

## INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND PARTICIPATION

### *Comparative Case Studies from India*

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**Abstract:** While participatory design in IS has found increasing acceptance, the role of participation in social arena has been lively debated in recent years. Development projects in the third world based on “western” assumptions have elicited sharp critiques, with consequent policy shift towards involving the poor people and local communities in these endeavours. In India, policies and programs aimed at reclamation of degraded lands, a priority thrust area which is directly linked to poverty alleviation, are typically controlled by central, state and local government bureaucracies, with little involvement, until recently, of the affected people. Some of these programs have attempted to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to model alternative development possibilities, and to then prepare action plans based on scientific knowledge for field implementation. These initiatives too have generally been bereft of end-user involvement. On the other hand, land development has been successfully carried out at several places in the country through community initiatives alone by harnessing indigenous knowledge. In this paper, we briefly present the continuum of participatory development through analysis of two contrasting case studies. The analysis leads to the challenge of integrating local knowledge within governmental institutional frameworks that can facilitate the larger spread of land reclamation efforts.

**Keywords:** Participatory development, information systems, community mobilization, degraded lands, GIS, structuration theory.

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