



Labor and Globalization

Ellen Ehmke

Social Security Expansion in the South: From Welfare Regimes to Implementation

A Study of India and its National Rural
Employment Guarantee Act



Rainer Hampp Verlag

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The profound lack of social security for much of the world's population is increasingly recognised as a problem, both in policy making and in social sciences. Many new national and international policy initiatives aim at the expansion of social security and social protection in countries of the Global South. Correspondingly, academia is discussing the specific Southern nature of welfare arrangements and regimes, as well as the design of social protection systems. This book studies India as an exemplary case of social security expansion, Southern social policy development and welfare arrangements, with a focus on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and its implementation. Its politics of implementation approach builds on historical and ideational institutionalism as well as interpretative policy analysis. It highlights the importance of two previously neglected factors: ideational motives and implementation challenges. Whereas ideas have played an important role in the OECD welfare debates, Southern welfare studies have tended to overlook the importance of domestic ideas as shaping factors of social policy development. Putting ideas at the centre allows us to analyse Southern welfare regimes in their own right. In the South, policy implementation can be as important as its design for an explanation of its reach. Moreover, the implementation process is often a central – if not the only – arena in which (poor) citizens interact with the state. It is a politicised and contested arena.

Key words: Social security, social protection, social policy, welfare regimes, India, interpretative policy analysis, implementation studies, development studies, public employment schemes

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Cover photo: An Indian farmer on a dam constructed through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Dhule, Maharashtra.
Picture taken by Ellen Ehmke.

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Abbreviations

AP	Andhra Pradesh
APL	Above Poverty Line
BC	Backward Classes
BDO	Block Development Officer
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMZ	<i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i> – German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BPL	Below Poverty Line
bn	Billion
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CEC	Centre for Environmental Concerns
CECG	Central Employment Guarantee Council
CPIAL	Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DNA	Democratic National Alliance
DoRD	Department of Rural Development
DWAMA	District Water Management Agency
EGS	Employment Guarantee Scheme (Maharashtra)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> – German International Development Agency
GoAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
GoI	Government of India
GoM	Government of Maharashtra
GP	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>
GRS	<i>Gram Rozgar Sewak</i>
GS	<i>Gram Sabha</i>
HH	Household
HMPA	Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis
IAMR	Institute of Applied Manpower Research
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICS	Indian Civil Service
IEC	Information and Education Campaigns
ILO	International Labour Organisation /Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INC / Congress	Indian National Congress Party
INR	Indian National Rupee
IPA	Interpretative Policy Analysis
ITDA	Integrated Tribal Development Agency

JC	Job Card
MEGA	Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act
MGNREGA/S	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/ Scheme
MH	Maharashtra
MKSS	<i>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghthana</i>
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
mn	Million
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MPDO	Mandal Parished Development Officer (local official in AP)
NAC	National Advisory Council
NCEUS	National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NREGA/S	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Classes/Castes
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PM	Prime Minister
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRI	<i>Panchayati Raj Institutions</i>
RTI	Right to Information
SA	Social Audit
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCRD	Standing Committee on Rural Development
SSoR	Standard Schedule of Rates
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TDP/F	Telugu Desam Party / Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
US	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UWSSA	Unorganized Workers Social Security Act

Glossary

<i>Aaya</i>	Nurse
<i>Anganwadi</i>	Child care centre
<i>Adivasi</i>	Original people; indigenous population of India, preferred name of the Scheduled Tribes
<i>Backward Classes</i>	Term used for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, as well as Other Backward Classes together (see below)
<i>Block</i>	Administrative unit below District and above Gram Panchayat level, regionally also called <i>Mandal</i> , <i>Taluka</i> , <i>Tahsil</i>
<i>Chapati</i>	Indian flat bread
<i>Chatni</i>	Chutney, spicy sauce
<i>Dal</i>	Indian dish prepared from lentils or other pulses
<i>Dalit</i>	Marathi word for the oppressed (ex-Untouchables)
<i>Diwali</i>	Religious Hindu festival at the beginning of winter
<i>Crone</i>	Ten million (10,000,000)
<i>Garibi hatao</i>	“End to poverty” slogan of Indira Gandhi
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Village council, the lowest tier of the <i>Panchayat</i> system. In sparsely populated areas it also notifies the spatial unit of several small hamlets or villages, which are grouped together to form one GP
<i>Gram Sabha</i>	Village assembly provided by government statute
<i>Gram Rozgar Sewak</i>	Aid to the Gram Sewak, especially for the provision of employment
<i>Gram Sewak</i>	Administrative position, responsible for one <i>Gram Panchayat</i> , often a life-time posting; literally ‘servant of the village’
<i>Holi</i>	Religious Hindu festival at the beginning of spring
<i>Jajmani</i>	Local system of interdependence in pre-colonial India
<i>Jati</i>	Caste in the sense of named birth group
<i>Jowar</i>	Local type of grain, used for breads
<i>Kharif</i>	One of three seasons in India’s geographical centre, main agricultural season following the monsoon
<i>Kaccha</i>	Unfinished (infrastructure/ house), often earthen works
<i>Lakh</i>	Hundred thousand (100,000)
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	Lower House of Parliament
<i>Other Backward Classes/ Castes (OBSs)</i>	Socially and educationally deprived communities for whom compensatory actions are authorised by the state, excludes Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
<i>Mandal</i>	Block, spatial administrative unit
<i>Mohua</i>	Tree, its fruits are collected, tried and either sold or

<i>Narega</i>	used for home production of alcoholic drinks Vernacular word for NREGA especially used Hindi speaking areas
<i>Panchayat</i>	Council, official institution of local government
<i>Panchayati Raj</i>	Official system of self-government
<i>Patel</i>	Non-elected village elders
<i>Pucca</i>	'Finished' (infrastructure/ house), permanent often concrete structure
<i>Rabi</i>	One of three seasons, precedes the monsoon
<i>Rajya Sabha</i>	House of States
<i>Sarkar</i>	Government
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Elected Village Head
<i>Scheduled Castes</i>	Official term for the formerly Untouchables or <i>Dalits</i> . Those castes listed in a Schedule of the Constitution as deserving special assistance in respect of education, welfare, employment in public services and political representation
<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>	Official term for India's indigenous or <i>Adivasi</i> population. Those communities listed in a Schedule of the Constitution as deserving special assistance in respect of education, welfare, employment in public services and political representation
<i>Tahsil</i>	Block, an administrative spatial unit between District and communal level, used in Maharashtra
<i>Tahsildar</i>	Government official at Block Level
<i>Taluka</i>	Block, an administrative spatial unit between District and communal level, used in Maharashtra
<i>Yatra</i>	Journey, procession or pilgrimage that may be used for political purposes with speeches and people joining along the way
<i>Zamindar</i>	Revenue collector and landholder under British rule
<i>Zilla parishad</i>	District level council

Preface and Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

The lack of social security is a global phenomenon. As much as 71 per cent of the global population have no, or no adequate social security (ILO, 2017). This means that despite the recognition of the right to social security as a universal human right more than 60 years ago, and its affirmation in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 30 years later, we are far from its realisation.¹

Counter to a first intuition, the problem is not that no public social security schemes exist. Virtually every country around the globe has some social security system in place, in the Global North as well as in the South. Moreover, some Southern countries with relatively low GDP per capita have even been comparatively successful in extending social protection to all (see e.g. Sandbrook, Edelman, Heller & Teichman, 2007). Many other countries in the Global South, by contrast, have welfare schemes that are regressive and favour those that are already privileged (Barrientos, 2011b). Moreover, many social programmes are clientelistic and enhance patron-client relationships, rather than granting individuals more freedom (Wood, 2004; Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2008; Holmes & Jones, 2009). In sum, in countries of the Southern hemisphere we often find programmes with low coverage rates and limited access, and which are embedded into problematic relationships. In contexts where the need for social security schemes is particularly high, access is most limited.²

The need for social security, particularly in the Global South, is increasingly recognised as a global problem by the international community, i.e. the United Nations and its specialised agencies, as well as other international forums such as the G20. The largest international political initiative on social issues in recent years was the adoption of the new interna-

¹ The right to social security is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (Articles 22, 25), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 9) and codified in a number of conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (most prominently in Convention No. 102, 1952).

² This is not to say that in the Global North all needs are met. Despite the existence of elaborate and extensive social security mechanisms in many countries of the Northern hemisphere, this part of the world is not free from poverty, social exclusion, social inequality and exploitation. However, this is not the theme of this book.

tional development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this framework, social protection – which is often used interchangeably and has increasingly replaced social security – is expected to make a significant contribution to the achievement of Goal 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere” (United Nations, 2015). More specifically, it is now a goal to “implement social protection systems and measures for all, and achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable” (ibid.).³

These international activities are accompanied by a fast-growing number of national initiatives to expand social protection in many countries of the South.⁴ Some well-known examples are the extensive programmes in Brazil, most notably Bolsa Familia (Barrientos, 2011a; Hall, 2008; Lavinias, 2011; Moretto, 2014; Leuboldt, 2015), social grants and public work schemes in South Africa (Knijn & Patel, 2012; Patel, 2012; Fakier, 2014), and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India, which is the focus of this book (also see United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2011).

The spurt of international and national policy initiatives to expand social protection has triggered a renewed academic interest in the hitherto relatively under-researched topics of social security provision and welfare development in the Global South. Two main bodies of literature can be distinguished. First, Southern welfare regime approaches seek to address the question of which specific welfare arrangements have emerged in the southern hemisphere (Gough *et al.*, 2004; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b; Rudra, 2008; Seekings, 2008; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). The second set of literature looks at specific (country level) initiatives and seeks to identify reasons for success and failure of current policies of social security expansion (see e.g. the authors on national initiatives above).

³ Another important international initiative is the adoption of Recommendation No. 202 on ‘National Social Protection Floors’ (ILC, 2012; Kaltenborn & Cichon, 2012) by the International Labour Conference in 2012. The approval of the Recommendation has been near unanimous among representatives of states, workers and employers. It may be seen as a sign of the large support that the extension of social protection enjoys politically all around the world.

⁴ Social protection became a growing field of bi- and multi-lateral development cooperation (for an overview see Loewe, 2008: 23ff; World Bank, 2012: 93ff).

In both the political as well as the academic debates, a variety of functions are attributed to social security: Social protection schemes are seen in a primarily material logic, i.e. as a way to reduce monetary poverty and realise economic benefits e.g. as automatic stabilisers in times of crises (on the latter see e.g. Bonnet, Ehmke & Hagemeyer, 2010). Moreover, social security is discussed as a component of subjective wellbeing (Gough, McGregor & Camfield, 2007; Gough & Thomas, 1994), as a right (Sepúlveda & Nyst, 2012), and as an enabling condition for freedom and for the good life (Sen, 1999). Freedom from hunger, want and disease – as well as the freedom e.g. to choose what kind of work, whether reproductive or productive, people want to be engaged in – is a universally desirable goal in the pursuit of the development of full individual capacities and capabilities. Thus understood, social security is crucial to any idea of substantive – not just formal – democracy, in which not only civil-political liberties and property rights are guaranteed, but full citizenship rights including the realisation of social and economic rights (Marshall, 1949 [1992]).⁵ This last perspective, which can be termed the freedom enhancing character of social security, is a central normative foundation of this book.

A context which is particularly suited for the study of the expansion of social security and welfare is India, and in particular its public employment programme the (Mahatma Gandhi) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MG-NREGA, also (MG)-NREGS).⁶ India is the world's most populous democracy and has, since its foundation in 1950, strived

⁵ See e.g. literature on new constitutionalism, which discusses hollowed out democracies in which the most protected rights are property rights (see e.g. Bakker & Silvey, 2008: 22).

⁶ Originally the Act was called National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, NREGA. The prefix Mahatma Gandhi (MG) was added in 2009. Throughout the book NREGA is used, because this is the name under which the programme is commonly known. In the Hindi speaking areas of India it vernacularly called '*narega*' (also see Drèze, 2011c; Khera, 2011c). When the abbreviation MGNREGA is used in direct citations, it is not changed. The two abbreviations are used interchangeably. Additionally, the abbreviation NREG-Act is sometimes used to differentiate the legal base from the NREG-Schemes. The NREG-Act forms the basis for NREG-Schemes, which are formulated and implemented in each of India's federal states.

to realise social well-being of its population. India is, thus, an exemplary case of a Southern democracy with a long tradition in welfare policies.⁷

In the Constitution of the Indian Republic, welfare was made a Principle of State Policy. In fact, India shows extensive activity of central and state governments in the field of social security. Yet, India also is a country that is characterised by high levels of poverty, malnutrition and deprivation, and hence, a lack of social security for significant parts of its population. In 2005, 42 per cent of India's population lived under the international poverty line of USD 1.25 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day (World Bank, 2011b: 7). Indian official poverty statistics see the rate at 37 per cent in the same year, this is equal to more than 400 million people living below the domestic poverty line (Reserve Bank of India, 2013).⁸ At the time India was home to a third of the world's absolute poor. The government's schemes have so far failed to tackle widespread poverty, malnourishment or to influence other indicators of a lack of social security such as high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy. India is an example where the coverage with social security has, so far, remained behind the governments' ambitions and the needs of the population.

India is furthermore an illustrative case for a country with a recent history of social protection expansion. During the government of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), a centre-left coalition under the leadership of the Indian National Congress party (INC or Congress) between 2004 and 2014, a number of social initiatives were launched, most notably the employment guarantee called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MG-NREGA) of 2005.⁹ The scheme guarantees every rural

⁷ For the study of welfare in the South, India is of importance both in the region – as the largest state and a trendsetter of social policy developments – as well as globally – as a large emerging economy and as a historically important voice of the South that has advocated an own non-aligned development path.

⁸ A broader discussion on poverty in India and how disputed the definition of poverty, as well as the number of poor are, can be found below. Poverty data on India and other countries often becomes available with a big time lag. More recent estimates are much lower. In 2011 21.9 per cent of the Indian population were counted to be below the national poverty line and at 21.2 per cent below the adjusted international poverty line of the World Bank of 1.90 USD (PPP for 2011). Data retrieved October 19 2019 from <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>.

⁹ Other important social policy initiatives are the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (UWSSA) of 2008, and the National Food Security Act, adopted in 2013.

household 100 days of wage employment annually, and thereby seeks to enhance the livelihood and social security of India's rural population. By design, NREGA is rights-based and universally accessible, which constitutes a major difference as compared to previous social protection schemes, and is important with regards to the freedom enhancing character of social security. NREGA was the flagship programme of the UPA government, and its major initiative in terms of social security extension. The Act is the foundation for the largest public employment scheme of the world. In its peak it provided work to 55 million households. In the financial year 2012-2013¹⁰ it provided employment to nearly 50 million – close to 30 per cent of all rural – households. Coverage of the relevant population is thus higher than for any other major Indian social protection scheme. In terms of spending, it is second only to the Public Distribution System (PDS) (see Table 3.1 on page 78). Yet, within the various Federal States and Districts of India, crucial indicators for the success of the scheme, such as participation rates, the number of days worked and wages, vary widely. NREGA thus is a suitable example of a recent expansion of social protection in a country of the Global South, where the achievements as well as problems can be studied.

1.1 Aim, core themes and research questions of the book

The introduction above highlights a pressing political problem: the failure to expand social security successfully and the failure to ensure a greater degree of socio-economic security for the majority of the population in many countries of the Global South. Based on this, the research presented here is ultimately driven by the question of how social security can be improved for people living in poverty and deprivation in the South. As such, this book aims to make two contributions: a) to the academic debate on welfare expansion in the South and b) whether the formal expansion of social welfare policies leads to welfare gains from the perspective of the people who participate in such schemes. Thereby, the book contributes to theory “that neither is an all-embracing meta

Furthermore, the Right to Education Bill and the Right to Information Act have been enacted during UPA tenure. A not rights based initiative is the health insurance card for the population below the poverty line, the *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Joyna* (RSBY) that started to be rolled out in 2008.

¹⁰ The Indian financial year runs from April 1st to March 31st of the subsequent year.

narrative nor is microcosmically, myopically local, but tacks on the awkward scale between the two, seeking to explain phenomena with reference to both their larger determinations and their contingent, proximate conditions” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012b: 48).¹¹

As outlined below, there is an academic knowledge gap with regards to the development of specific welfare regime constellations in the South, as well as to the implementation of social protection schemes. This book identifies three central themes in the study of welfare expansion in the global South – *emergence, implementation and welfare gains* – that are hitherto underexplored both theoretically and empirically. The following pages present the academic problem statement, research questions and core findings for each of the three themes.

1.1.1 *Emergence*

The first theme of this book concerns the emergence of specific welfare regimes and programmes in the southern hemisphere. This has been addressed by studies on social policies and social protection schemes, as well as on the politics of welfare in the global South (Gough *et al.*, 2004; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b; Rudra, 2008; Seekings, 2008; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). This literature is part of a growing field of academic research that is located at the intersection of social policy studies, comparative studies of welfare states, and development studies. The approaches applied to Southern welfare regimes build on previous works on welfare in the OECD and adapt these to Southern contexts.

Yet, these studies mostly use meso to macro level comparative approaches. There is a lack of country studies that explore the developments of the identified regime types in more detail. Most of these approaches rely on quantitative statistical data for the construction of their regime types, and lack attention for more qualitative aspects such as the importance of domestic ideas or the impact of colonial legacies (see e.g. Midgley, 2011; Wehr & Priwitzer, 2011; Wehr, Leuboldt & Schaffar, 2012). Thus, although the question of the driving forces of welfare development is a global question, it cannot be answered universally. When we look into the explanatory power of actors and interests, institutions, as

¹¹ All quotations in American English have been changed to British English for better readability. Citations that are originally in German have been translated by the author, unless marked otherwise.

well as ideas – all of which have been deemed important in the study of OECD welfare regimes, albeit to a varying degree – we need to focus on the realm where social policy is made.

India is a Southern country with an extensive tradition of social welfare programmes. National politics have been dominated by a party that has, for the longest time, propagated a socialist development path and pro-poor policy. Thus India can be expected to have actors actively pursuing welfare policies. From the perspective of Southern welfare regime research, India is a relevant case as well, because the country has been part of most of the recent comparative approaches to welfare in the South.¹² Yet, all approaches classify the country differently, as ‘informal security regime’ (Gough *et al.*, 2004; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b), as ‘protective’ (Rudra, 2008), as ‘agrarian’ (Seekings, 2008); among them, only Rudra discusses India in more detail. The comparison of the ascribed regime characteristics with the Indian case promises to offer insights for the approaches to Southern welfare regime. At the same time, these approaches can potentially contribute to better understanding the dynamics of welfare development in India, because India, and actually the whole of South Asia, is together with Africa the most under-researched world region in terms of its welfare provision.¹³

Hence, the first research question concerns the forces behind welfare development in the South. The general question is: what arguments have been provided to explain welfare expansion in the South – or its absence – and the emergence of Southern welfare regimes? This question guides the literature review. It is later posed for the Indian case as: What led to the expansion of social protection policies historically and the legislation of NREGA in 2005?

The review of the aforementioned relevant literature on welfare and social policy in the OECD and non-OECD leads me to the conclusion that socio-political ideas are a particularly under-researched but poten-

¹² A practical argument for a focus on India is the large domestic research tradition, which is primarily published in English.

¹³ The South Asian welfare characteristics are explored by Köhler (2014). For Latin America see e.g. Barrientos (2004, 2009), Haggard & Kaufman (2008), as well as Burchardt & Weinmann (2012), for the Middle East and North Africa see Karshenas & Moghadam (2006), and on East Asia Usami (2004), Gough (2004a) as well as Haggard & Kaufman (2008).

tially influential factor for the development of specific welfare arrangements in the South. A selected number of ideas of important politicians and leaders was analysed for this study using secondary literature. Although this review remains somewhat at the surface, the analysis shows that – in the making of the Indian Republic and the early years of independence – earlier inegalitarian traditions were not successfully overcome. Both the ideas of domestic thinkers and, at times, international ideas on social policy have influenced India's welfare trajectory. Yet, ideas always need actors actively pursuing them in order for them to gain relevance in the form of policies and institutions. This can also be seen in the case of NREGA, a rights-based and universal scheme, which was made possible by a specific actor constellation at the time of its adoption, and which can build on a history of (smaller) public employment schemes. Aside from these findings for the Indian case, the literature review also illustrates the scope for South to North learning. In sum, this study thus re-emphasizes the need to include ideas as a central factor to explain the expansion of social security.

1.1.2 Implementation

The comparison of Northern models with Southern experiences reveals the second theme of this research: implementation. Implementation is not discussed as a main theme in Northern approaches to welfare and has also hardly received any attention in recent debates on welfare in the South. But, as mentioned above, access to welfare schemes in the Global South is highly unequal. This can – but must not – be a question of policy design; often it is due to issues in implementation. Thus, in particular in the South, we cannot expect policy objectives – such as e.g. universality of access, if that is an aim – to be realised easily. A change in policy does not necessarily constitute a change on the ground. Large differences in (social) policy implementation, for example with regards to access and participation, between and within locations in Southern countries such as India, are manifest empirical insights. The book analyses the differences that persist with regard to welfare achievements between locations and within locations in Southern countries and seeks to understand these. The second research question pursued here thus asks: how can differences in implementation be explained?

These issues of implementation are also of crucial theoretical importance. The process of policy implementation is a central, albeit neglected, arena of interest articulation, of contestation and of politics. It is important for representatives of the state administration, as well as for participants in social programmes for whom this is a more – if not the only – accessible arena. Throughout this book it will be shown that processes of implementation are highly political and have as much impact on realising welfare gains in a given setting as does policy design – if not more. This is a crucial insight for welfare studies in the South. The book develops an approach to the *politics of implementation*, which builds on earlier studies on implementation in the South (Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991) as well as an interpretative policy analysis (Yanow, 1990, 1996; Fischer, 2003).

India and NREGA are suitable cases for a study on implementation. In India, significant differences exist with regards to indicators of human development (see Figure 5.2 on page 168), and with regards to the accessibility of social protection programmes. While this is true generally, it is also true for NREGA in particular. In addition and in contrast to previous schemes, the government makes data on participation, wages and types of work in the scheme easily available. Based on official NREGA data and through the review of literature on NREGA, two States, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, and two Districts therein, Adilabad and Amravati, are identified as field work locations.¹⁴ The comparative set-up is chosen to explore seemingly more or less successful locations of NREGA implementation.

