development Project (Prodepine), which was designed in direct response

to the 1994 national indigenous protest against proposed privatization of communal land and water resources (van Nieuwkoop & Uquillas, 2000; Treackle, 1998).<sup>51</sup>

Prodepine became the first stand-alone World Bank project to focus directly on indigenous and Afrodescendant communities. It funded local capacity building, demand-driven rural subprojects, land tenure regularization, cultural heritage activities, and the institutional strengthening of the Council for the Development of the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador. This government agency managed the project, cogoverned with national indigenous organizations in a de facto majority, with the World Bank as broker (van Nieuwkoop & Uquillas, 2000). This unusual hybrid arrangement was made possible by the convergence of the national indigenous movement's growing political power and the influence of social development specialists within the World Bank.

Independent analysts differ over whether Prodepine's co-governance process and its focus on strengthening self-managed, autonomous ethnic organizations was an institutional concession to protest – or a deliberate effort to weaken and divide the indigenous movement (Griffiths, 2000; Guatemal, 2006; ICCI, 2001). Waves of national protest and political instability persisted during project implementation, and Prodepine ended up getting caught in the crossfire (Walsh, 2001). World Bank project managers sought to apply technical rather than political criteria to funding decisions and to sustain a pluralistic co-governance and resource allocation process in a context where Ecuador's largest indigenous confederation, CONAIE, claimed to represent 70% of the country's indigenous population (Uquillas & van Nieuwkoop, 2003: 14). The governance structure of Prodepine and its host agency became contested terrain; some CONAIE advocates questioned power-sharing with other ethnic confederations, while an emerging national debate over different forms of indigenous representation counterposed organizations based on "nationality" or "peoplehood" vs those based on territorial, class and religious affinities (Lucero, 2008). For some critics, the project's neutrality during high profile national political conflicts was considered evidence of its divisive intentions (ICCI, 2001).

In practice, Prodepine's primary focus was on Ecuador's second-level, self-managed indigenous-led membership organizations focused on regional social and economic development – and on bolstering the capacity of the new hybrid government agency that funded them (Bebbington & Carroll, 2000; Carroll, 2002).<sup>52</sup> Two-thirds of the second-level organizations funded had already been in operation for more than five years, two-thirds included more than 10 grassroots organizations, and 60% were multi-ethnic (Carroll, 2002: 442–443). Prodepine also created incentives for informal community-based ethnic affinity organizations to form their own second-level organizations.<sup>53</sup> Most funded organizations pursued both advocacy and economic goals, though some focused on just one or the other (Carroll, 2002). The project's academic critics contended that its focus on more consolidated second-level indigenous membership organizations favored relatively better-off communities and leaders with more formal education, reinforcing "projectism," fragmentation and less overtly politicized agendas (Bretón, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008, 2014, 2015; Larrea Maldonado, 2010; Martínez Valle, 2006). Indeed, diverse analysts agree that funding private

<sup>48</sup> Gibson and Woolcock compared cases of overt protest against abuse of power with the exercise of voice within KDP and concurred with Li insofar as: "There is no obvious bridge between, on the one hand, contestation... within decision-making about KDP resource allocation and, on the other hand, more fundamental and ongoing challenges to opportunity hoarding of public power by governing elites" (2008: 172). Yet Gibson and Woolcock did not find cases where KDP somehow muted extra-institutional protest (2008). In contrast to their focus on agency and contestation, Carroll's critique takes a more structuralist approach, recognizing that KDP was more participatory and less corrupt than other rural development programs while emphasizing KDP's compatibility with neoliberalism because of its emphasis on productive infrastructure investment, microcredit – and its use of competition between village proposals as a project decision-making principle (Carroll 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Scott Guggenheim, former World Bank project manager (email communication, April 19, 2019)

<sup>50</sup> Interview, Sentot Satria, March 28, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> For a movement strategist's assessment of that protest's limited bargaining power and partial blunting of government efforts to privatize communal lands and water, see Pacari (1996).

<sup>52</sup> Representation of indigenous peoples in the lowland Amazon region took different forms (Lucero, 2008: 148–149).

