

Final Progress Report
Sustainability Science Program, Harvard University
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Name: Tara Grillos

Fields:

Institutions for Sustainable Development (Comparative Political Science), Behavioral and Experimental Economics

Degree program, institution and (expected) graduation date:

Harvard Kennedy School, PhD Public Policy, expected May 2015

Faculty hosts at Harvard name and department:

Ryan Sheely (Kennedy School), Richard Zeckhauser (Kennedy School), Bill Clark (Kennedy School)

Description of SSP-related research activity:

Title: Participatory Development and Capacity for Collective Action

Abstract: Conventional wisdom touts beneficiary participation in development interventions as both an end in itself and as a method for improving project outcomes. An important question for the effective allocation of donor and government resources is: Does beneficiary participation improve sustainable development outcomes? And if so, how, in what forms and for whom? Existing research is spread across disciplines, with little communication between distinct literatures on participation, and forms of ‘participation’ vary substantially both in practice and as discussed in the literature. This research project aims to offer a conceptual framework to help interpret differing results across existing studies. It also seeks qualitative and experimental evidence of causal pathways through which the effects of participation may be observed.

Identification of the problem you address:

‘Participation’ has become a popular response to the perceived failures of top-down interventions in environment and development. However, a poor understanding of how particular forms of participation affect outcomes of interest undoubtedly results in inefficient spending on such programs in many cases. If participation is to be a stipulation of donor funding (as it is in many instances), then practitioners require a better understanding of how exactly human behavior is affected by differing forms of participation, and how those behaviors ultimately affect development outcomes.

Key question asked about the problem:

Which forms of stakeholder participation affect development outcomes? How and for whom?

Methods and Data Acquisition:

I seek answers to these questions through a mixed-methods approach. First, through classification and meta-analysis of existing empirical research, I explain apparently conflicting results of prior studies and identify topics for further research. I then use qualitative methods to construct mental models of how participants themselves perceive the participation process. Finally, I rigorously test for the existence and magnitude of specific effects of participation using laboratory and field experiments.

Principle literature upon which the research drew:

Institutions, Participatory Governance, Psychology, Development and Behavioral Economics, Natural Resource Management

Geographical region studied:

Latin America; Africa

Recommendations that might be relevant for your problem:

While the research is still too preliminary to offer concrete suggestions at this point, it ultimately aims to provide recommendations as to the particular forms of participation that are appropriate in a given context.

A description of the final product(s) you have/are aiming to produce:

This work will contribute three papers to my doctoral dissertation and will also provide the basis for my long-term research agenda.

Other intellectual or professional advancement activities over the past academic year:

In addition to the three papers which will comprise my dissertation, I am currently collaborating with two of my SSP faculty hosts. With Richard Zeckhauser, I prepared a review of experimental work in developing nations, and I presented this paper at the conference *Experiments for Export: Behavioral Experiments in Latin America* at Georgia State University. With Ryan Sheely, I am examining the role of participation in promoting self- and collective efficacy within the context of a randomized intervention in Kenya.