The analysis of data from extensive interviews with members of the administration, NREGA participants, and other relevant policy audiences confirms that differences in access to and benefits of welfare exist. The insights from the field furthermore suggests that an overall change in the logic of implementation as foreseen in the NREG-Act, has not been realised. Using the approach of the politics of implementation, the mechanisms or factors that contribute to change or continuity in implementation are analysed. Two central explanatory factors are identified. These are, firstly, perceptions, such as the perceptions of the self, the other and

¹⁴ More information on case selection and sampling can be found in Section 4.5.

the scheme's objectives, by both administration and participants, and secondly, the context and the legacies in which the scheme is locally set.

1.1.3 Participants' perspectives on welfare gains

Participants' views are also at the core of the third theme of this book. Welfare expansion neither stops at the level of policy making, nor at high coverage rates and accessibility. The numerical inclusion of people in a social protection scheme tells us little about the de facto socio-economic security of the populace. The realisation of welfare gains for the (targeted) population is another (and perhaps the most important) dimension of welfare expansion in the South. The third theme is investigated by analysing whether welfare policy changes also lead to changes in social security for participants. This inquiry builds on interpretative policy analysis approaches, which attribute a central role to participants as active readers of policy in the entire policy process (Fischer, 2003; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Especially those that are poor and vulnerable to manifold economic risks might not find their situation much changed when a new scheme is designed, either because they still cannot access it, or – even if they can access the scheme – its impact on their lives remains limited. Social protection policies can contribute to building spaces of greater freedom, and spaces for emancipation, enabling individuals to make choices that are not informed by sheer survival necessities. Social protection can allow those protected more say about how they want to lead their lives, can allow greater agency. But this is not necessarily so. We cannot assume that participants of welfare schemes simply gain social security and freedom through their participation. The question of possible welfare gains can only be answered by and with the people who are targets of such schemes. It thus becomes necessary to engage with participants, their perception of welfare schemes and the effects such schemes have on their lives.

Against this background, the third research question is: how does the implementation of the employment guarantee scheme differ between locations, also in the perceptions of the (target) population, and does it lead to welfare gains in their opinion?

This book emphasises that not only material gains are sufficient for understanding welfare gains: reliability and agency are two additional and

mutually supportive dimensions. NREGA is relevant also in this regard, because it entails a number of provisions that are meant to give participants more say about how they want to lead their lives. There are, thus, good reasons to believe that NREGA can contribute to substantial welfare gains. The interviews with NREGA participants highlight that the participation in the scheme has led to material gains for workers in most of the studied areas. But, in many cases, they come without corresponding success in terms of reliability and agency. This, in turn, limits the effects of material gains. The analysis of the multivocal accounts on implementation – including those of the respective administration – reveals three core issues in implementation that are different than previous literature on NREGA suggested. These are a) the distribution of welfare gains within the villages and the exclusionary processes around these, b) the mechanisms by which employment is provided on demand or not, and c) the role of awareness in a self-selecting scheme, discussed in Chapter 7. These aspects are further analysed using the approach of the politics of implementation.

1.2 Structure and methodology

Overall, this book links mid-range theories on welfare development (emergence), with studies on programmatic aims of a specific government and their realisation (implementation), and with the perspectives of citizens on social policy expansion (welfare gains). The bond is formed by the – contested – explicit and implicit norms and ideas that guide the objectives and practices of welfare provision, which are analysed throughout this book.

A suitable approach that analyses the role of ideas and perceptions in the emergence and implementation of social policies is political ideational analysis (Hay, 2011, 2002). The book furthermore builds on interpretative policy analysis to study how NREGA has been implemented and how the implementation is perceived by relevant policy audiences. Both approaches, as well as this book, are embedded in a post-positivist research tradition, which is introduced in more detail in Chapter 4. The central form of inquiry is the predominantly qualitative analysis of primary data from fieldwork interviews and secondary sources such as previous literature and statistics.

Although much more data is available on NREGA than on other schemes, much of it is not reliable. Additionally, it is not possible from participation numbers alone to understand, whether more people would have liked to work, or to work more, and what effect their participation in the scheme had for them. This made in-depth engagement with the participants' perspectives extensive fieldwork on NREGA implementation necessary.

This book builds on extensive research in different locations of India, on more than 60 interviews with NREGA participants and non-participants, focus group discussions, as well as interviews with members of the administration. They form the core of data for the analysis on implementation and welfare gains in Chapters 6 and 7 of this book. Before turning to these other central considerations of this book are introduced.

The book is structured as follows: Chapter 2 starts with an introduction to key terms and an in-depth review of relevant theoretical literature. It presents the state of the art on welfare regimes and social security expansion in the Global South and also draws on respective literature on the Global North. This review points to the knowledge gaps in the fields of emergence and implementation, and highlights which factors are deemed important for welfare development in the literature.

Chapter 3 provides a complimentary review of literature that deals with (social) policy analysis, in particular with policy-making in Southern contexts, and with issues of implementation. This review forms the base of the approach of the politics of implementation, on which the further analysis of the themes 'implementation' and 'welfare gains' rests.

Chapter 4 introduces important epistemological, ontological and methodological choices that guide the research process, and the field work in particular. The chapter also gives details on the political ideational analysis, which is used to further explore the theme of 'emergence'.

In the following three chapters 5, 6, and 7, the analysis of the three themes, following the approaches earlier introduced, is presented.

Emergence is the theme of Chapter 5. It provides a historical account of India's welfare trajectory, including the making of the MGNREG-Act.

Chapter 6 turns to a detailed analysis of both implementation and welfare gains. Because the two analytically distinct themes are empirically

intertwined, their analysis is jointly presented. On the one hand, the chapter presents official data on the implementation, as well as on the assessment of the implementation by the administration in the selected fieldwork locations. On the other hand, it presents the perceptions of welfare gains by the local population. The chapter highlights issues in implementation as identified by participants and administration. The core issues concerning implementation that are identified in Chapter 6 are then further explored using the approach of the politics of implementation in Chapter 7. The concluding Chapter 8 summarises the results on all three themes and the respective research questions and present findings from the entire book and reflects on the approach and the findings.

2 Discussing Welfare in North and South

Comparative studies of the evolution of welfare systems are pre-occupied with exploring relatively subtle distinctions between different, usually European, models. In global terms this is a very ethnocentric preoccupation. They rarely ask the much more difficult question of why the vast majority of the world's population lives in societies where systematic social welfare is neither provided nor expected. (Baldock, 1999: 469)

A key inquiry of welfare state research has been Esping-Andersen's classical question "What are the causal forces behind welfare-state development?" (1990: 9). Although it sounds like a global question, Esping-Andersen actually only poses it for advanced capitalist democracies of the north-western hemisphere. Hence, Baldock criticises this as an 'ethnocentric preoccupation' (see above).

In the context of this study – with its explicit Southern focus and a less positivist approach to social science – the question pursued reads: What arguments have been provided to explain welfare expansion in the South – or its absence – and the emergence of Southern welfare regimes? This question guides the review of literature throughout this chapter. Within the context of the whole book, the review below provides the arguments on welfare expansion in the South that have been previously made, and to identify what has been overlooked or neglected till date. The insights from this review form the theoretical background for the discussion of the emergence of NREGA in the context of the Indian welfare regime in Chapter 5.

Relevant and reviewed publications are structural-functionalist approaches that have explicitly addressed the question of welfare expansion in the South, as well as the recent literature on welfare regimes in the South. Additionally, I analyse approaches on which Northern welfare state theories build.¹⁵ I expect relevant insights from their explanato-

¹⁵ In my opinion, it is neither possible nor desirable to omit the voice of the researcher from the research. Thus, I also regularly use the perspective of the first person singular to highlight the choices I made. It is a conscious choice not to distance myself from the product of my research by employing a seemingly neutral position, or writing as a plural 'we.' This choice is embedded in and further explained by a post-positivist research tradition, which is presented in Chapter 4.

ry logics – focusing on interests, actors, institutions, and ideas – to explain welfare development the South. At the end of this first chapter, I argue that it is also useful to reverse the view and engage in South to North learning.

Before engaging with the theoretical literature key terms for the study will be defined. These range from welfare related terminology to ‘development’, and ‘North’ and ‘South’ themselves.

2.1 More than terminology: Of welfare and its development

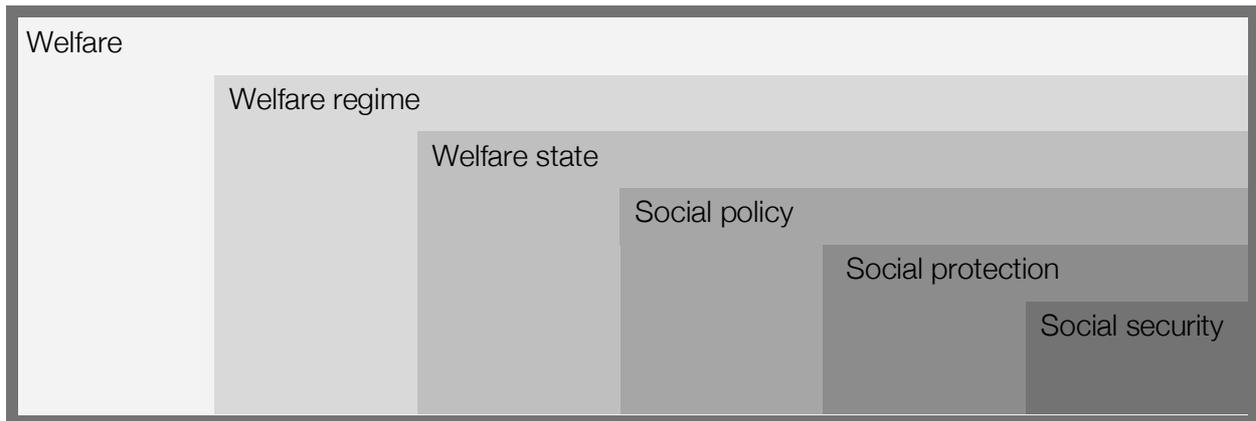
Academic debates offer a multitude of competing definitions of key terms and concepts such as ‘social security’, ‘social protection’ and ‘welfare’ and ‘welfare state/regime’.¹⁶ One reason why they are so disputed is that in the process of formulating ‘welfare’ or ‘social policy’ objectives and indicators, professional believes, and normative standpoints fall together in a way that cannot be disentangled (Rieger & Leibfried, 1999: 484).¹⁷ Different definitions give varying weight to components, objectives and indicators of welfare. For reasons of clarity I start with a short introduction of key terms in the context of this book and their relation to each other. Their contested conceptual underpinnings will also be discussed throughout the literature review.

Figure 2.1 below illustrates that welfare can be seen as the most encompassing, farthest-reaching term. The subsequent terms are described as components thereof, with the exception of the last term, social security. Social security can be defined narrowly or very broad, which puts it back to the same level as welfare. Therefore the figure is framed by social security.

¹⁶ Other terms such as ‘social safety nets’ or ‘social risk management’ will not be discussed or used throughout the study. Both are associated with a neo-liberal turn in economic and social policy and a purely economic reasoning for minimum social standards (see e.g. Chhachhi, 2008: 135; Heintz & Lund, 2012: 16). They have been popularised by the World Bank as the ‘human face’ of the liberalisation and privatisation policies of structural adjustment and are typically limited to especially targeted ‘vulnerable’ groups (critically see e.g. Burgess & Stern, 1991: 44f; Kurz, 2001; Heintz & Lund, 2012).

¹⁷ This argument would be disputed in a positivist approach to social science, which does claim that science untainted by normative positions is possible. Such a view is not supported in this research as will be outlined below in Chapter 4.

Figure 2.1 Terminology: From welfare to social security (and back)



Source: own illustration

In this book ‘welfare’ shall be understood as a term that relates to individual well-being in the original sense of ‘faring’ or ‘getting on’ well. Two universal needs – without which the “pursuit of one’s vision of the good” would be fundamentally disabled – must be satisfied (Gough, 2004b: 17): physical health beyond survival and critical autonomy of agency. The latter is the “capacity to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it” (ibid.). The second component of this definition clearly shows that welfare goes beyond a material dimension, and includes for example education. However, welfare defined in such a way is a rather abstract concept and not easily measured.

In the following term ‘welfare regime’ the content of ‘welfare’ is much more debated than ‘regime’. The latter is commonly understood as “a set of explicit or implicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area” (Krasner, 1982: 185ff). With regards to the former, there is little agreement to what ‘welfare’ such regimes converge. This can be seen in the literature review below. An important aspect of the welfare regime debate is, that it accepts that the state is not the sole provider or satisfier of welfare needs. Families, markets– as well as potentially other groups or institutions – are also recognised. Yet, in a welfare regime perspective the government’s activities influence, which responsibilities are placed on other actors. Therefore, even in welfare regime analysis, the state and respective governments retain a prominent position.

The ‘welfare state’ literature is – obviously – primarily concerned with the state’s or the government’s role in the provision of welfare for its

citizens (Kaufmann, 2003b: 43). Yet, not any state is deemed a welfare state. The engagement for welfare must be pervasive and a defining feature of the state's activities, "the government is assumed to play a primary role in ensuring the well-being of the population" (Heintz & Lund, 2012: 3). The degree to which states contribute to the welfare of its populace is typically measured in the per capita or relative spending levels on social policies. Although some authors in the field of welfare state theories look at social policies and the wider "relation between political and economic order and their link to the social order" (Schmid, 2007b: 643), the idea of the 'state' often remains to homogenous and one-dimensional (Clarke, 2004, 2008; Wehr & Priwitzer, 2011). A broader perspective on 'the state' should cover that there may be different interests between government agencies and bodies, as well as interests outside formal government bodies that influence state policies.

'Social policy' is often defined descriptively by the interventions that it includes: social transfers as well as the provision of public goods and services – among which education, public health care, housing, family social services, social services for the elderly, the disabled and children (also see Heintz & Lund, 2012). Concurrently, the term always reflects ideas about society (Kaufmann, 2003a: 43). Therefore, it is not surprising that the question what social policy is, has been answered differently over time and across space. For example, in the academic debate about social policy in the Global South Mkandawire (2004a) points out, that social policy may also take the form of food subsidies or land reform, according to its "redistributive, protective and transformative or developmental roles" (Mkandawire, 2004a: 1). Yet, the aims pursued with social policy may not be the same for all actors involved, neither will it affect society uniformly. Therefore, social policy is "historically and analytically highly ambivalent: It enables and restricts, empowers and confines, cares and neglects. It gives freedoms and limits options, it creates more equality and new inequalities, produces security and – thereby – ever new insecurities" (Lessenich, 2008: 10). Understood in such a way, social policy is not only a reaction to societal needs, but also an active ordering force of social relations.

One component of social policy is 'social protection'. When defined by the activities that it covers, it includes

government policies and programmes that aim to reduce economic risks, directly address vulnerabilities and protect individuals from harmful actions by third parties that would compromise their well-being. ... [It] therefore includes measures such as unemployment insurance, pension programmes, direct social assistance to poor households and labour market regulations. (Heintz & Lund, 2012: 3)

Compared to social policy, this definition excludes the provision of public goods and social services, as is often the case in social protection definitions. However, this term's importance grew recently, not the least through the ILO's campaign and later recommendation on 'National Social Protection Floors' (ILO & OECD, 2011; Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, 2011; ILC, 2012).¹⁸ In the Recommendation health is included, which points to the fact that social services are sometimes also considered to be part of social protection. Social protection has in common with social policy that it is state centric and typically refers to a responsibility of a government. As opposed to welfare or social security, social protection is always done for or to someone. The term does not have an individual or subjective dimension of experience or feeling.

Which leads back to the last of these contested and complex terms, 'social security'. It entails three dimensions: First, when defined by its content it refers to statutory social security schemes, which are often defined in a narrower sense than social protection schemes, i.e. they cover a varying number of contingency risks for formal sector employees as in the respective ILO Conventions.¹⁹ This narrow definition corresponds to 'social security' in the bottom right box in Figure 1 above. But, with the shift in- and outside the ILO the terms social protection and social securi-

¹⁸ There also is a change in vocabulary by the ILO. Earlier campaigns were called e.g. "Extending social security to all." The shift to 'social protection' as the central referential term is quite recent.

¹⁹ The most important Convention in this regard is the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). It makes provision for seven branches: medical care, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, old-age benefits, invalidity benefits, survivors' benefits, employment injury benefits, unemployment benefits, family benefits. In the United States of America the term 'social security' refers exclusively to pensions.

ty are increasingly used interchangeably (see ILO, 2010a: 125ff for a detailed discussion on terminology).

Second, social security is a right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in Art 22 and 25 (1) that

everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. ... Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Additionally, the right to social security is also enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which stipulates in Article 9 that “[t]he States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance.” The right to social security has recently also been emphasised by other bodies within the UN system, such as the Special Rapporteurs on Extreme Poverty and on the Right to Food (Sepúlveda & Schutter, 2012: 1; Sepúlveda & Nyst, 2012). When social security is seen as a right it escapes the narrow first definition. The right to social security is discussed as the basis for rights-based approaches to widely defined social protection (UNDP, 2010; ILO 2010b; Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, 2011; Sepúlveda & Nyst, 2012).

Third, social or socio-economic security is linked to ideas of human security, dignity and ultimately freedom (ILO, 2004). Thus understood social security matters for every person around the globe. Because “insecurity is *instrumentally* bad. It [...] shortens people’s time horizons, makes them more opportunistic and narrows their choices. It heightens uncertainty and vulnerability” (ILO, 2004: 3, emphasis original). Thus understood social security is a precondition, an enabler and interdependent component of a comprehensive understanding of freedom.

For Sen (1999: 8) freedom denotes the expansion of individual capabilities, which allows each and every one to be the agent of their lives, and the opportunity to “live long and live well” (Sen, 1999: 5).²⁰ Sen’s capability approach presupposes that certain needs have to be met as a (material) basis for the development of capabilities to lead an autonomous life for everyone (Gough, 2004b: 16ff).²¹ Social security – or in Sen’s terms protective security – plays a central role in the realisation of freedom.²² But, to achieve freedom, protective security, i.e. fixed institutional arrangements for statutory income replacement as well as emergency relief, are insufficient; all interconnected and mutually supportive instrumental freedoms – political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security – are needed (Sen, 1999: 40). Freedom thus has a material, as well as a political, and a social dimension.

For the ILO (2004: 5) socio-economic security necessarily includes four dimensions: freedom from morbidity – hence a level of physical health, well above the margins of survival – freedom from fear, control of own development and sustainable self-respect. As in the definition of welfare, socio-economic security goes beyond income poverty alone. “Notions of poverty overlap with notions of insecurity”, but “one could have one without the other” (ILO, 2004: 3). To measure socio-economic security the ILO suggests a complex three-layered approach that combines indices for seven forms of socio-economic security, which entail input indicators on the political commitment to a particular form of security, process indicators that measure processes, which have been created to give effect to the commitment, and outcome indicators that denote achievements (ILO, 2004: 47). This definition of social security is more encompassing

²⁰ The ILO (2004: 5, emphasis original) writes similarly, that basic security provides an environment in which each and every one has “the fair and good *opportunity* to live a decent life.”

²¹ The argument for social security has been justified from a number of perspectives, which can be grouped into three lines of thought: the idea of uninsurable risks or market failure, rights based arguments or needs based argumentations (Munro, 2008).

²² That Sen starts his argument with needs does not mean that the goal is minimum standards; deprivation can be both absolute as well as relative, problematic are both (Sen, 1999: 22). But, Sen has been criticised for being primarily occupied with absolute deprivation, or excessive inequalities, not equality in general.

than the one of welfare of Gough above because it includes the need for civic-political freedoms. There are thus three dimensions of social security: first and most obviously, the improvement of material conditions, in particular when people are living in situations of deprivation. The second dimension is reliability. Social security is future oriented and entails the ability to plan. The third dimension is the growing autonomy of agency, to have a say on one's own life.²³

A further component in the definition of social security – that is engrained in both Gough's and the ILO's definition to a certain extent – which is key in this research, is the involvement of those allegedly affected by welfare and social security measure in their assessment. In other words, "ultimately the success and failure of social security would have to be judged in terms of what it does to the lives that people are able to lead" (Drèze & Sen, 1991: 31).²⁴

However, social security or welfare policies by the state have been criticised from various perspectives. Liberal critics of the welfare state argue that social security creates dependency on handouts and reduces the entrepreneurial spirit of people who know that they can rely on state support. Critics on the left have criticised welfare policies as technologies of rule, as instruments by the means of which populations are defined and categorised and thereby made governable. If we accept this view, social security thus entails a paradox: state benefits, which may be viewed as a form of dependency and as a tool of governance, are also meant to create greater independence and ultimately freedom. This is an inherent tension between the freedom enhancing character and the disciplinary functions of social security.

²³ It may be difficult to differentiate between the exact welfare gains from the expanded scheme, and gains through other sources, as there will always be informal influences that we cannot account for, which influence welfare outcomes and gains. (Gough *et al.*, 2004) take up this issue in their conception of informal security schemes (see section 2.6 below).

²⁴ For Drèze and Sen, social security has a promotional and a protective character, which need to be thought and implemented together. They advocate to give up the idea of income poverty in favour of capability deprivation (Drèze & Sen, 1991: 20). Additionally, for Sen the question of outcomes must include the processes by which the outcomes were achieved, this is what he calls *comprehensive outcomes*. On the contrary *culmination outcomes* look at the results irrespective of processes (Sen, 1999: 27).

In this study, based on the above discussion of terminology, social security expansion shall be understood in dual way: On the one hand, it denotes the expansion of government social or welfare policies and programmes (Type 1 – welfare development, see Figure 2.2 below). It shall be understood as a step in the realisation of more comprehensive, substantial welfare provision by the government agencies. Indicators for such an expansion would be new schemes with new or larger target groups and participants, or higher numbers of participants and eligible groups in existing schemes. This might – and in many cases must – be accompanied by higher social outlays by the state.²⁵ On the other hand, social security expansion in this study shall entail, whether the formal expansion of a welfare scheme does lead to gains in welfare and social security for society, or at least those sections of the population that are affected by the policy (Type 2 – welfare gains, see Figure 2.2 below).