<sup>53</sup> For example, Prodepine's central role in encouraging the formation of the first Afro-Ecuadorian second level peasant organization with a political agenda is well-documented in the case of the 38 communities that constituted the Federation of Black Communities and Organizations of Imbabura y Carchi (FECONIC) (Zambrano Murillo 2011: 16, 70–71). Thanks to Carlos de la Torre for this reference.

rather than public goods tended to accentuate long-term class differentiation trends – and the relative mix of such projects funded by Prodepine is not clear (Carroll, 2002; Martínez Valle, 2006).

In practice, Prodepine went beyond narrowly economic development projects, venturing into more political terrain by supporting third-level federations and fourteen municipalities that were governed by a new national indigenous political party (Andolina, Laurie, & Radcliffe, 2009: 90).<sup>54</sup> In contrast to previous government rural development programs widely associated with clientelistic exclusion of independent grassroots organizations (e.g., PRONADER), 69% of the almost 1600 local level projects reportedly went to affiliates of CONAIE (World Bank, 2003b: 7). Prodepine also funded the “legalization” (titling) of more than 252,000 ha of indigenous and Afrodescendant community lands, accompanied by trained grassroots paralegals – though the government did not provide the counterpart funding needed to address highland land conflicts through purchases (Nieto Cabrera, 2004, World Bank, 2003b). The project’s primary focus on tangible measures to strengthen autonomous, large-scale membership organizations differs from the official reforms limited to the “minimal package of cultural rights” known at the time as “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Hale, 2002).<sup>55</sup>

At CONAIE’s 2001 national congress, their demands included structural changes in Prodepine and its implementing agency, including strengthening the role of “nationalities and peoples” in both staffing and project funding allocation in a planned follow-on project (CONAIE, 2001: 4). By 2005, a debate within CONAIE led a majority of affiliate federations to reject a Prodepine successor project, so the government cancelled it (World Bank, 2006). Their reasons included concern with increased state capacity to intervene in the organizations, the amount of spending on administration and consultancies, and emphasis of project funding for market access over production, in the broad context of fears of co-optation into economic paradigms that they opposed politically (Andolina, Laurie, & Radcliffe, 2009: 238–239). Other ethnic confederations favored continuation of the project. Governmental power-sharing with national indigenous confederations survived the end of the World Bank role, including the government agency that operated Prodepine. Subsequently, however, centralizing “postneoliberal” national politicians rolled back institutionalized indigenous power-sharing in government agencies (Martínez Novo, 2013; 2014; Mijelski & Beck, 2011).

The key political opportunity for bolstering countervailing power involved the creation of a hybrid national agency, co-managed by autonomous national indigenous organizations, to fund local projects via diverse regional membership organizations. This leverage did not extend to influencing national economic policies that undermined the viability of smallholder production (Martínez Valle 2003). Prodepine’s longer-term impact on the enfranchisement of excluded constituencies and the construction of countervailing power had contradictory results. On balance, the project appears to have strengthened core regional building block second-level membership organizations that link local to national indigenous organizations – while also contributing to

political friction between and within federations over how to engage with the state and markets.

## 7. Comparative analysis: mechanisms, processes and outcomes

Each case analysis 1) identified tangible mechanisms that addressed countervailing power, going beyond conventional superficial approaches, 2) analyzed subsequent processes of contestation and 3) assessed their mixed results, within the limits of the available retrospective evidence. Stepping back from the cases, the following section identifies nine broader patterns in the landscape of contested terrain (see Table 2). Some of these findings address specific mechanisms that were considered to be key at the time, such as power-sharing over allocation of social funds, while others involve enabling measures that were later recognized as important in the emerging practitioner “field” of transparency, participation and accountability, such as proactive disclosure of project information and grievance redress.

### 1) Relevant project-related political opportunities were targeted to excluded constituencies

In each case, political changes in national context created space, most notably transitions to democracy, new constitutions or waves of protest. Yet those openings in national capitals were necessary but far from sufficient to drive changes in the state that could reach subnational, often peripheral regions.<sup>56</sup> Each project deployed measures whose openings tangibly reached specific excluded social constituencies, often in targeted territories. The identification of these patterns confirms the relevance of operationalizing the concept of “political opportunity” by focusing on how targeted openings enabled collective action for specific constituencies, in contrast to the conventional framing of political opportunities in generic terms (cf Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

### 2) Where projects contributed to countervailing power, they deployed two principal mechanisms

The project actions that were relevant to countervailing power fell into two main categories: 1) institutionalized power-sharing over allocation of social funds and 2) direct support for scaled-up representative social organizations – including funding, recognition of legitimacy and, perhaps most importantly, collective titling of territories (see below and Table 2). Both kinds of measures are significantly more ambitious than conventional approaches to participatory development, which involve “light touch” consultations, because they involve at least incipient checks and balances. This is consistent with the findings of the experimental literature on governance reform, which suggest that “voice without teeth” generates little leverage (Fox, 2015). Yet the key power-shifting elements of power-sharing over funding decisions in these projects were based on rules rather than laws, and were therefore vulnerable to rollback.

