

# Summaries

## **Introduction: Decentralising Service Delivery? Evidence and Policy Implications**

*Mark Robinson*

This introductory article examines the main question addressed in this *IDS Bulletin*: Does the devolution of responsibility for service provision to elected local authorities improve the delivery of services to the poor? Highlighting the problem of the lack of comprehensive evidence, the article draws attention to the largely negative consequences of decentralisation for service delivery at the local level. It summarises the key findings of the contributions to the *IDS Bulletin*, showing how the evidence marshalled by the authors confirms a general pattern of poor service delivery outcomes. Arguing that decentralisation of service delivery may not be appropriate in all contexts, the article concludes that the most propitious conditions for success lie in resource availability, capable local governments and effective structures of accountability at the local level.

## **Does Decentralisation Improve Equity and Efficiency in Public Service Delivery Provision?**

*Mark Robinson*

Proponents of democratic decentralisation argue that it not only produces improvements in participation and accountability but also leads to better delivery of public services with positive equity and efficiency outcomes. This article demonstrates that the evidence to support this contention is very limited and uneven in scope and that available data from Latin America, Africa and Asia suggests that the equity and efficiency effects are largely negative. This conclusion does not invalidate the promise of decentralisation for improved service delivery but highlights the importance of political commitment, client mobilisation, technical capacity and adequacy of financial resources as critical factors shaping positive outcomes.

## **Decentralisation and Service Delivery: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa**

*Diana Conyers*

This article reviews the evidence on the relationship between decentralisation and service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa. It notes that, although

decentralisation has been a popular development strategy in the region during much of the post-independence period, there is little evidence to suggest that it has had a positive impact on service delivery. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that decentralisation as a strategy has failed. Decentralisation has not really had a fair trial because few countries have actually decentralised significant powers to local governments. This lack of substantive decentralisation and the poor quality of service delivery are both a reflection of the wider problems of governance in general.

## **Does Devolution Deliver? Institutional and Political Dimensions of Self-help Programmes in India**

*Craig Johnson, Priya Deshingkar, John Farrington and Daniel Start*

A central aim of this article is to understand the impact that local governance structures have on the ability of governments to implement social policy in India. It compares the administration of self-employment programmes in Madhya Pradesh (MP) and in Andhra Pradesh (AP), two states in which administrative and territorial powers of local governance vary substantially. Its central findings are twofold. First, the economic impact of government-sponsored self-help programmes was minimal. Second, and in some ways contradicting this first finding, the perceived impact (and therefore the political value) of self-help group (SHG) programmes was particularly favourable in AP. The interpretation of these findings is that differences in performance and perceptions of performance reflect both the political importance that state bureaucrats attach to self-help programmes in AP and the size of the population being served by the state bureaucracy.

## **Accountability Failures and the Decentralisation of Service Delivery in Pakistan**

*Shandana Khan Mohmand and Ali Cheema*

Pakistan's poor performance in social development has been blamed to a large extent on political and administrative structures that weakened political and bureaucratic accountability to citizens. Decentralisation reforms, implemented in 2001,

sought specifically to address these accountability failures. This article uses survey data to analyse the extent to which local government reforms have been effective in improving the magnitude and quality of provision of essential public services, such as education and health, in rural Pakistan. It finds that while the provision of targeted services has increased, the reforms have not been able to improve the quality or provision of universal services, and that the explanation for this lies largely in the nature of local politics and in the administrative procedures and structure of the local government plan.

### **A System in Waiting: Improving Service Delivery through Decentralisation Reforms in Cambodia**

*Luc Spyckerelle and Joanne Morrison*

This article discusses how well Cambodian communes are positioned to effectively engage in poverty reduction activities through improved service delivery at the local level, and what the record is of the initial implementation of the decentralisation reforms. The design of decentralisation in Cambodia contains some innovative features. However, the low levels of funding in the first five years of implementation, the lack of some key implementing regulations and the absence of clearly defined responsibilities for minimum service delivery by the communes or higher administrative levels has somewhat stalled the reforms. The main achievement to date therefore appears to be in the political domain. The long-awaited sector deconcentration reforms are expected to give a new vigour to decentralisation, but many key issues related to deconcentration are still under discussion.

### **Decentralisation, Politics and Service Delivery in Mexico**

*Julian G. Salazar*

For more than two decades Mexico has undergone a significant decentralisation process. Although states and municipalities now receive significant resources to finance key public services to the population, their

impact on poverty alleviation has been limited. As decentralisation has been accompanied by a deep process of political change, the new political dynamics have played a major role in determining the effectiveness of decentralisation to benefit the poor. It is argued that sub-national political actors have gained important financial capacities to deliver public services. Yet, the mechanisms to make public officials accountable are weak at the local level, undermining the prospects of decentralisation for more equitable service delivery.

### **Decentralisation and Difference: Indigenous Peoples and Health System Reform in the Brazilian Amazon**

*Alex Shankland and Renato Athias*

In recent decades, Brazil has undergone one of the world's most far-reaching processes of political, fiscal and service decentralisation. In the social policy sectors – and particularly in the health system – this has gone hand in hand with the establishment of a strong institutional framework for service user participation. However, this process has failed to erode the strong correlation between social difference – including gender, race, ethnicity and geographical origin – and differential access to services and health outcomes in Brazil's highly unequal society. This article reviews the experience of a specific subsystem – that responsible for delivering healthcare for indigenous peoples – for which difference is a key consideration. Based on fieldwork in the Rio Negro region in the northwest Amazon, the authors examine the implications for indigenous peoples' movements of institutionalised engagement with the delivery of health services. Far from decentralisation enabling indigenous peoples' participation to transform health system bureaucracy, there is evidence the forms of engagement it has promoted have bureaucratized indigenous movements' approach to securing the health rights of their communities.