Figure 2.2 Dual meaning of social security expansion

	Welfare development (Type 1)	Welfare gains (Type 2)
Characteristics	Expansion of government social or welfare policies and programmes More comprehensive, substantial welfare provision by government agencies.	Gains in welfare and social security for society, or at least those sections of the population that are affected by the policy
Indicators / dimensions	New schemes with new or larger target groups and participants, or higher numbers of participants and eligible groups in existing schemes Potentially higher social outlays by the state	Individually identifiable improvements in the domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material gains • Reliability • Agency

Source: Author’s own

This encompassing view on social security expansion is not limited to absolute poverty. Relative poverty is clearly also a concern. All forms of poverty are an expression of inequality, which has severe implications for all societies (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014). Thus, although inequality may not be a central category of this study the

²⁵ Nonetheless, spending alone is neither a necessary nor a sufficient indicator: more people could profit from redistribution within the social budget, whereas higher outlays could also be spend regressively on a small number of people.

achievement of more social security is seen as an enabling step towards greater equality, which is central for countries in the North and the South alike, as well as on a global scale.

The other much-disputed term, which is frequently used throughout this study, is 'development'. In this context it is linked to the verb developing in the sense of emerging, evolving, something coming into being and expanding as part of a historical process. It is not about the capital 'D' Development of international development, a project that has been criticised "as an expert-led, universalized project that leads to depoliticizing tendencies, [in which] ... not only capitalism but also context, difference and politics are obscured from view" (Hickey, 2009: 474, building on Hart (2001)). This 'Development' is also criticised for its biased and one-dimensional concept of development and modernity, in which the 'developed' states are more advanced than others, the 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' countries (Ziai, 2010). I share this critique and will therefore not refer to 'developing countries' in my own words.

To distinguish between those countries in Europe and North America, which are classically discussed as welfare states and those outside this realm I will use the terms global North and South.²⁶ These are preferred over the earlier used 'centre' and 'periphery'²⁷ because they include cultural next to economic arguments, and they show that the relationship between North and South is more dynamic, than 'centre' and 'periphery' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012b).²⁸ Yet, the 'south', remains a relational term, which cannot be

²⁶ This is also a decision against the terms 'First' and 'Third World' that have lost traction – not least through the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'Second World' – and which are also associated with a biased notion of modernity. I am also not using the terms 'high, middle, and low-income countries'. This would reduce the differences between countries primarily to income levels, and overlook the many ways in which 'development' and 'underdevelopment', the high and low incomes of countries are related to each other.

²⁷ These are often linked to dependency theory, which argues that the centres have influenced the economic, social and political structures of the periphery historically through colonisation and continue to do so, through the regulation of production and circulation of goods and capital (see e.g. Becker, 1999: 60).

²⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff (2012b) use the terms 'north' and 'south' without capital initials, probably also to show that these are inherently diverse structures. However,

defined, a priori, ... [it is] not a thing in or for itself. It is a historic artefact, a labile signifier in a grammar of signs whose semiotic content is determined, over time, by everyday material, political, cultural processes, the dialectical products of a global world in motion. ... [I]t always points to an 'ex-centric' ... location outside Euro-America. (ibid.: 46)

In this understanding, North and South are not geographical entities, but analytical categories, which are linked in processes of (inter-) dependency. The relationship between North and South has become less static and uni-directional, also empirically “the line between north and south is endemically unstable, porous, broken, often illegible” (ibid.). The South has moved to the forefront of globalising modernity, “not of an alternative modernity, of modernity *sui generis*” (ibid.: 14, emphasis in original). One source of the modernity of the South is its earlier exposure to

the effects of world-historical forces, [it is] the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labour are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north ... [It is] a hyperbolic prefiguration of its future-in-the-making. (ibid.: 12, 19)

Academically the South can no longer be seen as a reservoir of “unprocessed data” but challenges us “to understand the world from its vantage: to make it ... an ‘active producer of social theory’” (ibid.: 1, 44). Therefore, after looking at the South through the lens of Northern welfare state theories, I will also ask what such a ‘Southern view’ highlights with regards to Northern theories. As I will show, it questions the validity of some dear assumptions, and points to blind spots of Northern theories. Which brings me from definitions to theories and concepts that have so far attempted to explain welfare development – or its absence – in the South.

2.2 Functions and structures

One set of arguments explains the development of welfare provision by the state with functional logics or structural arguments. This school of thought suggests that there is a direct causal link between changes in

I will use them with capital initials whenever I refer to the global North or the Global South, as defined below.

society and economy – such as urbanisation, democracy or the prevalence of a capitalist mode of production – and the state’s activities in the field of welfare (Schmidt, Ostheim, Siegel & Zohnhöfer, 2007: 22).

This is the case in modernization theory, which argues that “economic growth is the ultimate cause of welfare-state development” (Wilensky, 1975: 24). The answer to the question what explains welfare development is, hence, economic growth, which leads to the modernization of societies expressed in industrialisation, urbanisation and other social changes. These developments necessitate state activities in the social domain. The expansion of welfare provision is convergent among increasingly rich countries and mediated by the age of the population and the age of the social system – not by ideology, political actors or the political system claims Wilensky (*ibid.*: 16,47). Typical indicators are per capita national income and social security spending per capita – as proxy for welfare. In Wilensky’s classical study these are strongly correlated: the higher the GDP per capita, the higher the social spending.

But, as critics of the modernization school have pointed out, it fails to explain the large differences in spending levels and patterns among developed economies. Hence, economic growth does not serve as a tool for the explanation of variation between similarly developed countries, if at all, it can only account for very different cases. This also means that some countries with a comparatively high GDP levels neither have high social spending nor excessive welfare states (see Usami, 2004: 129). And, once the focus shifts from social spending to welfare outcomes – such as life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy etc. – it proves that robust GDP growth alone is insufficient to cause superior welfare outcomes, a finding, which holds across North and South (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b).²⁹ This critique is supported by the fact that there are a number of countries and regions within countries³⁰ which achieve superior welfare outcomes despite relatively low income levels and social budgets (Ghai, 2000a: 1f; Bangura & Hedberg, 2007: 2f; Sandbrook *et al.*, 2007). This school of thought has also been criticised that the social change associat-

²⁹ However, growth did create opportunities for more social spending for those governments that chose to do so (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008: 9; Sandbrook *et al.*, 2007; Kohli, 2010: 502).

³⁰ The Indian state of Kerala is an often-quoted example in this respect (Ramachandran, 2000; Sato, 2004).

ed with growth – i.e. industrialisation – was non-uniform in the North, and is particularly different in recent times (Pierson, 2004: 215f; Heintz & Lund, 2012: 10f).³¹

Another second major branch within the family of structural arguments explains welfare development as a functional logic of democracies.³² Instead of economic determination, these authors argue that the political regime determines welfare development. But, a look at the extension of social security programmes and achievements in terms of welfare outcomes shows that authoritarian, state corporatist and populist regimes have produced good welfare outcomes, too (Usami, 2004: 131; Bangura & Hedberg, 2007: 5; also see Mulligan, Gil & Sala-i-Martin, 2002). Also Haggard & Kaufman (2008) dismiss the argument that democracy would by itself result in a more generous and progressive welfare regime. From a historical comparative perspective, Loewe (2009a) argues that social security systems in developing countries were frequently not installed in democratic settings.³³ Additionally, Gough and Abu Sharkh (2010b: 45) suggest that the increase of democracies in the so-called third wave of democratization has led to a shrinking statistical association of democracy with welfare. These findings suggest that a formally democratic order of a country as such seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for welfare development in the South.³⁴

³¹ Actually, Pierson (2004: 239) argues that historically late industrialisation “has probably helped ... to achieve more encompassing social policy regimes.” Yet, despite the numerous academic critiques and scientific counter evidence against the core argument of modernisation theory – that economic development is the cause of and leads to convergence in welfare development – its political traction is unbroken. Core statements of modernization theory on the primacy of economic development and the subsequent quasi-automatic social development live on only slightly modified in ‘trickle-down theories.’

³² See Haggard & Kaufman (2008: 365ff) for a detailed overview.

³³ Loewe (2009a) names four different settings; firstly by the colonial powers, secondly after independence with a comprehensive attitude, thirdly by the pressure of certain powerful interest groups within the state and lastly during the past 20 years as a means to accelerate social and economic development.

³⁴ Yet, frequently the definition of democracy used in such quantitative comparisons are formalistic and mainly consist of universal suffrage and regular change of government through vote, hence, they are no substantive definitions of democracy.

A further functionalist argument also starts with the connection of democracy and capitalism: Neo-Marxist approaches argue, that historically labour is neither necessarily free, nor willing to sell its labour to others for money. What is required is a process of active proletarianisation. This is achieved through social policy, which is, hence, not a reaction to the needs of the working class, but part and parcel of the constitution of working-class (Offe, 2005 [1977]: 167). Social policy fulfils the function of the permanent “transformation of owners of labour power into wage-labourers” (ibid.: 157). Part of becoming wage labour is also to become a citizen, only the latter allows to transform potential class conflicts about the capitalist mode of production into political disputes, which leave the core determinants of economic organisation untouched. For the context of the South the question arises, why so many owners of labour power have not been transformed into wage-labourers (also see Burchardt & Weinmann, 2012: 18), i.e. why commodification of labour has not been pervasive development and what that means for citizenship.

A newer strand of an essentially structuralist argument is concerned with the influence of international structures and the impact of globalisation, more precisely the structure of the world economy, on the welfare state. The authors of this strand of literature assume convergence towards minimal welfare provision in the light of international competitiveness of open economies in the world market. But, there is also much scepticism towards this argument. For example Pierson (2004) argues that the pioneers of welfare established their systems in a period of highly open international trading. This is not to say that globalisation does not diminish policy options, but neither does it “systematically undermine the viability of welfare regimes, old or new” (Pierson, 2004: 234).

International political economy scholars have advanced a similar argument for the South. They claim convergence of welfare development in developing countries because they face the similar challenges of demand for capital and surplus labour. This is expected to set developing countries on a converging route of a (neo-) liberal development path, which is mainly triggered by external pressures (see Rudra, 2007). But, evidence suggests, that countries reacted to these externalities in crucially differ-

And, OECD definitions of ‘welfare states’ typically include that these are democracies.

ent ways.³⁵ Hence, the position in the international political economy environment alone does not hold sufficient explanatory power.

Overall, when functionalist arguments explain how structures cause welfare development they tend to produce very general answers. These are contradicted by the real worldly empirical variation in the development of welfare. Therefore, purely functional logics neither explain welfare development in the South nor its absence. Because of the limitations outlined above, they are no particularly useful point of reference for the research question pursued here. These approaches were soon complemented by approaches that seek to explain different levels of welfare development within groups of countries of similar economic development levels and political structures, these are discussed below.

2.3 *Interests and actors*

One school that seeks to explain why welfare development varies across rather similar countries focuses on actors and their interests as historical and political forces. These approaches shift the focus to power in domestic politics as a source of welfare development and away from a rather mechanic understanding of causation through economic structures. Concurrently, they narrow down the number of countries for which the new theoretical claims should hold: Western democracies, which have already achieved a “high level of economic development [that] was necessary in order to fund expensive welfare programmes” (Olsen & O'Connor, 1998: 7).

One argument is the following: Democracies with an overall capitalist economic structure of property rights and markets as dominant institutions produce inequalities that are in tension with the political and legal equality of the citizenship status (Marshall, 1949 [1992]). Without social rights the universal ideal of equal citizenship would paradoxically contribute to the perpetuation of real inequalities.³⁶ An extension of social

³⁵ For examples see Sandbrook *et al.* (2007). Rudra (2007) discusses the argument explicitly.

³⁶ Chatterjee (2004: 4, 22) discusses this in detail for former colonies. According to his analysis the virtues of equal citizenship are not equally accessible to every citizen in many countries in the South. The universal objectives in constitutions and government statements can only be claimed to their full extent by the few (virtuous) citizens that belong to civil society, while the biggest part of the population engages

rights is therefore necessary to overcome the gap between theoretical and practical rights-holders. In a democratic setting, the likelihood that an order without social rights would be questioned by the citizens is much higher, and the non-realisation of social rights less probable (Marshall, 1949 [1992]: 88). Hence, Marshall predicts that a democratic country with a capitalist economic structure will evolve towards a welfare state by means of its domestic political processes, but without specifying these further (Lessenich, 2008: 43).

Later interest-based approaches name more specific sets of actors. The expansion of welfare is typically attributed to the power of labour and social democratic parties. Power-resource theory (for a review see O'Connor & Olsen, 1998) contends that power resources, “the attributes (capacities or means) of actors (individuals or collectivities) which enable them to reward or punish other actors” (Korpi, 1998 [1985]: 42) are effective, because they shape other actors expectations of the use of this resource. Korpi claims, that the existing “differences in the degree of inequality in the distribution of power resources between countries and time periods provide a fruitful base for the understanding of variations among the western democracies” (ibid.: 58).

In another variant of the power-resource approach the concern is not exclusively on labour and capital, but on larger class coalitions including e.g. farmers (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which crucially shape welfare regimes. Interest-based approaches have furthermore highlighted, that it is not only the strength of social-democratic, left parties, which influence the composition of a welfare regime, but also the vigour of market-oriented conservative parties and catholic welfare organisations (Schmidt, 1998). Lastly, the influence of median voters through electoral competition, in particular if they are relatively poor, has been stressed (see Dallinger, 2012: 3, based on Meltzer and Richards (1981)).

The low-income median voter thesis is contradicted for the South besides others by the Indian case – a country with 60 years of democratic tradi-

with the state through the intermediaries and exceptions that are at the core of political society. This is the result of the failure to achieve full citizenship rights for all. The inegalitarian effects that universal policies have produced and reproduced, in particular in the political realm, can be understood as a powerful reproduction pattern, which shape the welfare trajectory (Ehmke, 2011b).

tion where – depending on the definition – between 25 and about 40 per cent of the population live in absolute poverty. In sum, actor and interest-based approaches have not been discussed for the South for long. Only recently, they became part of the explanatory logics provided by Southern welfare regime approaches, which will be discussed below.

Overall, interest and actor based theories have generated strong arguments about the development of welfare regimes and the expansion of social policy. However, in the South constellations can be quite different, as will also be argued below. A more general critique towards interest and actor centred approaches has been, that they overlook the role of the state and its apparatus, which potentially generate own dynamics that cannot be reduced to a play-ball between capital and labour. These are typically dealt with by approaches that focus on institutions.

2.4 Institutions and practices

Institutions can be regarded “as social practices that are regularly and continuously repeated, that are linked to defined roles and social relations, that are sanctioned and maintained by social norms, and that have a major significance in the social structure”, summarises Jessop (2001: 1220) in his description of institutional approaches. In that sense a family is an institution, as is federalism, criminal law or a national pension fund. Institutional approaches maintain that institutions hold explanatory power “because [...] institutional variations function as independent or intervening variables in one or another causal chain” (ibid.: 1221). Hence, such approaches explain welfare differences in reference to variance in specific institutional properties.

Institutions matter because they are seen, inter alia, as the points of crystallization of social forms, as defining the rules and resources of social action, as defining opportunity structures and constraints on behaviour, as shaping the way things are to be done if they are to be done, as path-dependent path-defining complexes of social relations, as the macro structural matrices of societies and social formations, and so on. (ibid., 2001: 1217)

With regards to welfare and social policy, institutional approaches have focused on their role for governments and other state apparatuses to

maintain power. This is e.g. discussed for the origins of German social policy under chancellor Bismarck in the late 19th century, when the introduction of various branches of insurances for workers is seen as move to create and maintain workers loyalty to the state (Townsend, 2007: 24). Inadequate institutions have been discussed as a potential reason for the absence of welfare provision. In this view, the state's administration and bureaucracy are deemed to lack professionalism, which impacts on the capacities to tax, and to run social programmes. However, arguments focusing on fiscal capacities have been questioned by Gough & Abu Sharkh (2010a: 12ff), who find that in the South there is no strong link between the ability to tax and welfare. Also the ILO is arguing that even low-income countries can finance basic social security programmes from own revenues, once the focus of expenditure is shifted to the social domain (ILO, 2008a).

Authors with an institutional perspective have also factored in international influences on welfare and social policy. Different from the functionalist arguments on international influences, which have been discussed above, an institutional view emphasises that the global economy as such does not structure the social domain. It is rather the degree of links with the world market and the institutions that protect a country from the world market, hence, it is the degree of openness of the economy that matters.³⁷ Another institutional turn on international influences stresses that social policies, especially in the South, have long been influenced through structural adjustment programmes and international aid flows (Mkandawire, 2004a).³⁸ An institutional analysis of the development of welfare in the South should therefore take ties to international organisations, and potentially the conditionalities involved into account.

And, there is historical institutionalism, which makes two related but analytically distinct claims on the evolution and trajectory of policy i.e. in the field of welfare. The first is concerned with the initial choice of policies in founding moments of institutional formation that shape the following distinct development paths (Thelen, 1999: 387). During such critical junctures actors or their coalitions take essentially contingent

³⁷ For a discussion of this argument see Haggard & Kaufman (2008: 352ff).

³⁸ The influence of international institutions on social policy in the North, on the other hand, has long been neglected (Deacon, Hulse & Stubbs, 1997).

decisions, which once taken create powerful feedback effects for future decisions because they influence future alignments and interest formulation (ibid.: 287ff). Hence, the second claim is that patterns of institutional stability and change are constrained by past trajectories through reproduction mechanisms (ibid.: 387ff). The latter can either be incentive structures, in which actors, once an institution is in place, “adapt their strategies in ways that reflect but also reinforce the ‘logic’ of the system” (ibid.: 392). Alternatively, they have been identified in the distributional effects of institutions, which are not neutral, but “reproduce and magnify particular patterns of power distribution in politics” (ibid.: 394).

In the field of social policy an example for this logic could be that there are times, critical junctures, when it is open what decision will be taken, i.e. an employment or a tax financed pension system. But, once the decision has been taken and the respective institutions have been built, they create new interests, which are obstacles for a later radical reform. In that sense, these phases of openness for contingent decisions are of special interests for scholars studying welfare development from an historical institutional perspective. Institutions – once created – have an impact on the further development of welfare and social policy because they are actively ordering social relations, creating new interests that need to be dealt with in any future reform.

Yet another way of thinking about welfare from a by and large institutional viewpoint is discussed in governmentality studies. Building on the work of Foucault (1999, 2000b, 2000a) this branch of theories points out that

governance practices (mediated by institutions) attempt to delimit, unify, stabilize and reproduce their objects of governance as the precondition as well as the effect of governing them. [...] [G]overnance practices typically aim to create and reproduce the subjects needed for governance to operate effectively. (Jessop, 1999: 351; also see Clarke, 2004)

Governance of welfare regimes thus looks at changing definitions and practices not exclusively on institutions as such. Welfare governance produces the subjects that it later governs. In that sense welfare regimes are “constitutive of their objects of governance and not just as responses to pre-given economic and social problems” (Jessop, 1999: 352). Also in

this sense, social policy is an actively ordering force. The effect of such governance practices is not homogeneous across the population but contributes to “the classification and normalization of individuals, groups and other social forces as a basis for differential treatment” (ibid.: 351; also see Chatterjee, 2004). Social policy is, thus, not benign, but always also an instrument of social control (see i.e. Wehr & Priwitzer, 2011: 143).³⁹

Overall, the different institutional schools have provided many and rich arguments on the ways in which welfare development is shaped by institutions. Yet, as I will outline below, institutions and their effects can be quite different in the South. Hence, the institutional argument may be important for Southern contexts, but the institutions will most likely be different.

2.5 Ideas and cultures

A fourth set of arguments rests on the power of ideas. More generally, “very little space [has been] accorded to ideas as causal (or constitutive) factors in mainstream political science” (Hay, 2002: 195). Also with regards to welfare development, ideas are typically not discussed as stand-alone explanatory factor, they need actors striving for them and institutions in which they inscribed.⁴⁰ Ideas are central, for example, in Esping Andersen’s welfare regime approach, where they are the third pillar next to interest and institution based arguments. Socio-political ideas are deemed to have a lasting influence on the type of social policies pursued and welfare regimes developed. This becomes obvious in the names of his regime types ‘social-democratic’, ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990). What gives these regimes their name, and explains

³⁹ With regards to the relevance of welfare governance for the South Ferguson (2009) argues that the kind of neoliberal embodiment of subjectivity as discussed by Foucault, is not the type of practice prevalent in the South. He suggests that there is another way of neo-liberal arts of government with more direct institutional impacts. These are the politics of structural adjustment. Another argument is made by Scott (1998), who highlights the way in which colonial subjects were constituted as the other and the minor.

⁴⁰ In purely discursive approaches ideas do not need to be embodied in actors or institutions. They are influential in and through the discourse alone. The notion of ideas will be discussed in more detail below.

their distinct development path are the ideas that have shaped them. Or as Kaufmann puts it: “the specific difference of welfare policies can be explained by the links between normative ideas and their institutional realisation” (Kaufmann, 2003b: 36).⁴¹ Ideas are crucial for the social policy path taken because they are encapsulated already in “how the social question is put, how the central problem of a specific social policy has been formulated at the outset of its development, [this] must be seen as influential key to the understanding of national social policy development” (ibid.: 33). When Kaufmann discusses socio-political ideas he has both the ideas of influential individuals as well as societal ideas on welfare in mind. Baldock only sees influences of the work of few selected individuals, whereas “culture in its broadest sense – as the unorganized and largely implicit values and norms represented in the behaviour of a community or nation” (Baldock, 1999: 459) does not have a causal link to any particular form of welfare in a given country.

The latter argument is explicitly questioned by Rieger and Leibfried (1999: 461f), who analyse the influence of Confucian religious views on East Asian welfare regimes – hence they are among the few authors that study welfare development outside the OECD. Rieger and Leibfried conclude that social policies in East Asia follow a markedly different logic than European or North American welfare regimes with Christian (or Protestant) traditions. They point out that worldviews and mind-sets follow their own discrete logics and cannot be deduced from social and economic structures. Rather they have a strong impact on societal stratification. And, culture – an amalgam of widely shared worldviews and mind-sets – frames the room of manoeuvre for changes in social policy, because shared sense-making may prevent that certain socio-political policy proposals are discussed as alternatives at all (ibid.: 455, 479f). Both quantitative and purely institutional accounts of the welfare state neglect such specific cultural elements of social policy (ibid.: 483). At the same time the authors are paramount that the strong normative and empirical reliance on the family within the East Asian welfare states is not a sign of an unbroken tradition within the social structure, but rather a product of state policies (ibid.: 430). Overall, Rieger and Leibfried (1999: 482) ques-

⁴¹ The quotation above has been translated from German to English by the author. The same holds for all following translations from originally German texts, unless marked otherwise.

tion whether the idea of the welfare state – as it is conceptualised in the OECD with its distinct Christian religious history – can be transferred to other regions at all. They trigger the provocative question, whether the commonality of OECD welfare states, which allowed them to expand welfare, really is that they are capitalist democracies – as the mainstream of welfare theories argues – or whether it was rather their Christian, and in particular Protestant, religious history that supported this development.