### 3) Power-sharing over social fund decision-makings operated at different scales

Projects supported power-sharing with social leaders in allocation of government social funds at multiple scales: at the national level in Ecuador, state level in Rondônia, subdistrict level in

<sup>54</sup> The authors of a survey of second-level organizations at the time suggested that “the second-level organizations delegated the tasks of representation to the national and provincial organizations for making the indigenous movement’s political demands, while the second-level organizations concentrated more directly on development actions in the microrregional arena and were connected to political action through their linkages with the national organizations” (Larrea, et al 2002: 15–16, cited in Bretón, 2005: 74).

<sup>55</sup> The project also funded large numbers of scholarships to open indigenous access to higher education and professional positions in the project itself – which led to friction between conventional and intercultural approaches to education (Laurie, Andolina & Radcliffe 2005). At the time, paying professional salaries to indigenous staff provoked criticism – as suggested by the pejorative term “golden ponchos” (Andolina, Laurie, & Radcliffe, 2009: 74).

<sup>56</sup> These projects’ alignment with national political dynamics and their brokering with stakeholders was consistent with the approach now called “Thinking and Working Politically” (e.g., Dasandi et al., 2019). Yet other key characteristics of TWP were absent from most of these cases – such as iterative problem-solving approaches and flexible funding.



**Table 2**

Tangible, targeted political opportunities that contributed to countervailing power.

Targeted institutional changes during project period:	WORLD BANK PROJECTS				
	Mexico DRD	Brazil Planafloro	Colombia NRMP	Indonesia KDP	Ecuador Prodepine
<b>Institutionalized co-governance of social funds</b>					
New policies mandate state-society power sharing over local government social funds					
New policies establish state-society power sharing over social funds at subnational or national levels					
State-society power-sharing over social funds is institutionalized in new laws					
<b>Direct support for social organizations of the excluded</b>					
Substantial funding for autonomous, scaled-up membership organizations					
Collective titling of land or territory at scale					
<b>Enabling institutional changes: Transparency, participation and accountability</b>					
Proactive measures for gender inclusion					
Proactive measures for ethnic inclusion					
Grievance redress mechanism that redressed grievances					
Open government & accountability measures implemented					
Proactive governmental anti-corruption measures					
Public disclosure of project evaluations, third-party research or media coverage					
Tangible official to defend human rights and to reduce risks of violent reprisals					

\*Degree of shading represents degree of intensity

Note: Shading signals qualitative assessment of varying degrees of intensity.

Indonesia and municipal level in Mexico. Where these initiatives opened up budget decision-making in existing local governments, as in Indonesia and Mexico, they constituted participatory budgeting – in contrast to power-sharing funding bodies that were limited to project enclaves in Brazil and Ecuador.<sup>57</sup> In Ecuador, the hybrid national agency's funding for indigenous municipal governments was quite modest, ad hoc and temporary. In Brazil's state of Rondônia, state government power-sharing over resource allocation was limited, brief and unaccountable. In Indonesia's KDP, in contrast, participatory subdistrict councils were backed up by proactive measures to bolster voice and oversight from below – though a subsequent national Village Law strengthened executive authorities (while retaining some participatory elements). Early on, KDP appears to have encouraged more of a pro-village power shift because it deployed field organizers (known as “facilitators”), though that field presence weakened as the program scaled up. In Mexico, more funding for municipalities was supposed to be accompanied by participatory decision-making. New rules that provided unprecedented official legitimacy for village claims to municipal authorities were rarely implemented beyond one state – and were then vetoed by a subsequent national law. In Ecuador, Indonesia and Mexico, project design required villages to compete with each other to apply for social funds (“deliberative contestation”), which may have blocked incentives for villages to unite to constitute a form of countervailing power vis-à-vis the higher levels of government that controlled resource allocation. In none of these cases did participation influence

national policy decisions, power-sharing was limited to deciding which local projects to fund.