An ideational perspective has also been used to explain international influences on welfare development (Deacon *et al.*, 1997; Gough, 2004b; Mkandawire, 2004a). Those states, which decided to extend social security schemes in the aftermath of World War II, met a favourable international environment in economic as well as ideational terms, that encouraged welfare extension, social policy and labour rights. By the late 1970's the tide had changed. The neo-liberal turn, which then took hold, is said to have discouraged the extension of welfare schemes, but there is no linear effect of economic pressures as such (Yeates, 1999). Similarly, Rieger and Leibfried (1999: 484) are convinced that

the determinants of globalisation will not influence decision-making on social policy directly or one-dimensionally. ... For current and future social policy decisions the role of assumptions and values, and thereby of different culture, is not superficial. On the contrary, they gain importance because cultural values and beliefs steer the search for adequate instruments for the realisation of societal objectives.

In sum, many studies on welfare regimes and social policy in the North acknowledge that socio-political ideas, either of individuals or a society, are of importance in explaining the specific formulation of a welfare regime. But, influences are discussed at very different levels. For the South, ideas have been discussed specifically by Rieger and Leibfried for South East Asia. They attribute a fundamental importance to ideas and shared world-views. Whether this can be said for other world regions too, has not yet been explored.

Overall, most approaches above concentrate on or limit themselves to one central causal factor or explanatory logic to explain welfare development. But, in the North as well as in the South there is another ap-

proach to the study of welfare, which combines several of the arguments made above to a new explanatory logic, the welfare regime approach.

2.6 Southern welfare regimes?

For the OECD welfare regime theories form one of the most discussed and contested topics in social science.⁴² In Esping-Andersen's modern classic *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) insights from actor-centred approaches on class-coalitions are combined with the notion of institutional paths or path-dependency, and the importance of ideas.

His approach has received much praise. For example, Esping-Andersen's arguments complement the study of quantitative data on welfare arrangements with a sociological review of historical developments, and an explicit discussion of the normative foundations of different regime types (Schmid, 2007a: 259). Hence, the welfare regime approach shares with institutional approaches the recognition of the welfare state as force ordering social relations, through stratification.

Yet, critics point to a number of weaknesses in Esping-Andersen's theoretical and empirical work. The category of de-commodification, which Esping-Andersen sets as the crucial denominator and historical objective of welfare states, is only one possible objective besides freedom, solidarity, (re)distribution argue for example Rieger (1998), Candeias (2004) and Wehr *et al.*, (2012). For de-commodification to emerge as an objective there needs to be prior commodification (Lessenich, 2008). Another central line of critique is that Esping-Andersen's degree of de-commodification is centred on male breadwinners and fails to take account of the typically dependent provisions of welfare for women (Lewis, 1992). Overall reproductive and care activities receive little attention in the welfare debate, as do entitlements of non-core workers (Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Seekings criticises that the role of redistribution is lost in Esping-Andersen's empirical work (2008: 18ff).

⁴² The extensive and controversial debate around welfare state regimes in the North is depicted i.e. in Esping-Andersen (1998 [1989]: 32ff), Arts & Gelissen (2002), Schmid (2007b), Lessenich (2008), as well as in Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser (2011).

Table 2.1 Main comparative approaches to welfare regimes in the South

Author	Welfare regimes identified and main characteristics	Method / explanatory model	Indicators / dimensions
Gough, (2004b) Gough & Abu Sharkh (2010b, 2010a)	Actual or potential welfare state regimes: High state commitments and relatively high outcomes More effective informal security regimes: Relatively good outcomes despite low state spending Less effective informal security regimes: Low levels of welfare achievement, low public commitment and some international inflows Externally dependent insecurity regimes: Heavy dependence on aid and remittances, poor welfare outcomes	Statistical cluster analysis of 101 countries. Theoretically founded ideal types differ from empirical real types. Common belonging to clusters not coherently explained. ⁴³	Welfare/ security vs. illfare/ insecurity outcomes: poverty rates, literacy levels, Human Development Index Degree of private and public commitment: public and private spending on welfare including health, and international flows or aid and remittances
Rudra, (2007, 2008)	Protective welfare states: Aversion to international markets, combine socialist and conservative elements, de-commodification policies before proletarianization, hence few beneficiaries Productive welfare states: active encouragement of commodification and international market participation, resemblance with liberal model, either repression or minimum level of protection for workers Dual welfare state: legacy of primarily inward-oriented and encouraging export competitiveness, social policies respond to capital and labour, expected heightened political competition for scarce public resources i.e. partisan politics.	Cluster analysis of 32 middle-income countries. Two theoretical ideal types confirmed and one more empirical real type. Explanation: Initial choices on export or domestic economic orientation create interest groups and path dependency.	Outcome variables: literacy, mortality, and immunization rates Promoting protection input: spending on public employment, social security, and tertiary education, ILO conventions ratified Promoting commodification inputs: level of public investment in primary and secondary education, basic healthcare

⁴³ Gough & Abu Sharkh (2010b, 2010a) explain welfare development with the “5 I’s” industrialisation, institutions, interests, ideas and international influences. However, these discussions are not connected to his regime types. See the discussion below.

Author	Welfare regimes identified and main characteristics	Method / explanatory model	Indicators / dimensions
Haggard & Kaufman (2008)	<p><u>Latin America</u>: Alignment with urban workers, exclusion of the rural poor, Import substituting industrialisation (ISI), unequal coverage and adverse economic conditions lead to complex, uneven developments in the region</p> <p><u>East Asia</u>: No alignment with labour, extension of core services in particular education, ISI – but with a parallel export-orientation, post 1990 initially low coverage combined with robust growth lead to expansion of social entitlements</p> <p><u>Eastern Europe</u>: Repression of independent worker and rural organisations, broad social entitlements, state monopoly in planning, post 1990 liberal reforms hit in an adverse economic setting, but mediated through electoral pressure based on prior wide coverage</p>	<p>21 middle income countries from Latin America, East Asia and Eastern Europe.</p> <p>Identify regional regimes, no ideal type construction.</p> <p>Explained by fundamental political realignments, fiscal base of social policy is crucial, preferences of actors and their organisation are more important than institutions.</p>	<p>Outcome variables: Social spending on social security, health and education, Wealth (GDP Growth)</p> <p>Explanatory variables: Regime type (elections, franchise, civil liberties)</p> <p>Structural change (urbanisation, industrialisation, openness for trade)</p> <p>Social stratification</p>
Seekings (2008)	<p><u>Agrarian regimes</u>: Focus on peasants, social stability and development, family is central, employment marginal and state varied, dominant mode and locus of solidarity is kinship and family, decommodification and defamilialization are low, redistribution varies.</p> <p><u>Workerist regimes</u>: Focus on workers, industrial peace and income smoothing, family is marginal, employment central and state varied, solidarity is individual or corporate, degree of decommodification is minimum, defamilialization varies, redistribution is low.</p> <p><u>Pauperist regimes</u>: Focus on paupers, social stability or electoral gain and poverty reduction, role of family is marginal, employment marginal and state central, solidarity is universal and located through the state, degree of decommodification is maximum, defamilialization is medium to high redistribution also medium to high.</p>	<p>Comparative historical analysis not focused on particular countries or regions, but periods</p> <p>Explanation: coalitions and objectives, institutional paths</p>	<p>Outcome variable: degree of redistribution</p> <p>Explanatory variables: existence or absence of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an immigrant working class - agrarian crisis and de-agrarianization - electoral competition for votes of non-unionized poor <p>Degree of openness of the economy</p> <p>Exposure to external influences favouring either universal or employment-based welfare provision</p>

The debate on the welfare state has emerged from and still largely focuses on the North. Welfare regime theories have been developed to explain divergence and convergence among a set of countries that – from a global perspective – appear rather similar because they share key characteristics: they are “capitalist economies, formal labour markets, relatively autonomous states and well-entrenched democratic institutions” (Gough, 2004b: 33). Esping-Andersen himself and other authors are paramount that the claims of the welfare regime approach are essentially valid for Western capitalist democracies. He himself writes, “the new emerging industrial democracies do not appear set to converge along Western welfare state path. ... [W]hat kind of welfare state is likely to emerge in the future?” (Esping-Andersen, 1996: 1). He answers his own question – whether a wider set of countries than those in his original 1990 study emulate the Western model or follow new trajectories – by saying “[i]f by ‘new’ we mean models that deviate markedly from existing welfare states, the answer is essentially no.” (ibid.: 20).

Nonetheless, about a decade after the publication of the *Three Worlds* study the welfare regime approach was first applied to the South (Gough, 1999; Dombos, 1998)⁴⁴ and ever since, the number of studies with a southern focus is on the rise (Gough, 2004b, 2008; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b; Rudra, 2007; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Seekings, 2008).⁴⁵ As Table 2.1 on the previous page shows, the authors do not agree on the regime types that emerged in the South, but they agree that they are different from those described in the OECD.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Earlier works on welfare institutions in the Global South have rather focused on the organisation of social security or social protection in non-industrialised societies and came from anthropology, ethnography, development studies as well as economics (see i.e. Benda-Beckmann *et al.*, 1988; Ahmad, Drèze, Hills & Sen, 1991; Platteau, 1991). One in few authors that highlights the colonial legacies of welfare organisation in the South is Midgley (see i.e. 2011).

⁴⁵ Studies on single countries or regions come from Usami (2004), Vivekanadan & Kurian (2005), Kwon (2005) Loewe (2010) as well as Köhler & Chopra (2014).

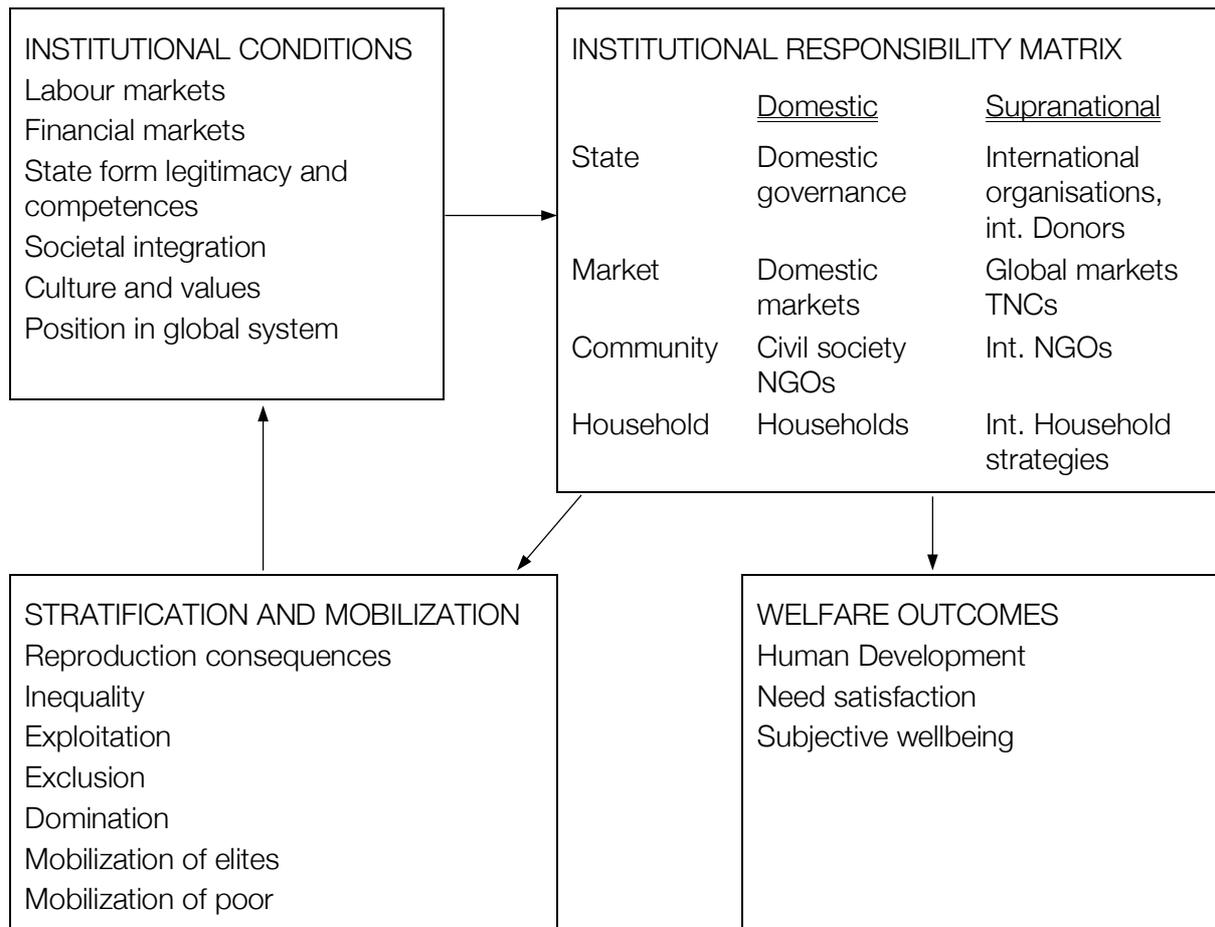
⁴⁶ A more radical critique comes from Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai & Stubbs (2015: 24), who suggests that the term regime is misleading and suggest “assemblage” instead. According to them, there is a “need to deconstruct the taken-for-granted conceptual apparatuses around ‘social policy’ and ‘welfare regimes’ developed in the Global North” (ibid.).

All four comparative approaches listed on the previous pages highlight variation within in the South, without agreeing on its classification. And, they advance different arguments explaining how welfare regimes in the South came into place. In the third column from the left the table shows that the explanatory models used are primarily a combination of institution and interest-based arguments. Besides, international influences are frequently discussed.

What is furthermore common among the different approaches is that they share the need to point out that there are a number of crucial economic, social and political differences, which influence the dynamics of welfare expansion. Starting with institutions, Gough (2004b: 26ff) highlights fundamental disparities on a general level: state institutions are less autonomous and democratic practice might be absent, capitalism in the South exists next to and interacts with other forms of economic organisation such as subsistence (see top left box in Figure 2.3 on the next page). Other differences in terms of institutional conditions concern the labour market – a crucial institution in terms of the realisation of welfare that has long been neglected and only recently received more attention (Heintz & Lund, 2012; Burchardt & Weinmann, 2012). In many countries of the South labour markets are characterised by high shares of informal employment, with no or weakly defined employer-employee relationships. “Widespread informality means that most of those engaged in productive employment are excluded, de facto if not de jure, from social protections” (Heintz & Lund, 2012: 20). This means on the other hand that “the population in formal employment is generally relatively privileged, that is, has incomes close to or above the median income. A welfare system that ties benefits to formal employment is likely to exclude most of the poor”, concludes (Seekings, 2008: 25). Besides these institutional conditions Wood & Gough (2006) identify three more fields in which the institutional settings vary between North and South.

Other institutional differences between North and South concern the providers of welfare (see top right box in Figure 2.3 on the following page). The Northern triad of state, market and family has to be extended to include community, which is a fourth major source of welfare production (Gough, 2004b: 26ff). And, in the South there is a greater reliance on kin, family and community rather than either market or state (Seekings, 2008: 25).

Figure 2.3 Welfare organisation in the South



Source: Wood & Gough (2006)

The welfare mix is much more varied, access to welfare provision in the South is more heterogeneous, unequal and differentiated according to social status:

Welfare provision by the market demands economic capital, social security through networks presupposes cultural capital. State provision of public and social services are coupled with citizenship and employment status, and company benefits are exclusively linked to employment status. Strategies to achieve social security are therefore socially varied and determined. (Dombois, 1998: 14,20)

And, as Wood & Gough (2006: 1700) point out, there is an international dimension to welfare production too. It comes in on all scales, from donor funding on State level to remittances on household level. Generally, the international influences on institutional level are deemed to be high, through i.e. the colonial past (Gough, 1999) and exposure to structural adjustment programmes in return for credits from international

financial institutions. Seekings (2008) argues that a significant degree of international migration can also be seen as an international influence.

Thirdly, most authors argue that welfare achievements tend to be lower in the South, yet with great internal variation, which they in turn seek to explain (see bottom right box in Figure 2.3). The figure above, fourthly, includes mechanisms of stratification and mobilisation of elites and other groups, which are said to be different from the North (Gough, 2004b).

Differences in terms of actors and interests can be seen in the bottom left box in Figure 2.3. In the South, the power of labour vis-à-vis capital is much more limited: the rates of unionisation are small, large parts of the population live in the countryside and agriculture absorbs a larger share of the workforce than industry or services (Gough, 2004b; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010a). In the absence of substantial industrialisation processes and only small proportions of organized labour, we may not expect labour to play the same crucial role in the extension of welfare as in the North (Seekings, 2008, 2012).

Besides the weaker role of labour, many countries in the South generally host more heterogeneous populations in terms of ethnies, languages and religions. Gough and Abu Sharkh (2010b) conclude from the correlations in their cluster analysis that relative homogeneity in these respects is profitable for welfare development, whereas it seems more difficult to organise inter-communal solidarity in ethno-linguistic heterogeneous settings. Another argument could be that structural heterogeneity with regards to the integration in capitalism obstructs the formation of stable coalitions between different groups (Becker, 2008).

Also in Rudra's (2007) approach institutions and interests play an important role to explain differences between the 59 "less developed countries" middle-income countries that she studies. She predominantly relies on historical institutional arguments. The *productive*, *protective* and *dual welfare states* that she identified are marked systematic divergence in their social policy regimes.⁴⁷ Their origins can be traced back to the deci-

⁴⁷ The category of 'productivism' that Rudra uses has been labelled a rhetorical device rather than a truly different concept of welfare organisation by Choi (2011:15). Choi points out that the most protective regimes (highest social and unemployment spending) at the same time show the highest levels of productive expenditure (health and education spending), at least in the OECD. Partly the defini-

sions of policy makers, which have reacted differently to internal as well as external pressures, and thereby shaped distribution regimes in the long run (ibid.: 382ff).

Haggard and Kaufman (2008) share much of Rudra's explanatory model – path dependent distribution regimes shaped by strategic alignments during critical junctures – and add that the impact of economic performance, as well as of democratic institutions also play a role for the three regional regimes they observe. However, “the effects of institutions are conditional on the distribution of underlying preferences over the policy in question and the strength of the contending social groups in the political process” (ibid.: 15f). Hence, for them interests are more important than institutions. In terms of the strength of the poor – an interest group deemed to favour social policy expansion – they caution that

[a]lmost by definition the poor and vulnerable are deprived not only of assets and income but of social and political connections and influence as well. Democratic rule provides incentives for politicians to reach such groups and opportunities for them organize but by no means guarantees that these crucial steps in the political process will in fact occur. The fate of the poor and vulnerable is therefore never in their hands alone but will depend on the self-interest of other social groups and the formation of cross-class coalitions with an interest in equity and social justice. (ibid.: 362)

Hence, the type of coalitions that design social policy, crucially influence whether it is pro-poor. The preferences of all actors are structured, but not determined by prior economic choices and the type of political regime (ibid.: 347, 357f). Economic growth may be “a permissive condition for the expansion of social entitlements” (ibid.: 354), but it can also be its substitute, as the case of the authoritarian regimes of East Asia shows. In sum, neither economic openness, nor growth have a direct effect on social policy expansion. For their emphasis on politics as a mediating

tion of productive welfare regimes overlaps with those of ‘developmental welfare states’, in which welfare and social policy are said to be subordinated to economic efficiency and economic growth, social insurance is mainly for industrial workers, and which tend to reinforce economic inequalities (Kwon, 2005).

factor they also rebuff the argument of convergent developments due to globalization. Such would implicitly claim

that political factors have no or no mediating effects on the relationship between globalisation and social policy; governments facing very different types of political challenges are presumed to respond similarly to external constraints. Yet, this assumption does not appear to hold, variety prevails. (ibid.: 353)

What does matter in their eyes, are the fiscal foundations of social policy, which “cannot be overemphasized” (ibid.: 362). But, whether there is a direct link between a state’s ability to raise taxes and the welfare outcomes has been challenged by Gough and Abu Sharkh (2010a).

Seekings (2008) approach to welfare regimes in the South puts actors and their interests first, but also includes institutional and ideational arguments. He sees five factors at work for the pace and direction of welfare regime change in the South (ibid.: 28): First, the existence of an immigrant working class, which makes it more likely to see a rapid move toward a ‘workerist’ approach which provides non-universal benefits to corporate groups of workers “the importance of the immigrant working class is that it lacks links to a productive peasantry.” Second, is an agrarian crisis and de-agrarianization; third, the degree of openness of the economy; fourth, the relative salience of universal versus employment-based norms of welfare provision through influences of either the International Labour Organisation (with its workerist emphasis) or the British liberal welfare tradition (with its ‘pauperist’ emphasis). And lastly, whether or not electoral competition for votes of non-unionized poor takes place. Such competition for the votes of the non-unionized poor would provide a stimulus to the promise of non-contributory social assistance, because the non-unionized poor are unlikely to be able or willing to be covered by a contributory system.

Overall, Seekings (2008: 24f) analytically differentiates three regime types: ‘workerist regimes’, in which risk-pooling structures are based on formal employment; ‘pauperist regimes’ that are defined by the recognition of the rights of citizens to income security through non-contributory, almost always means- tested social-assistance programs that resemble those of ‘liberal’ welfare regimes of the North; and ‘agrarian regimes’, which “promote income security through promoting broad access to

land.”⁴⁸ He points out that any real type welfare regime in a given country is likely to be a combination of several or all of these types.

Ideas are not much discussed as crucial differences between welfare in North and South in the comparative approaches to welfare regimes in the South. Seekings only points out that pro-poor reforms in the South were not limited to the typical domains of welfare such as social or labour market policies. They were rather framed in the broader term of ‘developmental policies’. He, hence, suggests that Southern welfare arrangements should rather be called ‘developmental states.’

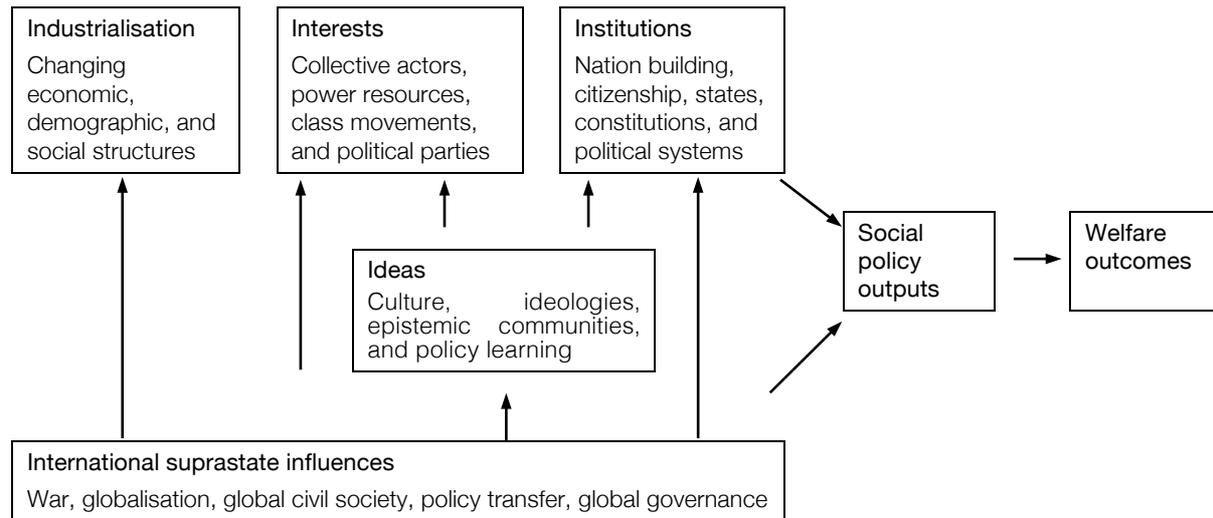
Gough and his co-authors do not devote many resources to explain what caused countries to be in one regime or the other in their early works of Gough and his co-authors (Gough, 1999; Gough *et al.*, 2004; Wood & Gough, 2006).⁴⁹ In later works they check for correlation of their empirical clusters with indicators of five explanatory logics: industrialisation, interests, institutions, international suprastate influences, and ideas, the so-called ‘Five I’s’ (Gough, 2008; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010a), depicted here in Figure 2.4.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Seekings attributes the development of the agrarian regime directly to the influence of the British Colonial Office. In the mid 20th century it took the stand that it had something to do about the social welfare of the natives, at least in Africa. However, Beveridge type social assistance as at home did not ring a bell to many, it was feared it would promote idleness among the uneducated. So instead the “Colonial Office developed a new doctrine of ‘development’ which emphasized raising the productivity of colonial populations through targeted investments in agricultural production, from this doctrine was born the agrarian approach, and the agrarian welfare regime” (Seekings, 2008: 33). The agrarian approach was compelling only if officials believed that an agrarian economy could be revived (or established anew).

⁴⁹ Midgley (2011: 41) therefore criticises their approach as “ahistorical”, and is not surprised they do not mention the heavy colonial legacies in Southern welfare organisation. In a similar vein Clarke *et al.* (2015: 24, citing Baltodano (2002)) caution against “social policy that is used ahistorically to represent state and actions in both developed and developing societies regardless of their different histories and different social conditions.”

⁵⁰ Indicators are the “stage of economic development (GDP per head), societal inequality (the Gini coefficient of income inequality), the level of democracy (using the Gurr index), the degree of cultural diversity within countries (the ethno-linguistic fractionalization index) and historical antecedents (employing Therborn’s four distinct ‘roads to modernity’)” (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b: 34).

Figure 2.4 Explaining Welfare Development: Gough's 'Five I's'



Source: (Gough, 2008; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010a)

The 'Five I's' proved powerful to explain welfare development in the North. But, they fare very differently in their relation with the Southern regime types and prove to be not or only partially helpful (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010a: 7ff). The explanatory value of each of the 'Five I's' is limited in the South, essentially due to the greater structural pluralism:

the '5 I's' explanatory model ... has less purchase in understanding welfare ... in the developing world. In the Global South, the pattern of industrialisation, interest formation and representation, institutional development, ideational influences and the entire international environment are very different: more complex, variegated and heterogeneous. Consequently, their ability to explain welfare and revenue systems is more indeterminate. (ibid.: 31)

In sum, Gough and his co-authors neither strengthen the role of ideas as an explanatory argument for the South, nor do they really advance an explanatory model for welfare and social policy expansion in the South.

2.7 Interim conclusions on welfare in the South

Esping-Andersen was sceptic whether distinct welfare regimes would evolve outside the OECD. The review of above suggests that he might be wrong. For long the idea of convergence made scholars overlook the distinct developments in the South. But, welfare arrangements in the South are no unfinished trajectories or defunct replicas of Northern models (Seekings, 2008: 23; Wehr *et al.*, 2012). They are distinct modern

Southern configurations of welfare and social policy that can and need to be analysed in their own right.

In particular Gough and his co-authors should be credited for their pioneering work and thorough analysis of the different institutional and structural settings in the South. Their welfare regime concept has the most comprehensive aspiration, and they suggest that it can be used globally to show variation in and commonalities of newly described regime types that complement the welfare states in the North. With the introduction of 'informal security' and 'insecurity regimes', they also paved the way for a use of the term 'welfare regime' as a term for the study of welfare arrangements in given context without the normative connotation of achieving greater welfare.⁵¹ Yet, their regime clusters remain largely descriptive, and they do not explain how or why a certain state became member of one or another cluster. Moreover, other innovations they made on a theoretical level do not find their way into the empirical work. Examples are the more diverse actor constellations and de-clientelisation as central category of achieving greater welfare. While they theoretically stress the importance of a broadened view on welfare arrangements, their empirical material for the identification of regimes and their consistency over time is – due to data limitations – confined to data on private and state social spending and respective welfare outcomes (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b). In order to identify regime types – among which the informal security regimes – they use outcome indicators such as measles vaccination and schooling rates, which measure access to and use of formal, state provided welfare services. Similarly, they theoretically stress the need for de-clientelisation, but do not have indicators to model it and hence drop measuring it. In consequence, in their empirical work Gough and his co-authors strongly focus on the mediating effects of state institutions and spending on welfare outcomes. The main empirical innovation is the inclusion of remittances and external aid as welfare inputs, which capture the relative importance of international ties for a welfare regime. And, there, hence, is a tension between

⁵¹ Such a connotation that welfare has already been achieved is very much part of Esping-Andersen's (1990) approach. Gough *et al.* (2004) point out that not all states reach security, that rather insecurity is the rule in some states. In that way, they break away from the problem-solving bias that besets much of welfare regime research.

the analytical framework of Gough and his co-authors and their attempts to empirically prove the existence of the various regimes (Gough, 2004b; Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b).

Between the approaches, the emphasis on the state's activities in the social field varies, but the state is clearly not the sole provider of welfare; families, markets and communities also contribute. While traditional ties and welfare arrangements were the subject of anthropological and ethnographic studies first, they are acknowledged in political science today.

The emphasis of other welfare approaches in the South, like their counterparts in the North, is on interests and institutions. Ideational influences received less attention so far. Where ideas appear, as in Rudra's and Seekings' approach, the mechanisms by which they work are not made explicit. Only Rieger and Leibfried (1999) have specified that ideas are influential in the form of cultural and religious worldviews, which frame the room of manoeuvre for social policies. Similar to debates in the North is the tendency to develop ever new typologies, at cost of a relative neglect of the role of the state in (semi-) peripheral welfare regimes, the impact of colonial legacies, power constellations and governing functions (also see Wehr, 2009; Wehr & Priwitzer, 2011; Wehr *et al.*, 2012; on legacies see Midgley & Piachaud, 2011).

Another shortcoming is that the welfare regimes identified in the South once again do not centrally discuss reproductive and care activities. The argument that the organisation of care is a central, albeit neglected, determinant of welfare regimes has gained prominence in the OECD welfare debates over the past decades. But, as the welfare regime framework is extended to the South, old notions of work and gender divisions travel unconsciously along – although they have even less relevance in Southern settings. The share of households with only one (male) wage earner is significantly lower than in the OECD. Engaging in productive *and* reproductive activities is reality for the majority of women in the South.

In these fields, Southern approaches seem to repeat some of the flaws of Northern welfare regime concepts. In two other areas, however, there may be useful insights from the South for the North. First, most of the approaches for the South make the internal variation of access to welfare state provisions a starting point of their argument (Dombois, 1998).

Northern welfare regime approaches could benefit from such a proposi-

tion. Analyses that focus on an average-production worker, that is less and less the norm also in the OECD, easily overlook that de-commodification is different for other groups of workers, this argument has been advanced by Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011). A second field in which Southern welfare regime approaches may be a step ahead is the systematic integration of international influences on welfare regimes into their models in the form of migrant labour (Seekings, 2008), remittances and foreign aid (Gough *et al.*, 2004).

2.8 Linking welfare debates to India – implications for the study

What does the literature review above tell us with regards to the guiding question ‘What arguments have been provided to explain welfare expansion in the South – or its absence – and the emergence of Southern welfare regimes?’ and what does it mean for the research questions pursued in the remainder of the book? The review above revealed that explanations for the development of specific welfare regimes are to be sought in domestic developments rather than global structural or functional logics. Welfare and social policy expansion always appear to be mediated by domestic politics, by prior institutional choices, and by the times in which such processes take place. This is an argument to pursue the question ‘what explains welfare development and social policy expansion?’ contextually, for specific spatial and temporal settings.

The approach to Southern welfare regime pursued in the remainder of this book engages in a nuanced analysis of welfare arrangements, building on Northern insights and adapted structural, economic and social settings. Building on the approaches reviewed above, I will analyse a specific Southern welfare regime and its emergence with a view to the interplay of actors, their interests and strengths, as well as to institutions and ideas. The emphasis shall be an inquiry into those factors and logics behind the emergence of one specific welfare regime and its recent social policy expansion. The context chosen is India.

In terms of Southern welfare approaches, India is most specifically discussed by Rudra (2008) as exemplary case of a protective welfare regime. According to her analysis such regimes are characterised by a combination of socialist and conservative elements in terms of social provision. Constitutive is that they eschew international markets, and protective policies are developed mainly for those (small) groups that have already

been commodified and have some exposure to international markets. These are predominantly public sector employees. Their share in total formal employment is comparatively high in India, just above 70 per cent throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (*ibid.*: 124). Rudra is aware that these protective policies are not accessible to all. And, she argues, that the distributive coalitions that have been formed in the early welfare regime prevent that protection is expanded to significantly more. However, in India only about 7 per cent of the workforce are formally employed (NCEUS, 2007). In other words, the regime is protective for only about 5 per cent of its workers. Even if her argument may be right, whether being ‘protective’ really is a defining feature of the Indian welfare regime may be doubted. The regime name seems misleading.

For Gough *et al.* (2004) India belongs to the informal security regimes, more specifically it is a ‘failing informal security regime’ with high illiteracy (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b). Empirically this means that the authors see a connection between relatively low state spending and comparatively better welfare outcomes, which they attribute to non-state, informal mechanisms. Characteristic for such regimes are “high but different levels of insecurity with low levels of public responsibility ... exhibiting higher life expectancy but high youth illiteracy (though somewhat higher girls’ secondary enrolment)” (*ibid.*: 37). The failing informal security regime is further marked by “low income, an ex-colonial ancestry and high cultural diversity; however it also exhibits more extensive democracy and income equality” (*ibid.*: 49). They concede that in such regimes, there may be many different public programmes and also informal security mechanisms, but they also see “high levels of insecurity among the mass of the population” (*ibid.*). What the authors of this approach fall short to do is to engage with any of their regime types in discussions of specific cases. India exhibits some of the features that are characteristic for failing informal security regimes. It could well be an exemplary case for this regime type.

Other approaches above do not discuss India specifically. Haggard and Kaufman (2008) look only at East, not at South Asia. Overall, South Asia and Africa are under-researched in terms of discussions on distinct regional welfare regimes. Köhler (2012, 2014) attempts to close this gap for South Asian region. Köhler points out that the state historically fulfils a developmental as well as a welfare role in the region. She sees a common

developmental welfare state identity in the region that builds on a rights-based approach in recent innovations in social policy.

Seekings (2008) does not classify any country as a specific regime, but argues that all real regime types will be a mix of the ideal types that he identified. In terms of his approach India exhibits mostly features of agrarian regimes, which focus on peasants, social stability and development. In such regimes the role of family is central, whereas the importance of employment for social provisions is marginal, decommodification and defamilialization are expected to be low. Typically such regimes “bolstered peasant agriculture through shaping access to land, access to product markets ... and production systems” (Seekings, 2012: 18). And he cautions that although these regimes were “ostensibly pro-poor, the primary beneficiaries were usually better-off or ‘middle’ peasants” (ibid.). But, in terms of the formal sector, which is predominantly public, India also exhibits features of workerist regimes (see Table 2.1 above). Lately, Seekings (2012) argues that India belongs to a number of countries in which redistributive welfare regimes are on the rise. He argues, such regimes engage in state action not to structure markets or kinship responsibilities but to replace them.

Besides, India has also been discussed as a welfare state – though rarely – by domestic authors. Exceptions are Arora (2004) and Bava (2004), who take as starting point the Indian Constitution’s call for the realisation of welfare for all its citizens. The post-colonial Constitution demands to

promote the welfare of the people ... to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations. ... The citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood. (Constitution of India, 2007)⁵²

Given these universal and far reaching constitutional goals in the field of welfare, India should indeed be called a welfare state – if being a welfare

⁵² And Art. 41 directs “the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want” (Constitution of India, 2007).

state would solely depend on the declared principles of state policy. But, these brilliantly formulated 'Directive Principles of State Policy' of the Indian Constitution have not been realised till date.

This is not to say that there have been no activities by the Indian central and State governments in the field of welfare. In fact a multitude of social welfare programmes on central and State level exist (Dev, Antony, Gayathri & Mamgain, 2001: 16; Imhalsy, 2008; de Haan, 2008; Sülzer, 2008; Srivastava, 2008). Between 2003/2004 and 2012 the number of the centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) alone, excluding social schemes by the State governments, varied between 99 and 213 per year (Chaturvedi, 2011: 18).

Objectives and plethora of schemes aside: the Indian society is de facto characterised by persistently high poverty rates and lack of social protection. India is home to a third of the world's absolute poor, hunger and malnutrition remain on unacceptably high levels.⁵³ And, as highlighted earlier, not only absolute but also relative deprivation and inequality are problematic for a society. Whereas earlier India was often discussed as a country with low levels of inequality, this is increasingly doubted (World Bank, 2011a: 23): Consumption inequality may be relatively low, but in terms of income inequality India is close to Brazilian and South African levels, both of which are known for their high levels of inequality (OECD, 2010).⁵⁴

⁵³ Here I discuss mainly the material dimension of poverty. However, as outlined above in the debates related to welfare and social security, poverty cannot be reduced to monetary poverty alone (for a discussion on the links between monetary poverty, capability deprivation and subjective well-being see i.e. Neff, 2009).

⁵⁴ Inequality and its negative effects on poverty have been criticised for long (Myrdal, 1970: 49ff), and became a growing concern since liberalisation. Several authors attest rising inequality alongside the rapid growth process, between and among states, individuals, sectors, and groups (Drèze & Sen, 2002: 319ff; World Bank, 2011a; P. K. Kannan, 2012). In terms of consumption inequalities high and middle income groups increased their consumption by 4.3 per cent and 6.2 per cent per year respectively, whereas the income groups at the bottom of the pyramid (extremely poor, poor, marginal) increased their consumption by less than one per cent between 1993/94 and 2004/05. The latter "consist predominantly of the informal workers, among whom the socially deprived groups (SC/ST, OBC and Muslim) and women are over-represented" (NCEUS, 2009: 20). On the other side of the coin, the share of national income held by Indian billionaires rose from 1.8 per cent to 22 per cent

Hence, in India we find a stark contrast between the proclaimed ideals of state activity in the field of social and welfare policies and their realisation. There clearly is a misfit between the intended, or proclaimed, goals and the outcome. India is a country where the *de facto* extension of social security to the whole population remains an urgent need. Here, welfare regime approaches as discussed above fall short in their explanations. Even though they move beyond an analysis of policy prescriptions – considering welfare inputs and outputs – they do remain on a level of macro structures of interest aggregation and cumulative outcomes.

The discussions of Southern approaches to welfare regimes and on India above suggest that there are a number of issues unresolved in the theoretical models for which a closer look at the case of India may be beneficial. Such a more nuanced analysis of the Indian welfare regime, that takes up the issues below, is not only of value in itself, but may also serve the function to discuss some of the premises of Southern welfare regime approaches. As the largest country in South Asia and an important player in the region, such a discussion may contribute to the emerging debate on South Asian welfare regimes.

First, for the welfare debate in the OECD, the influence of ideas on welfare politics is at least implicitly well recognised (i.e. social-democratic, liberal, conservative regimes in Esping-Andersen, 1990). Yet, even there the notion of ideas and their influence on politics typically lacks a theoretic underpinning. For the South, the question that powerful ideas have shaped the development of welfare regimes has hardly been posed, with the few notable exceptions listed above. Given the prominence of India's independence struggle, its leaders and their ideas also outside India, there is reason to assume, that domestic traditions of thought have significantly shaped India's welfare regime. The hitherto lack of attention to ideas in welfare approaches for the South may constitute a considerable research gap.

Second, the role of the international environment for welfare regimes – in the form of policy initiatives and discourses, as well as institutions

between 2003 and 2008 – for a group of only 61 individuals in 2008, in a country of nearly 1.2 billion people (Halimi, 2013). In another ranking of 2008 by *The Economist* four out of the ten richest people in the world were Indian (Imhalsy, 2008).

and structural constraints – is disputed. Arguments on convergent (Deacon, 2007) as well as continued divergent developments (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008) have been made. The question, when the international environment played what role for the expansion of welfare, will be exemplary discussed for the case of India.

Third, India is interesting also in terms of actor constellations and coalitions. That these differ from the North has been discussed (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Rudra, 2008; Seekings, 2008). But Seeking is the only author that really brings in an adapted actor constellation framework. For the future, particularly the effects of not necessarily class based identity formation and coalition building need to be investigated (also noted by Wehr & Priwitzer, 2011: 144f). In this context the social organisation by caste constitutes is a peculiarity of the Indian case. Also in terms of the recent politics of social policy expansion in India may constitute a special case. The latest big welfare initiative, NREGA, targets landless labourers not through access to land, but through access to employment.

Fourth, when studying the South it has been shown to be necessary to move away from (de-) commodification as indicator for welfare achievements. This indicator is inadequate for a context, where large sections of the workforce may not have been commodified. The category of de-clientelisation has been advanced theoretically, but not yet applied empirically. However, the aggregate numbers of state and private spending, poverty or literacy rates, and health indicators cannot tell how a piece of legislation, a scheme or a changed regime alter people's lives, and whether they experience more social security and welfare. For the Indian case, it will be important to find a meaningful way to assess the impacts of expanded social policies for citizens. This study will use the an encompassing notion of social security, which entails the dimensions of material welfare gains, reliability and agency, as outlined in Chapter 2 above. In the welfare state debate dependency is primarily seen as market-dependency of commodification, whereas political independence is deemed a given. De-familialisation already highlighted that de-commodification is not the only dependency structure – in the South this is further broadened by de-clientelisation. Instead of looking at each of these dimensions separately, they are discussed here under the heading of agency, which denotes the freedom enhancing character of social security.

I follow Drèze & Sen (1991: 31), who remark that “ultimately the success and failure of social security would have to be judged in terms of what it does to the lives that people are able to lead.” In order to do this we need to engage with those targeted by such schemes and inquire into their perspectives with the help of more qualitative and ethnographic methodologies. This also implies a change of perspectives on citizens that participate in welfare programmes, from objects and targets of policy to co-producers of welfare outcomes.

Fifth, the inclusion of the perspectives of citizens is, thus, more than a methodological question. The state’s role as provider of welfare is traditionally privileged by welfare regime theories (notwithstanding the recognition for the contribution of other welfare providers). On a theoretical level the inclusion of the beneficiaries’ perspective on welfare implies to readjust the role of the state, and undertake a more nuanced analysis of the actors involved in producing and assessing welfare gains. This calls for a disaggregation also of ‘the state’. Such enables us to analyse how different state institutions and agents such as citizens and administrative staff at various levels interact with each other in the production of welfare. Only, such a perspective opens rooms for an analysis on why the impact of welfare policies varies for different groups and across locations. However, this last point falls outside conventional approaches to welfare regimes and needs to be underpinned by other theoretical discussions that deal with the gap between policy prescriptions and outcomes. This is typically taken up by policy (implementation) studies, which will be discussed in the Chapter 3 below. It is devoted to a review of literature that deals with the more empirical realm of differences in implementation. The review shows that the perspective of implementation research is a useful – if not necessary – addition to welfare regime theories for the South.

3 Studying (Social) Policy and its Implementation

From the poorest countries of the Third World to the most advanced exemplars of welfare capitalism, one of the few universals in the history of the 20th century is the increasingly pervasive influence of the state as an institution and social actor. None of which is to say that the existing states give us what we need. ... The contradiction between the ineradicable necessity of the state in contemporary social and the grating imperfection with which states perform, is a fundamental source of frustration. (Evans, 1995: 4)

The quote by Evans points to the frustration about the gap between proclaimed goals of policies, or things that we expect from states and the failure to achieve these. One way of conceptualising this is as implementation – or the lack thereof. “Policy implementation”, writes O’Toole (2000: 266) is “what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention of the part of government to do something, or to stop doing something, and the ultimate impact in the world of action.” An underlying assumption of most welfare regime approaches is that – after the settlement of eventual political conflicts about policy ideals between various groups of actors – policy prescriptions gain effect in the form of welfare outcomes. Observation in the field of social policy as well as other policy fields tells that often outcomes do not match the intent. Policy goals are unequal to their realisation. There is an *implementation problem*, which can be understood as the “imperfect correspondence between policies adopted and services actually delivered” (van Meter and van Horn, 1975, cited in Grindle, 1980: 3). Around this problem centres a subfield of policy analysis, implementation studies. Their central question is “what accounts for the differential success of public policies in the implementation process?” (Cline, 2000: 551). In its broadest sense, such “implementation analysis ... is fundamentally concerned with the capacity of the state to act in pursuit of its social objectives” (Brodkin, 1990: 109).