Mansuri and Rao's extensive evidence review concluded with the question of whether “mandated inclusion” in community-driven development initiatives improved their effectiveness, as in the case of quotas for women in India's local governments (2013: 292). The findings here suggest that at least in less institutionalized settings, where subnational governments often do not follow official rules, autonomous forms of countervailing power *outside* of official resource allocation venues are relevant because they can bolster capacity to question authority – as well as to monitor project funding decisions.<sup>58</sup>

4) *Countervailing power was manifested in scaled-up autonomous social organizations, especially where accompanied by collective titling of ethnic territories*

Where externally-supported government programs provided direct support for scaled-up, autonomous, representative social organizations, they did so in three ways. Two were tangible – direct funding and collective ethnically-based titling to consolidate their land base. The third was intangible – public recognition of their legitimacy as interlocutors vis-à-vis the state. In Colombia, Brazil, and in Ecuador, projects supported scaled-up, multi-level

<sup>57</sup> On definitions of participatory budgeting, see Peixoto (2012).

<sup>58</sup> This is consistent with Gaventa and Barrett's meta-analysis of 100 cases of collective action, which concluded: “citizen engagement through local associations and social movements emerged as more important sources of change than formal participatory governance spaces, with associations showing the highest percentage of positive outcomes” (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012: 2407).

grassroots membership organizations. Most notably in Colombia and Brazil, this form of organization was in turn grounded in collective titling of territories.<sup>59</sup> Scaled-up social organizations were necessary – though not sufficient – to defend those landholdings against multiple threats, especially in the absence of law enforcement. Meso-level regional social organizations constitute forms of countervailing power both because they have more bargaining power with governmental or private sector elites than do community-level organizations – and because of their potential capacity to hold allied political organizations accountable (such as national confederations).<sup>60</sup>

5) *Projects took substantial actions for ethnic inclusion, but not for gender inclusion*

Projects in Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil supported unprecedented ethnic inclusion measures, while the Mexico project's measures had contradictory outcomes depending on context. The evidence review found no evidence of proactive gender inclusion. Indeed, in Mexico, the indigenous community governance institutions that constituted countervailing power were often completely male-dominated. Only KDP in Indonesia took measures to enable countervailing power with gender inclusion, with both project rules and targeted support for what is now a national association of women-headed families.

6) *Participatory project innovations were made possible by national openings, but unfolded in regions where social actors lacked strong national political allies*

Ambitious project design was clearly enabled when architects “caught the wave” of a political opening – as in Colombia, Indonesia and Ecuador. In Colombia, for example, a then-new national law allowed World Bank officials to require that the loan support collective titling of Afro-Colombian and indigenous territories. Yet national allies within the state were still usually too weak to proactively *weaken* forces opposed to participation and accountability. Rare exceptions included World Bank project managers support for advocates' calls for the removal of Colombian agrarian officials who blocked collective land titling, as well as funding cutoffs in high corruption Indonesian subdistricts. Recall the findings of Mansuri and Rao's meta-analysis regarding the key means to offset powerful tendencies toward elite capture: strong central government oversight and robust transparency and accountability measures (2013: 287). Those key features were missing in four of the five projects, constraining their long-term impact (KDP is the exception).

7) *The enabling potential of official participatory spaces was constrained by the lack of complementary transparency and accountability reforms*

These projects predated the rise of the international transparency and accountability agenda. Only the Indonesia social funds

proactively emphasized the consistent application of new transparency and accountability rules for project decisions, as well as multiple anti-corruption measures and a functioning grievance redress mechanism. In the Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador cases, contestation over the projects did trigger significant mid-term reviews that became public and strengthened the hand of both pro-participation policymakers and advocates. All the projects also commissioned either evaluations or research whose findings eventually became public. Yet none of the projects emphasized proactive public disclosure of relevant, comparable, disaggregated and actionable information about project performance.

8) *The enabling potential of official participatory spaces was constrained by the lack of complementary human rights protections.*

At the time of these projects, international donors did not proactively address the rule of law. More specifically, none of the projects proactively invested in protections to address possible threats of reprisals. Yet in these project settings, vocal advocates of pro-poor power shifts could risk their lives for questioning authority.<sup>61</sup> Even today, official donor transparency and accountability agendas are rarely linked to investments in the defense of human rights.

9) *Ostensibly participatory project-related institutions were the targets of protest and advocacy, with diverse official responses*

The most extreme case of protest against project-backed institutions was in Chiapas, where the Zapatista rebellion exposed (World Bank-funded) municipal governments as tools of authoritarian elites. In Ecuador, the project itself was a concession to indigenous mass protest, followed by contestation over the terms of indigenous representation in its co-governance. The Brazil project was also a concession to an advocacy campaign, followed by broken promises for inclusion that led advocates to make official accountability claims. In Indonesia, rural social movements were rare and the project addressed grassroots claims that fit within its focus on local social investments. The project with the clearest contribution to movement-building was in Colombia, where pressure from both above and below converged to push through large-scale titling of ethnic territories.<sup>62</sup>

To synthesize these findings, Table 2 depicts the varied presence of the two main kinds of targeted political opportunities that were most relevant to bolstering countervailing power for the excluded: power-sharing institutions for allocating social funds and direct support for land-based social organizations. Table 2 also includes an assessment of the degree to which key reforms were carried out that could enable collective action (cf Joshi & Moore, 2000). Qualitative assessments of the degree to which these mechanisms for creating openings were actually put into practice are indicated by the degree of shading in the table's cells. To sum up these findings: most relevant power-sharing measures for allocating social funds were not institutionalized and therefore especially vulnerable to rollback, while few accountability reforms bolstered the public sector's “teeth” that are needed to respond effectively to “voice.” The most widely-shared form of progress involved ethnic inclusion to bolster representative social organizations. KDP in Indonesia stands out because it deployed the most comprehensive

<sup>59</sup> In contrast to historic approaches to land reform, such as land to the tiller, this collective titling involved *territory* – which can form the basis for some degree of self-government. This included both ethnic ancestral domain, and sustainable land use as in the case of rubber-tappers. In contrast, most 20th-century land reforms, in spite of their diverse ideologies, involved state control of “beneficiaries” and lacked countervailing power from below. Space does not permit a full treatment of this distinction here.

<sup>60</sup> For studies that stress the significance of *meso*-level mass membership organizations of the excluded for participation to have substantive impacts on states and markets, see Chen et al. (2007) and Esman and Uphoff (1984). On the dynamics of leadership accountability within scaled-up membership organizations, see Fox (2007).

<sup>61</sup> Even in usually less harsh Ecuador, land conflicts faced violent repression in the early 1990s (North, Kit, & Koep, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> The available evidence is insufficient to resolve how to interpret the “net” political impact of the proposal-driven social funds in Ecuador and Indonesia. Such debates are emblematic of a broader counterfactual puzzle: does participation in official decisions to fund local development projects necessarily *pre-empt* extra-institutional protest?

combination of mechanisms to create space for bolstering countervailing power, albeit bounded to allocating local social funds.

## 8. On Contradiction: analytical and methodological challenges

This historical evidence shows that even projects from unlikely aid agencies can contribute to targeted openings from above that can in turn bolster contextually-specific forms of countervailing power. At the same time, outcomes were always mixed. Opposing forces managed to reverse, block or contain the most significant innovations. That said, for autonomous social organizations there is a major difference between rollback vs. containment of progress towards countervailing power (e.g., Mexico and Brazil cases vs. Colombia and Ecuador). This points to two specific challenges that are relevant for analysis of contemporary aid agency agendas, especially as they increasingly focus on fragile and violent settings:

- 1) *International development projects can have contradictory effects on countervailing power for the excluded.* This idea refers specifically to *interaction* effects, in which some project measures actively *conflict* with others. That is distinct from the simultaneous process of *variation* along an implicit continuum, in which outcomes are stronger in some areas than others, or some project elements work better than others. Planaflores in Brazil responded to international advocacy protest by briefly supporting local CSOs, small farmer, indigenous and rubber-tapper organizations and demarcating collective territories – without protecting them from predictable backlash. On balance, the project appears to have ended up bolstering the patronage capacity of state political elites. In Mexico's rural municipal funds, new entitlements for outlying villages emboldened them to hold their municipal governments accountable, at least in Oaxaca. Yet the same municipal funds program had the *opposite* effect in Chiapas by increasing funding for authoritarian mayors before the rebellion and siding with counterinsurgency efforts afterwards. In Ecuador, the project responded to indigenous protest by creating a precedent-setting power-sharing body that directly funded representative, scaled-up organizations, yet it got caught in political crossfire between indigenous organizations of different political affiliations and appears to have accentuated differences between more ideological national leaders and second-level organizations that prioritized socio-economic concerns.
- 2) *Contradictory effects pose methodological challenges: how to assess their relative weights?* The empirical limitations of this retrospective evidence review underscore the challenge of determining the relative weights of elite capture vs. countervailing power outcomes – within the same project.<sup>63</sup> For practitioners concerned with minimizing the risk of violating first-do-no-harm principles, such monitoring needs to happen in real time, at scale. Official mid-term project reviews in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador identified major failures that were then partly addressed. At least in the Indonesia and Ecuador cases, extensive project monitoring systems identified both problems and progress, though not the relative scope of these different outcomes. The ambitious goal of measuring what are necessarily partial, uneven and often subjective power shifts across vast territories and large populations poses many unanswered questions. This monitoring agenda requires locally-adapted yet reliable and consistent indicators, institu-

tional autonomy and a substantial, sustained investment of political capital – all of which tend to conflict with dominant incentives in both aid agencies and governments. Moreover, for such monitoring to actually *contribute* to countervailing power in practice, the results need to be targeted to reach relevant stakeholders with capacity to act.<sup>64</sup>

## 9. Conclusions

This study engages empirically with the classic theoretical question of the contested relationship between structure and agency by comparing unlikely cases of change in inhospitable settings. The evidence review assesses whether and how externally-funded government projects bolstered contextually-specific forms of countervailing power – as well as whether such changes survived the test of time. All five anomalous projects did enable collective action from below, though in partial and uneven ways. Over the longer term, their most ambitious power-shifting elements were either reversed (Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador), watered down (Indonesia) or contained (Colombia). Yet these differences mattered for social actors on the ground. Scaled-up autonomous mass organizations, especially those grounded in collective landholdings, appear to have been more sustainable than the attempts to change rules to democratize decision-making about allocating social funds.

These findings inform conceptual, analytical and methodological propositions that are relevant for addressing how action can push back against usually-dominant structural constraints. All involve rethinking umbrella terms.

- First, the concept of countervailing power addresses the absence of accountability from the conventional approaches to participatory development or citizen engagement. Voice is not enough. Actors or institutions with capacity to *constrain* the abuse of power matter.
- Second, the broad concept of “political opportunities” and its relevance for collective action can be more tractable for comparative analysis if it is operationalized with greater consistency. This study focused on targeted, tangible measures that reached specific social constituencies at scale.
- Third, the common-sense term “mixed results” is too broad, it refers to both varied and conflicting outcomes. Both the nature and dynamics of “mixed results” inform this study's principal analytical finding: projects can have *contradictory* effects. This idea goes beyond simply varied results because it emphasizes the *interaction* between conflicting actions within the same program. Inertial actions can block innovative actions – even in the same project.
- Fourth, measuring both varied and contradictory results pose an unresolved methodological challenge because of the difficulty with determining their *relative weights*.

To sum up, for aid agencies to heed first-do-no-harm principles, real-time, independent monitoring that can identify and measure *both* countervailing power and elite capture is essential. Timely, targeted public disclosure of relevant, actionable information to stakeholders, in their own languages, would be a step in that direction.

## Declaration of interests

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<sup>63</sup> The question of how recent UK Aid project monitoring and evaluation systems address this issue is a focus of the ongoing Action for Empowerment and Accountability research project (cf Anderson, Fox, & Gaventa, 2020).

<sup>64</sup> On “targeted transparency,” see Fung, Graham & Weil (2007).



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Regarding the World Bank, a subject of the paper, the author's work relationships since the 1992–1994 study cited in the article have been limited to a commissioned book chapter in 2004, a brief research consultancy in 2015 for the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, co-authorship of a background paper for the 2016 World Development Report and service as an external member of a review panel for its Independent Evaluation Group in 2017. No current World Bank staff member was involved with this study.

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