Implementation analysis is typically part of policy analysis. This approach also looks at actors, institution and ideas – as the welfare regime approaches – but it does so with a focus on concrete (social) policies, their emergence, implementation and outcomes (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

The origins of policy science are often attributed to Lasswell and Kaplan, who stress an explicit practical, problem-solving and outcome orientation, multi-disciplinarity as well as a straightforward normative and value orientation (deLeon & Vogenbeck: 4f). Policy studies centre on specific policy processes of single schemes or *policy* (sub-)fields, not the grand picture of changes driven by economic or social structures (*polity*), or by political processes of consensus and conflict (*politics*) (Blum & Schubert, 2009: 13f). The emphasis of the approach is more on meso and micro processes, not on the macro. The assumption is not that politics and polity do not matter for policy formulation and outcome, the question is, how and to what extent they matter (ibid.: 28; Schubert & Bandelow, 2009: 4; for an overview of mainstream approaches also see McCool, 1995; Howlett *et al.*, 2009). Often the process of policy-making is analysed sequentially using the concept of the policy cycle with a varying number of phases, e.g. the five steps of agenda setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation (Howlett *et al.*, 2009).

On the one hand, the idea of a sequential or even linear policy process has deservedly been criticised (see e.g. Blum & Schubert, 2009: 130ff). On the other hand, it points us to one aspect in the making of social and welfare policy that is neglected in welfare regime approaches: implementation. As the short discussion on India above highlighted, this is problematic, because in India – and not only there – intent and implementation are far from each other.

The implementation problem has been approached roughly from four different angles.⁵⁵ Early approaches on implementation tended to focus on the dynamics within the *administration* or *bureaucracy*. They used insights from organisational, management and social-behavioural stud-

⁵⁵ Methodologically, implementation studies evolved from a first generation of approaches based on single case studies. A second generation sought to develop analytic frameworks and test them, however, they were often based on a rather small number of cases that nonetheless produced many influential variables (Cline, 2000: 553). Currently, there is a third generation of approaches, which seeks to integrate the merits of the earlier approaches. Such are the communications model advanced by Goggin, Bowman, Lester & O'Toole (1990) who favour a multimethod approach to investigate questions of timing of implementation, the extent of policy change, communication patterns and organisational capacity. Another example of a third generation approach is the implementation regime framework by Stoker (1991).

ies to explain differences in implementation. But Palumbo and Calista point out, that at the time of writing most implementation studies looked beyond administrative logics alone, because “implementation is not and cannot be seen as purely technical” (ibid.: 1990: 6). They write

implementation failure is more complex than just the result of bureaucratic incompetence. The behaviour of bureaucrats must be understood as by-product of the complex political, organisational, social and economic context in which they work. Bureaucrats’ varying positions of power in determining outcomes (or defining objectives) can often be traced to the nature of the policy environment itself. (ibid.: 4)

If it is not the administration alone, the context seems to matter. Hence, a second branch of approaches focuses on the impact of *policy context*. This literature looks at how a policy is embedded in an institutional context such federalism vs. centralised states with a varying degree of discretion at lower levels of the administration, policy subsystems, and the capacity of the state (see the contributions in McCool, 1995; Skocpol, 1985).

A third branch looks at implementation with a focus on *policy actors*. While studies on the policy shapers and their coalitions in elite networks are most common, there are also studies on “the actions (and conditions) of street-level bureaucrats and client behaviours [which] must be incorporated into policy making” (Palumbo & Calista, 1990: 4). This perspective stresses that “policy is made during implementation itself”, by

street-level bureaucrats who create policy through the multitude of decisions they make in interacting with the public (Lipsky 1980). ... [P]olicy formulation occurs during implementation by bureaucrats developing routines and shortcuts for coping with their everyday jobs. ... [T]hey shape policy because of the enormous and irreducible discretion they have particularly at the street level. (ibid.: 11,15)⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Palumbo and Calista (1990) also discuss other ways by which implementors shape policymaking at every stage of the process. They argue that implementors “are often the most powerful group in setting the policy agenda. They are consulted by legislators and interest group representatives ... Bureaucracies frequently initiate policy. ... One source of power is their expertise ... [B]ut the principal source of their power is their influence over policy subgroups or networks that create policy-

A fourth way of approaching implementation has been to concentrate on the impact of *policy content* on implementation (Lowi, 1995 [1972]; Steinberger, 1995 [1980]). The argument is that policies – depending on whether they are distributive, regulative or redistributive – create their own politics. A controversy with regards to content of policy centres on the desirability of ambiguity. Whereas some authors argue that ambiguity may well be a reason for success, because it allows more people to agree to it (Fischer, 2003), others have emphasised the need for clear policy messages for implementation success (Goggin *et al.*, 1990; see the discussions in Palumbo & Calista, 1990: 5; Matland, 1995: 157ff).⁵⁷

A fundamental distinction, which partly runs across these approaches, is how the implementation problem is conceived. The “orthodox” (Clarke *et al.*, 2015) view holds that problems of implementation are essentially to be found in issues of organisational management and the administrative logic (see Cline, 2000). Both Yanow (1990: 218f) and Cline (2000) describe these assumptions – which they criticise – in a similar way: In such a view, the implementation problem occurs only after policy formulation, events prior to the enactment of a policy are commonly not considered to be of relevance. Policy is essentially understood as an object, “as a finite and finished product” (Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 15). From this perspective ambiguity of the policy message is problematic, because it allows policy implementors bring in divergent policy objectives, hence, not to stick to the literal meaning of the policy (Cline, 2000: 561f). Such action is treated as “erroneous” (Yanow, 1990: 218), and essentially as a form of bureaucratic incompetence. Cline also mentions a lack of resources as possible reason for thus perceived implementation problems.

making intentions. ... [T]hey [the implementors] can determine what will get onto the policy agenda and how an issue or problem will be defined. They do this by making the policy issue highly technical and unintelligible to the uninitiated and thereby erecting barriers to participation by outsiders or by defining the problem to suit their interests.” (Palumbo & Calista, 1990: 10)

⁵⁷ Each of these four approaches shows considerable internal variation and conflict, such as top-down versus bottom-up approaches, the role of communication in the implementation process, the treatment of the level of conflict and cooperation, or the role of networks, none of which will not be discussed in detail here (see Matland, 1995; McCool, 1995; Cline, 2000).

The orthodox approach to policy and implementation rests on ontological positivism which holds “that an objectively discoverable implementation problem has an objective factual solution” (Yanow, 1990: 225; also see Yanow, 1996: 3; Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 13f). The picture of a “‘gap’ between intent and outcome has its roots in theories that view implementation as the rational bureaucratic execution of policies. ... The imagery foreordains the solution: close the gap” (Yanow, 1990: 225). Different ontologically positivist approaches to implementation propose various ways of closing the gap. Common to them is that they believe in a legitimate authority that knows and sets the real policy intent, and the obstructions of the realisation of that intent through the executing branches of administration and other external obstacles.

A non-orthodox logic is to treat implementation problems as a result of legitimate conflicts of interests throughout the implementation process.⁵⁸ Such a view always entails that implementation is a political rather than a technical process (Palumbo & Calista, 1990: 17; Brodtkin, 1990). The discretion with which street-level bureaucrats implement policies appears illicit from a perspective that views power to rest only in the hand of the elected policy-making legislators at central level. Once we acknowledge that power and the capacity to act emerges from a variety of actors coming together, this does not cause a problem for democracy (Stoker, 1991: 51). Stoker and Cline (2000) seek to find solutions to implementation problems in the creation of mechanisms that improve cooperation of policy actors, that come together to make policy work.

Yanow (1990: 225f) argues differently, she points out that we should expect a gap between policy intent and implementation because we know that there are different interests involved. From the interpretative perspective on implementation – which she introduces – the “‘problem’ of interpretation is the on-going working out of societal values about the policy issue, which is being implemented, values that change over time and exist in multiple versions simultaneously” (*ibid.*: 225). Thus, she does not expect implementation solutions through the creation of better cooperation mechanisms or any other fix to the “factual essence of the implementation problem” (*ibid.*: 221). Instead, she proposes to investigate differences of “implementors and other relevant publics’ interpreta-

⁵⁸ See Clarke *et al.* (2015: 15f) for various schools of non-orthodox policy studies.

tions of the policy culture and to analyse the effects of these interpretations and meanings on implementation efforts” (ibid.: 221).

In such an understanding implementation is not the final step at the assembly line of the policy making process, for “policies are not simply rationally engineered, linear processes. Rather, they are complex, multiple and fluid processes of knowledge production, meaning-making and claims-making that are taking place in multiple [...] spaces” (Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007: 188). Implementation is an integral part of policy as practice that moves across time and space, both of which are constructed categories (Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 20ff). “The timetables or timelines of policy implementation are neither natural nor technical, but deeply social, political and contestable” argue Clarke *et al.* (2015: 21).

Similarly, Clarke and his co-authors point to the constructed nature of ‘space’ and ‘scale’ within policy studies. Lendvai and Stubbs (2007: 174f) stress that “between the ‘creation’, the ‘transmission’ and the ‘interpretation’ or ‘reception’ of policy meanings ... a series of interesting, and sometimes even surprising, disturbances can occur.” In a non-linear conception of policy, implementation can then be understood as a contact zone and a front line, as yet another arena of continued interpretation and contestation in the practice of policy. In the so understood analysis of policy implementation “repertoires of refusal, resistance and recalcitrance must be allowed for as part of the dynamic, complex and contradictory processes through which policy moves” argue Clarke *et al.* (2015: 26). And they also highlight, as Yanow, that the focus on meaning and meaning making matters

because they are a point of contestation and it is the analysis of this contestation that is important. Meanings are inextricably linked with forms and relations of power and authority and are implicated in the making and remaking of social worlds.

... Policy [is] a setting and a genre in which meanings are made, contested, installed, naturalised, and normalised and in which power is organised, challenged and rendered normal or even invisible through the work of making policy move. (ibid.: 20)

Implementation is one part of this move of policy. An analysis of thus understood implementation must start prior to the publication of policy in the official gazette, with sensitivity to prior debates, past policies and

social settings in which the debate on a new policy is embedded. Policy makers – and indeed implementors – are neither “isolated from the general historical and value context of the policy” (Yanow, 1990: 219), nor do they attend to the literal meaning of a policy alone, “language ... carries multiple meanings” (ibid.: 220). And hence, “implementors interpret policies. ... Two implementors may each be implementing something different, based on different interpretations of the policy or its artefacts” (ibid.: 221). Doing so, does not mean that implementors behave “improperly; neither are policy-makers at fault for using ambiguous language. Purposeful ambiguity is at times a necessary recourse to accommodate conflicting interests in order to devise draftable legislation” (ibid.: 220). This means to give up the idea of a fixed meaning and goal of a policy, and to open up for a multiplicity of perspectives by different actors involved. In other words “policy is always ‘unfinished’, always open to having its intentions, its meanings and substance bent or re-appropriated, ... always in the making, emerging in the process of *assemblage*” (Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 30f, emphasis original). *Assemblage* actually goes beyond the idea of ambiguity, because it highlights the heterogeneity of elements that are part of the making of policy. Not only is the policy language never unambiguous, also other elements of policy – people, objects, places and the variety of texts that make up the policy – are incoherent.

One aspect of policy that is often understood as an unwanted incoherence in orthodox policy studies, but recognised an essential part of policy in interpretative policy studies is symbolic politics. Policies have cognitively known, rational as well as the symbolic elements that carry values and feelings argues Yanow (1996: 8). She points out that the enactment of a policy may even have (primarily) a symbolic meaning. The message that is sent through enactment

is that ‘government’ is indeed responsive to the needs and demands of its citizens, and that citizens’ claims on government for action are legitimate. Government responses speak not only to those directly involved in pressing for response but to broader publics as well. (ibid.: 14)

However, Yanow (1996: 12) cautions, that symbolic policies are not the opposite of ‘real’ policies, policies are symbolic and substantive at once.

Fischer (2003: 60) adds, that “policy is a symbolic entity, the meaning of which is determined by its relationship to the particular situation, social system, and ideological framework of which it is part.” Neither are symbolic meanings private or personal meanings, they are “public ... and they are historically and culturally specific. ... The power of symbols lies in their potential to accommodate multiple meanings. Different individuals, different groups may interpret the same symbol differently” (Yanow, 1996: 9).

Implementation, as well as policy generally, is understood as an interactive meaning making process, in which the definition of success and failure of implementation activities is negotiated among a variety of actors, that have not all been traditionally conceived of as implementors, i.e. policy target groups (Yanow, 1990: 222). O'Toole (2000: 266) points out that “clients (or more generally, targets) of policy ... must be more than passive recipients of publicly initiated effort; they are among the parties who have to be active toward implementation, through coproduction or in some other less direct fashion.” Their knowledge as the knowledge of other implementation actors is central to any research on implementation. When such is “performed in ignorance of the understanding that implementation actors themselves have about their circumstances [it] is likely to miss important parts of the explanation for what happens”, argues O'Toole (2000: 269).

O'Toole highlights that the knowledge of different actors in the policy process shapes their meaning making process. What happens to policy as it moves “from policy formation to ‘front-line’ practice” (Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007: 178 citing Clarke 2005) is a meaning making process that may be seen understood as translation (Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007: 177ff; Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 34ff). The term translation highlights that the renegotiations of meaning are always processes of power, that have been identified as forms of conquest in postcolonial theory and as a process in which dissenting voices are suppressed. Translation – as opposed to the conventional or orthodox view of a ‘policy transfer’ makes the work of policy translators and intermediaries visible and highlights the change that policy undergoes in processes of relocation. Policy translation acknowledges the „continuous transformation, negotiation and enactment, on the one hand, and ... [the] politically infused process of disloca-

tion and displacement ..., on the other hand” argue Lendvai and Stubbs (2007: 180).

Brodkin (1990) discusses specifically for social policies that “implementation became a strategic vehicle of social politics, ... that is, as a vehicle for defining and redefining social policy” (ibid.: 114f). She argues that the content of social policy is frequently left unclear or open to interpretation. Ultimately, she contends, a policy cannot be more “resolute and precise than the political processes that produce them”, with the consequence that “social politics continues in the implementation processes that give policy specific meaning” (ibid.: 116). But, implementation may at times also substitute more visible policy making processes. Finally, the “inquiry into state capacity needs to consider not only the state’s ability to make policy promises, but also its ability to deliver what it promises” (ibid.).⁵⁹ The question why some states do not deliver is taken up specifically for the South below.

The insights of the authors above are the basis of an approach of the *politics of implementation*, which is characterised by an open investigation into the results of a policy without privileging a deemed singular intent. Instead it acknowledges the ambiguity of meanings and conflicts over the societal values that the policy is deemed to achieve, as well as the translation process that occur as policy moves. It thus centrally investigates the perceptions and meanings that policy makers, administrators and targets attach to a certain policy to understand the de facto outcomes. This entails to give a lot of weight to perceptions and interpretations in the policy processes. Additionally, this approach builds on the insight that new policies are always embedded into the context of prior policies, relations of power and more general history.

3.1 *Theoretical views on implementation in the South*

As with the welfare state approach above, much literature on implementation has originally developed to explain implementation problems of and in the North. And, as in the discussions above, the overall explana-

⁵⁹ This also forms a link to the Southern approaches to welfare regimes of Gough *et al.* (2004), which looks at the welfare outcomes and characterises regimes that achieve very low human development indicators as ‘insecurity regimes.’

tory logics for the South are the same, but contextual differences, which lead to modified assumptions, are regularly emphasised.

As pointed out above, studies that look at internal dynamics of the administration as explanatory logic alone have been largely discarded for the North. For the South however, the notion of the administration as an obstacle to development is a much discussed neo-utilitarian argument (see Evans, 1989). One study with a strong focus on administrative logics comes from Bryant and White (1982). On the one hand, they are concerned about the impact of a strong administration on political power through expertise. On the other hand, politicians may not want the administration to get strong, because then the administration might reject their politics. Yet, they deem a working administration essential for development. What is needed in their eyes is political power that can hold the administration accountable (*ibid.*: 23ff).

Evans (1989) opposes the idea that 'rent-seeking' and being 'predatory' are characteristics of Southern state *per se*, or that "state action [is] the principal impediment to development" (*ibid.*: 562). Instead he suggests that the "efficacy of the developmental state depends on a meritocratic bureaucracy with a strong sense of corporate identity" (*ibid.*: 561). He thus seeks to find out when an administration is an obstacle, and when it can further developmental goals (also see Grindle, 1997).

Overall, Evans, as well other authors, stress that the logic of an organisation alone is only part of the explanation and we also need to look at the context in which it is embedded. As factors that trouble 'developing states' and that impact negatively on their capacity to deliver public goods Grindle (1997) lists poverty, economic crisis, budget austerity, corruption, political instability. Such "perverse institutional contexts" (*ibid.*: 482) can lead to a point by which institutions charged with the task to deliver public goods crumble or even collapse, and public sector morale declines. Pervasive corruption and rent seeking may prevent even well intentioned public officials from attending to the public good. Also for Evans (1989: 583f) corruption and clientelism remain particular large problems of state capacity in the developing world. This view also shared by Myrdal (1968) who detects the source of a lack of implementation, or enforcement of policies, in corruption and characteristics of the "soft state." These are that

national governments require extraordinarily little of their citizens. There are few obligations either to do things in the interest of the community or to avoid actions opposed to that interest. Even those obligations that do exist are enforced inadequately if at all. (ibid.: 895f)

For Myrdal the origins of the soft state are to be sought in the history and experience of colonialism. Against the authoritarian character of colonial rule it was disobedience and non-cooperation that emerged as strongest weapons of the indigenous independence movements. However, these traits also became a legacy for the post-independence governments to deal with (ibid.: 213f). At the same these governments also inherited a strong “abhorrence of using compulsion” (ibid.: 215), and thus rather tried to govern through incentives and persuasion. Yet, despite their repugnance of compulsion, government across South Asia had

an ambition to prepare and enact sweeping legislation of a general character aimed at modernizing their societies, and in particular countervailing the legacy of authoritarianism, paternalism, particularism and anarchy. ... These pieces of broad reform legislation were framed to defend the interests of the underprivileged in the masses. They have resulted in infinitely less social change than was said to be their aim. (Myrdal, 1970: 217)

The knowledge that far reaching laws as for example agricultural minimum wages or land redistribution would not effectively be enforced, made it easier for the upper strata represented in the parliaments to agree to such laws, precisely because they knew that nothing much would happen. The contrast between the policy prescriptions and their effects, or the activity “to legislate [policy] ideals without the possibility or even the intention of realizing them, is apt to breed cynicism and also to cause new elements of uncertainty and arbitrariness” (ibid.: 242).

Myrdal argues

fundamentally, the main explanation of the soft state is that all the power is in the hands of the upper class who can afford egalitarian laws and policy measures but are in an unchallenged position to prevent their implementation. (ibid.: 222)

Myrdal thus is not concerned about a lack of authority by the state, but about too much power in the hands of one group, the upper classes. This class dominates the legislative bodies of the state and is said to prevent the implementation of policies at the same time.⁶⁰

Where Myrdal points to the upper classes, Grindle and Thomas (1991) are concerned with policy makers more specifically. They stress the relative greater importance of policy elites in decision-making processes in the South. Similar to Evans they reject the view that decision-makers are only rent-seekers. Such an approach cannot account for policy change and reform actually happening, argue Grindle and Thomas (1991: 4). Neither are decision-makers “simply forced by events, interest group pressures or external agencies to make particular choices; generally they have a significant range of options in the management of public policies – including at times the option not to address them” (ibid.: 2). This actor-centred approach focuses on policy makers because, in Southern contexts these acquire special importance due to the uncertainty and unreliability of information, which forces decision-makers in developing countries to rely more on experience and intuition. As decisions get more intuitive, they also get more subjective and “are likely to be more politically oriented” (sic!) (ibid.: 46). What Grindle and Thomas overlook here is that political decisions always are political, no matter what amount of data and what degree of accuracy underpins them. What seems more important is that in the South we often find situations in which decision-making is centralised and relatively closed, interest representation is weak and informal, and the political regimes are relatively vulnerable (also see Scott, 1967). Such conditions add to the power of policy makers and “simultaneously isolates them from critical information about societal preferences and tolerance for policy change.⁶¹ For these reasons, the preferences and belief systems of policy elites become critical political variables in decision-making contexts” (Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 67).

⁶⁰ This may be a form of ‘symbolic politics’ but is not discussed as such by him.

⁶¹ For particularly destructive forms of influence of policy actors see Scott (1998). As a reason for the miserable failure of ‘certain schemes to improve the human condition’ he names “would say that the progenitors of such programmes regarded themselves as far smarter and far-seeing than they really were and, at the same time, regarded their subjects as far more stupid and incompetent than they *really* were” (Scott, 1998: 342 emphasis in original).

However, “belief and value systems do not dictate policy choices, Instead they shape and colour the way new information is processed” (ibid.). In summary

decision-makers within government emerge as central actors in the politics of reform because of the very characteristics of developing countries – uncertain information, poverty, ... centralisation in decision-making. These characteristics in turn are a result of a legacy of colonial rule, the nature of state building and nation-building activities and structural vulnerability to international and domestic economic and political forces. ... Information is limited, needs are great, resources are scarce and responsibilities are extensive. (ibid.: 45,49)

Overall, policy elites in Southern contexts possess considerable room for manoeuvre. They can at least partly define the policy space, and in that their own perception of the policy space matters greatly. Thereby elites have a large influence on policy content too (ibid.: 8).⁶²

The changed environment of policy-making, however, does also change the role of actors at another level. Grindle (1980) points out that officially participation mechanisms are typically foreseen (only) for the policy making process. But, for many citizens of Southern states the access to such arenas is close to impossible. Even in democratic states of the South a large majority of citizens are excluded through spatial disparity, communication structures, and education levels. Therefore, “a large portion of individual and collective demand-making, the representation of interests, and the emergence and resolution of conflict occurs at the output stage” (Grindle, 1980: 15). According to Scott,

much of the interest articulation in [‘developing’] states has been disregarded because Westerners, accustomed to their own polities, have been looking in the wrong place. A sizeable proportion of individual, and occasionally group, demands in less developed nations reach the political system not before laws are passed but rather at the enforcement stage. (Scott, 1967: 504)

⁶² That policy content shapes its environment is not centrally discussed as a distinct explanatory logic for the South. However, policy content is part of the larger explanatory framework developed by Grindle (1980).

It is there, in the implementation process, that citizens may find more rewarding opportunities to gain access to government goods and services. Therefore, the “desire among citizens to affect the outcome of governmental decision-making ... [that] affect them vitally and personally” (Grindle, 1980: 17) is directed to the implementation process (also see Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 66f).

When citizens approach “officials and agencies empowered to distribute benefits” it may often be through “factions, patron-client linkages, ethnic ties and personal coalitions” (Grindle, 1980: 17). Although such ties are commonly described as archaic and pre-modern, “from the perspective of individual citizens, this may be the most effective and rational means to acquire what they want from the government” (ibid.: 18). This point has also been made, from a different angle, by Chatterjee, who argues that such linkages or brokerages should not be seen as illicit or non-virtuous, but essentially as the legitimate tools of what he calls ‘political society’, of those marginalised that do not have access to the formally democratic, modern tools of civil society (Chatterjee, 2004, 2010 [2001]).⁶³

Scott discusses these influences at the implementation stage particularly in the form of corruption. He recognises that “the fundamental objection to corruption is that it always assigns greater importance to wealth and/

⁶³ Chatterjee’s point of departure are the modern inequalities, these are characterised by both persisting social and economic inequalities, and ridden by political inequalities that express themselves in the division into civil and political society (Chatterjee, 2004: 4). The new democratic political institutions of the Indian Republic have not been “made to work effectively merely by legislating them into existence”; they need to be sustained by a “network of norms in civil society that prevail independently of the state and that are consistent with its laws” (ibid.: 33). Modern political communities rely on (pre-political) foundations citizens, who “sustain freedom and equality in the political domain” (ibid.: 33). But, in countries like India, it is only a “small section of culturally equipped citizens” (ibid.: 41) that forms a so understood civil society. The members of this civil society deal with the state on the high grounds of modernity based on the principles of “equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members” (Chatterjee, 2010 [1997]: 168). But, the majority of Indians cannot deal with the state based on these universal ideals; they themselves do not abide the law, but make a livelihood by evading the law. The politics of political society are thus always contextual, temporary and strategic (Chatterjee, 2004: 40ff).

or 'connections' than to votes" (Scott, 1967: 523). Yet, this argument in his eyes gets less strong, where "the political system is closed or oligarchic,⁶⁴ the democratic objection to corruption becomes less valid since corruption may, in such instances, serve as an informal democratizing force" (ibid.). Scott argues that corruption may constitute a rational, legitimate and even democratic form of participating in political processes. This is quite contrary to the earlier cited Myrdal who sees corruption as one of the major evils inhibiting development. I am also sceptic to Scott's argument. He overlooks that we see politics at the input stage as illegitimate when it is bought – as it would favour those with the most resources. Similarly, corruption as politics is not only at odds with our ideas of democracy and legitimacy because it occurs at the output stage, but because it is resource based, and even more so in a context, where resources are very unevenly distributed. Hence, he is right in attributing a political character to corruption. But, he is wrong if he assumes that it could be a way of ensuring fair political competition.

However, what is needed is to look at the political dynamics at the implementation stage more broadly. If we want to understand welfare and social policy expansion in the South, we need to engage with the *politics of implementation* as introduced by the interpretative approaches to implementation above.

Grindle and Thomas (1991) contribute to such a perspective. They stress that the perceptions of policy makers are important for policy formulation. However, they do not transfer that insight to the level of the implementing agencies and their personnel. This is somewhat contradictory, because she holds that for the policy process field agents rather

than national planners or politicians, may be the most logical and the most accessible individuals to contact in any attempts to make effective demands on the political system. ... [And,] the implementation process may be the major arena in which indi-

⁶⁴ According to Scott, formal access to political system is available for political elites, party branches, civil servants associations, professional associations and trade unions. The access is denied for ideological reasons to indigenous business groups, foreign business interests and the political opposition. For parochial reasons it is denied to minority ethnic or religious groups, and for a lack of organisation to unorganised peasants and urban lower classes (Scott, 1967: 508).

viduals and groups are able to pursue conflicting interests and compete for access to scarce resources. (Grindle, 1980: 19)

On the one hand, she deems policy problems as essentially given. On the other hand, she acknowledges that policy makers have perceptions of the policy space, and that these matter for the solutions envisioned (ibid.: 11f). And, she also points out that contestations about policy goals may impede implementation: the “failure to agree on programme goals during the formulation process ... [and] the conflict over goals at national policy-making levels was translated into conflict between bureaucratic leaders and lower level implementors and between implementing agencies and their clienteles” (ibid.: 24). She, thus, hints at the need to look at the implementation problem from a perspective that takes conflict and legitimate different interests as a starting point. Such a perspective is common to interpretative and critical accounts of policy and implementation analysis (see for example Fischer, 2003; Yanow, 1990, 1996; Yanow & Haverland, 2012; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007; Clarke *et al.*, 2015). An interpretative analysis on implementation, however, is not common in approaches to implementation in the South.

The issue of political participation at the implementation level, has in the meantime been taken up by a number of studies that deal with the participation of citizens or clienteles of public administration in decision-making (Thompson, 1995). Participation at the local level has indeed been promoted as a cure to many problems associated with – in particular foreign aid – development projects. In a way this could be understood as a recognition that there are better possibilities for involvement at local rather than at national level. However, critical literature on participation has highlighted the problematic assumptions typically entailed in participatory approaches (Craig & Porter, 1997; Berner & Philips, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004), and Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava and Véron (2005) point out that participatory approaches are yet another technology of rule.

3.2 Empirical views on the implementation of social policy in the South

Apart from these rather theory-centred academic debates on welfare in the South, there is another strand of literature that deals more specifically and empirically with the extension of welfare or social protection schemes in ‘developing countries.’ Such contributions are often linked to

the political agenda – and project – of poverty alleviation or the extension of social protection policies. This agenda and political project has developed roughly over the past 20 years since the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 (Ghai, 2000b; Kohlmorgen, 2000; Dani & de Haan, 2008).⁶⁵ The summit was a starting point for policy debates and research agendas in international organisations.⁶⁶

Some of these studies apply rather classical policy study frameworks. For example Loewe (2009a) starts with the premise that in the South a significant part of the population suffers from unprotected risks – lives without social security – and that this a pre-condition for the emergence of social security schemes. In other words, a social problem must be given. That this alone has not led to the development of substantial social security schemes is attributed to two factors: first, countries additionally need the political will of governments and populations to do it, and, second, the financial, administrative and technical ability to design and run social security schemes addressing the unprotected risks are necessary but not always available (Loewe, 2009a).

Most policy-oriented studies on social security in the South currently focus on either design aspects, hence, on the potential alternative options during policy formulation, or on impact (Heinrich, 2007). In terms of design currently, the debates on conditional cash transfers (Rawlings & Rubio, 2005; Farrington & Slater, 2006; Cuesta, 2007) and micro-insurance (Loewe, 2009b) are particularly vivid, but also public work schemes are discussed (McCord, 2012; Subbarao, del Ninno, Andrews & Rodríguez-Alas, 2013). Other authors, in particular the ILO, discuss the aspect of fiscal feasibility of social security in the South (ILO, 2008a, 2009;

⁶⁵ The interest in social policy as a tool of development is not all new (Mkandawire, 2004b: 4f): In the aftermath of World War II social policy and the extension of welfare provision had already once been aims of economic development. Social expenditure and the regulation of labour were seen as a way to achieve them. After the socio-economic turn at the end of 1970s these tools were considered obstacles and evaporated from the political map. Existing social policies were increasingly discredited by the politics of the Washington Consensus.

⁶⁶ The ILO has centrally taken up this topic (Cichon & Hagemeyer, 2007; International Labour Office, 2010b, 2010a, 2011, 2014), so has the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (Ghai, 2000b; Mkandawire, 2004b; Karshenas & Moghadam, 2006; Bangura, 2007), and also the World Bank (Hall, 2007; Dani & de Haan, 2008; World Bank, 2012).

ILO, 2010a; Sepúlveda & Schutter, 2012). One sub-field of policy centred approaches is policy change through learning processes or the transfer of knowledge (Rose, 1991; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Blum & Schubert, 2009: 151f). This is also discussed for social security in the South, typically as North-South (Townsend & ILO, 2007; Gough, 2008) and more recently also as South-South learning processes (UNDP, 2011). These studies are very informative. They compile basic data and features on the social protection schemes that are deemed successful. They highlight successes – and sometimes shortcomings – and provide arguments for policy makers to invest further in social protection. However, most of these studies remain rather technical in nature and share the shortcomings of the orthodox policy studies, in terms of a lack of attention to contextuality of learning processes, and finally for politics.

It is quite recent that Barrientos & Pellissery (2012) pointed out that the recognition for the importance of politics grows. He argues, “for the adoption, design, and implementation of antipoverty transfer programmes, [...] this [politics] remains a substantially under-researched topic” (Barrientos & Pellissery, 2012: 3).⁶⁷ The narrow focus on schemes, impact and targeting, overall on policy effectiveness, is also criticised because it contributes to a tendency of ‘projectizm’ and ‘microizm’ (Tendler, 2004), hence, short-term, targeted interventions with little reference to the overall social and economic structures. Such is certainly not caused by academia alone, however, the narrow focus of studies on welfare in the South is said to have contributed to these tendencies.

3.3 Discussions on implementation in India

Implementation also is a recurrent theme in Indian social science literature. Above I pointed to the high levels of insecurity expressed in the overall high rates of poverty and inequality in India. Also, I highlighted the fact that there are a great number of social welfare schemes, that

⁶⁷ The Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Research Centre at the University of Manchester has since 2014 started a series of publications dealing with the politics of development programmes, among them also social protection schemes and NREGA (Gupta & Mukhopadhyay, 2014; ESID, 2014; Chopra, 2014; ESID, 2015a, 2015b; Roy, 2015; Chopra, 2015), which were however published after the field work for this study had taken place and the main body of this book had already been written.

have as their goal to change these conditions, and there even is a considerable level of spending. The World Bank stresses that total spending allocated per poor rural household in the major centrally sponsored social protection programmes was INR 9065 in 2004/2005 (World Bank, 2011b: xxii). This is equal to about 40 per cent of the annual rural poverty line, and if it would have reached all poor their numbers should have decreased significantly. Of course in no scheme anywhere the total costs incurred by a programme do reach the target group fully, there always are administrative costs etc. However, in India some say that even if 25 per cent of the money spent reach the beneficiaries it is deemed to be a successful scheme (Seekings, 2012). The remaining lack of de facto coverage of social security, has been a source of strong critique towards the Indian state, which appears to be “an agency with merely a progressive face bereft of any real intentions of providing a secure present or future for its citizenry” (Dev *et al.*, 2001: 14).

As reasons for the low levels of social security provision a number of arguments are discussed. First, in many programmes, in particular in means-tested schemes for people Below the Poverty Line (BPL), targeting is beset with problems that lead to errors of exclusion of the poor and inclusion of the non-poor (Working Group on Social Security, 2012: 20). Poor policy design as well as – not more specifically defined – administrative difficulties lead to a misidentification of “almost half the poor as non-poor, and conversely almost half the non-poor as poor” according to the World Bank (2011b: xxii).

Second, in particular with regards to the poorer States the lack of administrative capacities is seen as an explanatory factor (Working Group on Social Security, 2012: 20). In States such as Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand a majority of the rural poor resides. Respectively large sums are allocated from the centre to the social budgets of these States. However, they are unable to utilize the funds allocated to them because of both to co-financing rules, which these States find more difficult to meet, and due to a lack of trained and qualified staff (World Bank, 2011b: xviii). Personnel, however, does not only lack on State level but also, or even more, at the Block and local level.

There is, third, a lack of coordination and accountability. The multitude of simultaneously running social programs with overlaps in design and

delivery lead to problems in the coordination and reduced accountability of those responsible for the provision of social service (Sharma, 2004: 271; Chaturvedi, 2011; World Bank, 2011b; Working Group on Social Security, 2012).

Fourth, is a critique of the one-size-fits-all, top-down approaches that apparently still prevail, and do not adequately accommodate the diversity of living arrangements, and variety of needs across this vast country (World Bank, 2011b; Sharma, 2004: 271f). This is both an argument about policy design and about the structure of implementation. In this context, the need for more direct involvement of India's citizens in social schemes, more bottom-up approaches, has been stressed by various authors (Sharma, 2004: 271f; Dev, 2004).

But, fifth, decentralisation alone will not be sufficient to make a scheme accessible for the poorest. So far, the processes around the making of the BPL list at village level are politicised and beset with patronage, as are the processes of claiming benefits (Pellissery, 2005). In fact, patronage, corruption, abuse and humiliation are said to prevail at all stages of the process, from gaining access / selection, to the actual participation or the payment of a grant / delivery of food (Ginneken, 2004: 194; Pankaj, 2012b: 11; Working Group on Social Security, 2012). In many cases vulnerable groups, such as Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, and women are particularly subject to such treatment (Dev, Subbarao, Galab & Ravi, 2007: 3565). At village level the access "will depend to a large extent on whether acute inequalities in endowments have been eliminated. In such a setting, the panchayats would be free from the domination of rich and powerful landlords and would be more responsive to the needs of the poor" (Sharma, 2004: 271f). But, so far they are not. Several studies stress the importance of brokers, intermediaries and personal connections in gaining access to BPL lists and other public goods to which the poor are in principle entitled (Pellissery, 2005; Witsoe, 2012; Paul, Balakrishnan, Thampi, Sekhar & Vivekanada). Thus, the earlier identified politics of implementation do seem to work in favour of the entitlements of poor and vulnerable groups.

And, sixth, a very prominent theme in the Indian debate is the lack of awareness of among many potential beneficiaries (Dev, 2004; Sharma, 2004: 271f; Rajasekhar, Suchitra, Madheswaran & Karanth, 2006: 16;

World Bank, 2011b; Working Group on Social Security, 2012). Awareness, however, depends on the scheme, and varies across social groups (Dev *et al.*, 2007: 3563).⁶⁸ Generally, these arguments are more or less relevant depending on the concrete context of specific schemes, and States or even Districts. The degree of implementation and related problems varies widely across and partly within the Indian States. The overall inadequacy of implementation, captured in coverage ratios among the target population, can be seen in Table 3.1 on the next page.

This table also shows that one scheme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), mostly simply called NREGS or NREGA, fares significantly better in terms of coverage ratios than other schemes. The debates surrounding NREGS and its implementation are outlined in the following section 3.4.

⁶⁸In this regard, Dev highlights that the “status of women in the household, presence of NGO in the village, and high (overall) level of education in the village” contribute to creating awareness (Dev *et al.*, 2007: 3563).

Table 3.1 Major Social Protection Programme's Performance

Programme type and name	Coverage (% of relevant population; 2004/2005)	Bottom quintile as % of total beneficiaries (2004/2005)	Benefit incidence (% to bottom quintile 2004/2005)
Employment schemes			
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)	33% of rural HH (2008/2009)	-	
Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)	1 % of rural HH	43.4%	34.2%
Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)	0.8% of rural HH	32.9%	7.7%
Cash transfers to selected groups			
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension (IG-NOAPS)	8.3% of HH with elderly of 65 and above	32.8%	31.1 %
Widow Pension	6.2% HH with elderly	43.2%	32.8%
Disabled pension	14.4% HH with disabled	30.7%	27.6%
In kind transfers			
Public Distribution System (PDS)	23.3% of all HH (APL & BPL)	27%	29.7
Annapurna (higher subsidised food for poorest HH with elderly)	1.7% HH with elderly	51.9%	37.95
Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) (housing)	12.8% of rural HH	28.6%	24.6%
Midday Meals	-	-	
Health			
Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Joyna (RSBY)	~18mn cards issued for 70mn persons (July 2010)	-	-

Source: Adapted from World Bank (2011b: xx f), data on RSBY from UNDP (2011)

Table 3.1 Major Social Protection Programme's Performance ctd.

Programme type and name	Awareness	Evidence of leakage outside beneficiaries	From of targeting	Spending allocation rank 2008/2009
Employment schemes				
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)	Substantial	-	Self-targeting	2
Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)	Low	-	Self-targeting	5
Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)	Low	Intermediate	BPL	7
Cash transfers to selected groups				
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension (IG-NOAPS)	Substantial	Low	Mixed	6
Widow Pension	Substantial	Low	Mixed	-
Disabled pension	-	Low	Mixed	-
In kind transfers				
Public Distribution System (PDS)	High	High	BPL	1
Annapurna (higher subsidised food for poorest HH with elderly)	-	Low	Mixed	-
Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) (housing)	Substantial	High	BPL	4
Midday Meals	High	-	Government aided schools only	3
Health				
Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Joyna (RSBY)	-	-	BPL	-

3.4 Introduction to NREGA and its implementation

NREGA and the related schemes are the major recent initiative in terms of social security extension in India in recent years, and together they form the biggest employment programme in the world. Since inception NREGS provided employment to 20 to 55 million rural households annually, in the financial year 2012-2013 alone to nearly 50 million, which is close to 30 per cent of all rural households. Table 3.2 below provides information on the coverage in India's most populous States.

Table 3.2 Key figures on NREGS for India and major States

	Total pop. 2011 in 100,000 ¹	No. of rural HH 2011 in 100,000 ¹	HH provided employment in NREGS 2012-2013 in 100,000 ²	Share of rural HH participating in NREGS 2012 in per cent ³	Share of rural pop. below poverty line 2012 in per cent ⁴	Average no of employment days per HH ²
Andhra Pradesh	846.66	158.67	58.16	36.24	10.96	55.69
Assam	311.69	53.75	12.35	22.62	33.93	25.43
Bihar	1,038.05	169.27	20.66	11.94	34.06	44.85
Gujarat	603.84	67.65	6.81	9.89	21.54	41.39
Jharkhand	329.66	46.86	14.17	29.63	40.84	39.92
Karnataka	611.31	78.64	13.38	16.76	24.53	46.48
Kerala	333.88	40.96	15.26	36.62	9.14	54.89
Madhya Pradesh	725.98	111.22	34.97	30.87	35.74	39.66
Maharashtra	1,123.73	130.17	16.10	12.18	24.22	53.43
Odisha	419.47	81.44	15.99	19.38	35.69	34.14
Punjab	277.04	33.16	2.40	7.15	7.66	27.27
Rajasthan	686.21	94.90	42.17	43.58	16.05	52.24
Tamil Nadu	721.39	95.64	70.61	72.71	15.83	57.80
Uttar Pradesh	1,995.81	254.75	49.95	19.25	30.04	28.53
West Bengal	913.48	137.17	58.12	41.81	22.52	34.63
India	12,101.93	1,678.27	497.66	29.61	25.70	46.10

¹ Census of India 2011

² Data for financial year 2012-2013 from mgnrega.nic.in retrieved on September 24 2013

³ No of households for 2012 based on Census 2011, extrapolated State wise weighted growth rates as in Planning Commission (2013), NREGA data for financial year 2012-2013 as above

⁴ Data from Planning Commission (2013), population data for March 1 2012 is based on extrapolated Census 2011 data.

Note: The data on the share of rural households participating in NREGA and the percentage of rural population below the poverty line are not strictly comparable, because one uses households and the other persons as a base unit. However, NREGA data are collected for HH, and poverty line data was only available for households. According to NSS round 66 (2009-2010) 70 per cent of households and 73 of people were living in rural areas (NSSO, 2011: i).

That the scheme has been relatively successful in reaching its target population makes it a suitable case for a study of the expansion of welfare and social programmes in a Southern context. The question arises, in how far NREGS is distinct from other schemes and how that contributes to its relative success. At the same time, the variation within and between Indian States provides a rewarding field to study the politics of implementation.

Since its inception NREGA quickly attracted academic attention. The uncounted journal articles, essays and working papers, edited books (Khera, 2011c; Pankaj, 2012c), and PhD theses (Chopra, 2009; Palisetty, 2011), as well government assessments (Ministry of Rural Development, MoRD, 2012; Standing Committee on Rural Development, SCRD, 2013; Comptroller and Auditor General, CAG 2008, 2013) also engage with the issues of implementation in NREGA. These studies or compilations typically combine the works of different researchers, or groups of researchers, studying diverse aspects of the scheme in various parts of the country. Due to the varied methodologies applied they are not always suitable for a systematic comparison. However, they highlight how different aspects of this complex scheme play out in the various parts of the country. One important finding, which they share are the great inter- and intra-state differences. Methodologically the majority of studies either relies on quantitative survey type studies among NREGA participants and potential wage seekers, or combines the former with more qualitative interviews in focus group discussions and scheme administration. Given the stated objective of increased livelihood security there are surprisingly few studies that take this aim as central category of investigation. They rather analyse whether the statutory provisions are met. The most comprehensive review of NREGA and its statutory provisions till date is the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2013).

In some ways NREGA by design addresses earlier concerns related to targeting, participation of citizens and local decision-making, and accountability procedures. The most important features of the Act are listed in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Salient provisions of the NREG Act

Provisions	Principles
The guarantee to every rural household whose adults volunteer to do unskilled manual work for at least 100 days of wage employment in every financial year (Preamble).	Based on self-selection and demand No rules on targeting, eligibility criteria, or pre-requisite skill
Wages have to be paid at the level of State minimum unskilled agricultural wages on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight (Art. 3, 6). If no employment is provided within 15 days after application the applicant is entitled to an unemployment allowance (Art. 7).	Minimum wages Entitlement to unemployment allowance in case no employment is available on demand
The Act delegates decision-making and implementation responsibilities to local political bodies of the panchayati raj institutions (PRI) (Art. 16).	Bottom-up planning
The Act entails transparency guarantees on proactive disclosure of information and social audits (Art. 17, 23).	Transparency guarantees Citizen-centred monitoring
Creates rural infrastructure related to (in order of priority) water conservation and harvesting, drought proofing, irrigation, irrigation for farmers from disadvantaged groups, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development, flood control and protection, rural connectivity (Schedule I). The “creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihoods resource base of the rural poor shall be an important objective of the scheme” (ibid).	Rural infrastructure and livelihood development
Preference is given to wage employment over machines, and contractors are officially banned (Schedule I).	Ban of contractors
Employment has to be provided within 15 days within 5 km radius of the village (Schedule II).	Proximity clause
Prescribes participation rates for women (minimum one third) (Schedule II).	Demands female participation
Worksite injury insurance is mandatory for the States. In case of worksite injuries resulting in death or permanent disability of workers the States are obliged to pay a gratuity lump sum (25,000 INR) (Schedule II).	Work-site injury insurance
Work site facilities such as a crèche for children, safe drinking water, shade, and first aid are to be provided (Schedule II).	Provision of work site facilities

Source: Own presentation based on Ministry of Law and Justice (2005)

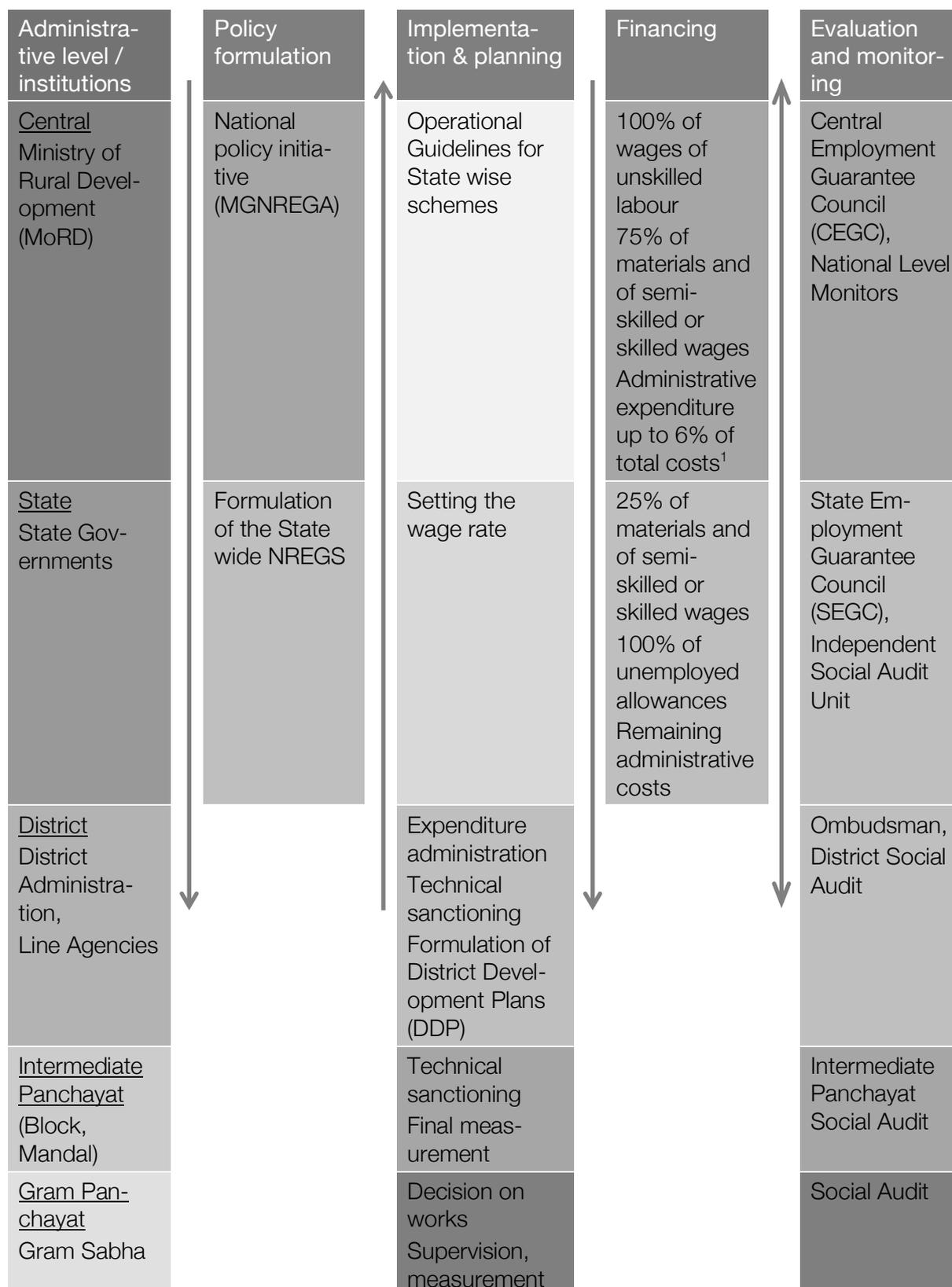
The de-centralisation of the scheme is reflected in its complex governing structure in which four core competencies – policy formulation, planning and implementation, financing, and monitoring – are spread over five levels: Central, State, District, intermediate Panchayat and local Panchayat structures (see Figure 3.1, page 84).

Figure 3.1 illustrates how responsibilities are shared differently among the various levels. In the fields policy formulation and financing the responsibilities are shared top-down and most charges lie with the Central and the State governments. In the field of implementation and planning the process is reverse: the Act foresees a bottom-up planning strategy starting with the registration of workers and demand, as well as the identification of useful works at the village level. In the field of monitoring and evaluation of the Act activities take place on all levels and several new bodies, independent from the implementing agencies have been constituted. Overall, it is a complex overlapping matrix of governing responsibilities.

First, at a general level the Centre is the overall rule maker and main funder of the scheme. Most competencies in policy formulation lie with the central level, mainly with the nodal Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). The Centre is furthermore important for the overall monitoring, evaluation and further development of the scheme. Although the Centre does not directly do implementation, the MoRD has been active in review and reform of implementation relevant topics. Implementation relevant changes are notified in the form of General Orders (GO's) and Operational Guidelines. One example of an important change in implementation that had been ordered by the Centre was the change from cash to bank payments. Also, the Operational Guidelines underwent major revisions in 2008 and in 2013 (MoRD 2008; 2013).

Second, State governments have some scope for policy formulation and interpretation in their respective State Employment Guarantee Schemes (NREGA Art. 4f). They can also give additional guarantees, for example, they can increase the number of days that households can claim in MGNREGS or cover other additional costs. Generally, the States have to bear the costs for parts of material, skilled labour and administrative costs as well as the unemployment allowance.

Figure 3.1 Administrative responsibilities in NREGA



Source: Author's own visualisation. For an overview of the various institutions and their responsibilities also see MoRD (2013).¹ This includes wages of the Programme Officer, his staff, assistance to GPs, stationary, mobility, travel computerization, training, information and education campaign (IEC) activities, monitoring and social audit, as well as other audit related expenses.

State governments have to integrate their respective Employment Guarantee Schemes in their overall administration, assign tasks within the lower tiers of their administrative structure, and hire staff where necessary etc. (NREGA Art.18). The States are key for the overall coordination of the administration of the Schemes.

Third, the Districts are in an important intermediary position between the local administrative structures and the State level. They are key for the monitoring and supervision of the implementation in the District, for the execution of works other than locally decided works, technical sanctioning of larger locally decided works, and the organisation of financial flows to the Gram Panchayats and the wage-seekers (NREGA Art. 13). The Districts pass on circulars and notes, and conduct trainings for new staff or in new procedures. Furthermore, the Districts are important because they take decisions on staff for the local level. Hence, they largely decide who will be the officers that represent the scheme to citizens. At the District level the District Collector or the Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat are designated as District Programme Coordinator (NREGA Art. 14). He or she and the implementing agencies at District level are fully responsible for the utilisation and management of funds (NREGA Art. 23). The District level is also important for coherence of plans and a medium term development strategy.

Fourth, some of the responsibilities are shared with the Intermediate Panchayat structures, which also do technical sanctioning of smaller works, opening and closing of work sites, measurement at the work sites and data entry. At this level GP plans are approved and forwarded to District level for final sanctioning. Furthermore, works are supervised and monitored by a Programme Officer, the key administrator at Intermediate Panchayat level, who needs to be assigned (NREGA Art. 13, 15).

Fifth and finally, the local Gram Panchayats are the centre of the bottom-up planning process of registering labour and demand, and the identification, execution and supervision of useful works at local level (NREGA Art. 16). They are responsible to develop action plans of works for the following financial year and to inform wage seekers about employment opportunities. A main task of the GPs is planning, because the provision of work within the short time frame of 15 days necessitates advance sanctioning, budgeting, and technical sanctioning of the works.

Within the Gram Panchayat a central role falls to the Gram Sabha, or village assembly, which shall decide on works, monitor the execution of works and realise regular social audits. The Gram Sabha meetings involve potential beneficiaries and are important to take their voice into account. Labour budgets are drawn up at the GP level, consolidated and supplemented by Intermediate Panchayat and District levels. These budgets should estimate the demand for labour in the coming year, based on the residents and their demands, taking into account crop patterns and other local conditions.

In sum, the governance structure of NREGS is complex. Depending on the field – planning and implementation, monitoring or policy formulation – the responsibilities are distributed in different ways across the five administrative levels. This structure addresses some of the earlier mentioned known implementation problems in India social protection schemes (see beginning of section 3.3). For example the NREGS' design diverts from the much-criticised top-down structure in all areas but financing. But, Pankaj (2012b: 27f) finds that still “MGNREGS is over centralised in design, although the implementation process has been decentralised to a considerable extent.” According to him, one problem is that the central government treats the different delivery capacities as neutral, whereas they are not. Poorer States and Districts are less well equipped to run the implementation processes, that are largely their responsibility.

As in other schemes before NREGA, administrative capacity is reported to be a major concern. There is an urgent need for capacity building for all staff as well as elected and appointed officials at the GP and Block level (Ambasta, Shankar & Shah, 2008: 47; NCEUS, 2009: 221; Raabe *et al.*, 2012). This is reflected in the difficulties of implementing NREGS at local level (Pankaj, 2012a: 113; Hirway, 2012: 66). The poorer States – such as Bihar, Odisha or West Bengal – particularly suffer from weaker capacities and a lack of personnel for scheme administration (Dutta, Murgai, Ravallion & Walle, 2012: 6), those States have a particularly high rate of unmet demand. Non-appointment of dedicated NREGS staff is a problem across States and a major hurdle to implementation (CAG, 2013: 10). In summer 2013 the recruitment target of dedicated MGNREGA personnel for 2010-2011 was missed by more than 50,000 (out of 264,085 positions foreseen) (SCRD, 2013: 98). Additionally, there is an urgent need

for capacity building for all staff as well as elected and appointed officials at the GP and Block level (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 47; NCEUS, 2009: 221; Raabe *et al.*, 2012).⁶⁹ In Jharkhand the non-existence of PRIs leads to particular implementation problems (NCEUS, 2009: 220), many poorer States generally have weaker PRIs (Pankaj, 2012b). Another difficulty for the poorer States is to raise the share of the costs that need to be borne by the State and local governments (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 6). Other authors also state a lack of trained staff at central level

at the Central Government level itself there are limited number of staff and senior level administrative supervision (one joint secretary) absorbed in day-to-day crisis management, with virtually no time and energy for putting in place durable systems and support structures for NREGA. (NCEUS, 2009: 225)

With regards to targeting the NREGA design addresses known problems of exclusion through its potential universal access for the rural population and the self-selection mechanism. Yet, although the programme is not means-tested, errors of exclusion and inclusion seem to remain. Additionally, other problems that beset earlier schemes were meant to be tackled through NREGS' innovative design. This concerns in particular the change from a supply to a demand driven logic of employment provision. This issue is in principle addressed by the NREGS rule that decision-making on local works must be done by the village council, the Gram Sabha, and at least 50 per cent of works have to be such Gram Sabha favoured projects. In fact, there still is a tendency to top-down decision-making on the type and timing of works, which can lead to works that do not fit the location and unmet demand for work. Besides, in terms of policy formulation NREGS opens up room for interpretation. One of the few points for which the policy design itself is criticised is that the scheme entails different objectives, which can be at tension with each other. For example the primary objective of creating wage employment in unskilled (*kaccha*, earthen) projects is at tension with the construction of durable assets, which *kaccha* structures, tend not be. This is also reflected in the statutory spending structures: The general ratio is

⁶⁹ Other States, such as Andhra Pradesh have used the funds from MGNREGS to top up their staff and their (technical) administrative infrastructure to enhance their delivery structures.

maximum 40 per cent for material, skilled labour and administrative costs, and minimum 60 per cent for unskilled wage employment. However, the MoRD points out that a higher share of funding for material costs invariably leads to less funding for wage employment, which is the primary objective of the scheme (SCRD, 2013). To accommodate the need for higher material costs, the Operational Guidelines have been revised in 2013 (MoRD, 2013). Gram Panchayats are henceforth asked to maintain the 60:40 ratio for all MGNREGS works together, the ratio of individual works may be different.⁷⁰ More generally the design is criticised by Ambasta *et al.* (2008), who point out that the scheme was extended to the whole country in 2007-2008 without a proper review of existing shortcomings in the implementation and subsequent adjustments. And, they may have a point there, given that despite the attempts to address known problems at the level of policy formulation, the review of literature on NREGS reveals that the scheme is still beset with some of the same problems that have been discussed above.

Moreover, issues of accountability and coordination remain difficult. The lack of coordination at central level, as well as between State and central level is said to lead to confusion in the field: “inflexibility or inability in implementation stems from interpretation (or lack of it) of the guidelines, rules and amendments which are passed down to the cutting edge staff” (NCEUS, 2009: 225). (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 41) ask how one could seriously expect NREGA to do better than its predecessors, given that the implementation is supposed to be done by “the same ossified, decaying structure that has deeply institutionalised corruption, inefficiency and non-accountability into the very fabric of Indian democracy at the grass roots?” Ambasta *et al.* hence ask whether and how the administration should have adapted to the new administrative logics of NREGS, and they assume that administration did not yet change. In effect, “[i]n most States employment is provided based on the availability of the work, the local bureaucracy is controlling the implementation process to a great extent” (Pankaj, 2012b: 27). Not meeting statutory requirements such as delayed wage payments, however, are a reason to make people drop out of NREGS (Hirway, 2012: 65). In effect it may be the “scattered

⁷⁰ Another type of flaw in design, which is more relevant for the richer states, is that available type of works may not be corresponding to the local needs. Ghuman and Dua (2012: 190) discuss this for the relatively rich state Punjab.

and intermittent nature of the MGNREGS work [that] encourages workers to depend on their earlier coping strategies like out-migration, long-term work with local farmers (though at lower wages) etc.” (Hirway, 2012: 65).

Another problem in the implementation of social programmes that was mentioned earlier is that decentralisation alone would not be able to make a change, given the power structures in the villages. For NREGS (Raabe *et al.*, 2012: 330) suggest that political participation and ownership on local level of social programmes enhances participation rates and curb clientelism, and thereby positively influence access and coverage rates. Where the opportunities for local participation are not given or undermined, coverage rates are lower. Khanna (2010) also argues that the collective organisation of the local population is important for their access to it. On the other hand, the continuity of unequal power structures in the local decision-making bodies of the PRI show that efforts of decentralisation alone do not directly lead to greater participation. The “inadequate transparency and accountability mechanisms, ... enable interest groups such as farmers’ committees to exercise power in defining priority areas of MGNREGA related works” (Raabe *et al.*, 2012: 330). Despite officially greater involvement in decision-making, issues of “wilful denial of entitlements by the officials” (NCEUS, 2009: 225) and “outright sabotage of the scheme by the administration” (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 44) remain. Hirway (2012: 65) in speculating about the causes of the decline in NREGS participation (most notably in the financial year 2011-2012) argues that local officials and local strong men may obstruct the implementation of the act by making available no more than a minimum level of NREGS works. Similarly Raabe *et al.* (2012: 318) point to “local elite capture and targeting failures.” There also is evidence for corruption in NREGA (Niehaus & Sukhtankar, 2009: 5ff).⁷¹

⁷¹ They distinguish two types thereof: stealing from beneficiaries, by paying them lower wages, and stealing from tax payers, by over reporting the amount of work done. Whereas the former is more or less likely to become a source of complaint of the villagers – or say a social audit – the latter may be of less concern. This needs to be checked by superiors on Block, District or State level. However, given the degree of corruption found, Niehaus and Sukhtankar (2009: 7) conclude that such incentives must be weak.

Lastly, a theme that is prominent for other programmes is also repeatedly named as a source for the failure of implementation in India: the lack of awareness among (potential) participants as well as the low levels of civil society mobilisation. Pankaj (2012b: 27) writes that “the realisation of low number of person days and other entitlements are happening because of the low level of quality awareness among the poor households and low, rather lack of, civil society mobilisation.” This is especially pronounced in poorer States (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 6). In effect NREGS “is yet to become demand-driven and civil-society oriented” (Pankaj, 2012b: 27; NCEUS, 2009: 220f).⁷²

Overall, the studies on NREGS and its various aspects cited above show that there are a number of obstacles to the expansion of the scheme. The major gaps discussed are not policy design, which attempts to tackle some of the known problems, but implementation. There are, however, considerable differences between the States. The comparison between the implementation in different States, therefore, promises to be rewarding if we seek to understand why the programme is implemented more successfully in some contexts than in others. Additionally, Hirway (2012: 66) points to equally large differences in the implementation between Districts and therefore suggests that learning from these might be useful.

3.5 Interim conclusions on policy implementation

The review of the literature on implementation with special focus on the South brought to the fore a number of key points. Firstly, in Southern contexts policy implementation receives relative larger importance as a focal point for interest articulation and political participation (Scott, 1967; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 66f, 125). This is an important argument that needs to be taken in account by studies on welfare regimes in the South. The lack of attention to implementation appears to be a particular shortcoming for Southern contexts. This is a strong argument for a comprehensive view on social policy expansion in the South from policy formulation to implementation – as attempted in this study.

⁷² Another critique by Pankaj (2012b) as well as Khera (2011c) on the scheme’s design is that NREGA leaves out the urban population. The issue that the government had promised an urban employment scheme too, will be taken up below in the section on the making of NREGA.

The welfare regime approach formulated above suggests to look for reasons of distinct developments in the politics of welfare expansion, including the institutional practices developed, effects from the external environment, as well as by actors and their ideas. For the analysis of the politics of implementation of welfare expansion in the South this can be adapted.⁷³ But, we change levels from the level of 'the state' to a disaggregated view of different bodies of the administration that might actually not pursue the same interests, and whose internal conflicts may contribute to the problems associated with implementation. Such an approach looks at welfare regimes not only as an aggregate phenomenon of policies and outcomes, but as a practice.⁷⁴

In any case, implementation cannot be seen as a purely administrative, technical process of the simple execution of singular policy intent. Policies always carry multiple meanings, are subject to various interpretations and re-interpretations. Interpretative approaches to implementation point out that conflicts should be seen as legitimate and are to be expected. Policy actors do have options how to act and they use them. Grindle points out that the room to manoeuvre of policy actors might be even larger in the South and that therefore their ideas, perceptions and interpretation may weigh even more heavily. Given the heightened role of implementation in the overall policy process, the same – in my opinion – should be assumed for policy implementors. Such a view, however, that investigates how the perceptions of implementors shape implementation, has so far by and large been absent for the South. This is furthermore linked to one more level of interpretation by another group of readers of policy: the citizens. Interpretative policy analysis stresses the interactive and dynamic character of implementation. In encounters

⁷³ With regards to some discussions on differences between North and South that have to be factored in when studying the South welfare regime approaches and implementation studies point to similar phenomena. For example Grindle and others see contextual factors having a special importance for the performance of organizations in 'developing countries'. This resembles the argument of Gough and Wood who assume less independence of the state from societal structures.

⁷⁴ Potentially also look at other regime definitions to see whether regime in practice fits. It could mean to look at the links and mutual dependencies between welfare producers.

between administration and citizens they mutually create, sustain, adapt to and change ideas and expectations about their counterparts.

Another important argument that emerges from the review above is the overall emphasis on actual gains or changes for citizens and administration, rather than a (simple) change in policy prescriptions. Bringing together insights from implementation studies and welfare regime approaches implies a shift of focus to actual welfare gains. Part and parcel is the recognition that not all policy legislated will also be implemented according to the proclaimed goals. Acknowledging that not all policy leads to the envisaged results also introduces an element of uncertainty about the achievement of envisaged aims. Several factors contribute to uncertainty: goals of policy may be ambiguous and conflicting; all policy is interpreted by implementors and those they implement it for; and paths, routines, practices and beliefs from earlier policies continue to shape the perceptions of a new policy and related practices. When implementation is contested, subject to competing interpretations, and shaped by prior practices we cannot expect certainty of implementation.⁷⁵ Reliability or certainty, however, is a dimension of welfare that is typically not included in welfare debates and indicators in the South, or the North. Lastly, I discussed that policy can also work very strongly on a symbolic level, more than in terms of material changes.

3.6 Linking implementation to India and NREGA – implications for the study

The decision to study the politics of implementation of welfare expansion in the case of India and NREGA is underpinned by the fact that NREGA is particularly relevant for the study of the expansion of welfare, not only because it is relatively successful compared to other Indian schemes, but also because it has the potential to make a difference in with regards to all three dimensions of social security outlined above: material improvements, reliability and agency. The recognition of the uncertainty of achievement of welfare gains for the individual citizen additionally underpins the choice for social security as central concept for the analysis.

⁷⁵ The question whether the more successful regions in terms of NREGS implementation have been able to reverse or at least change earlier practices of citizen-state encounters has hitherto hardly been addressed.

Also with regards to the dimension of agency India's NREGA is an interesting case. The scheme is supposed to benefit some of the most vulnerable groups, landless labourers and marginal farmers. A relevant question is whether they are able to claim these benefits in the dynamics of the politics of implementation, or whether the scheme rather benefits other groups with more resources.

Another question is whether the new demand-based logic, which implies change in state-citizen-encounters, is *de facto* realised. It is in the encounter of citizens with their local administration where the programmes are actually implemented. And, whether welfare gains have been realised, can ultimately only be judged by those who are affected by it. It is one important innovation of this book to explicitly link the welfare regime approach with the participants' assessment whether welfare gains have been achieved.

Thus, the local level is a central level for an investigation that focuses on the politics of implementation. Local level implementation is embedded in a wider web of administrative structures that shape important parameters of the scheme's rollout. And, some States fare much better than others with regards to the number of households participating in NREGS and the number of days per household – two important indicators for the expansion of coverage. These differences can only partially be explained with different state capacities in terms of fiscal resources and administrative staff, which is why these were not central for case selection, as discussed in the following chapter. Overall, dynamics at central, State, District and local level will be examined. As the literature review revealed, they all matter for implementation.

What is central, is that this study will not only engage with the easily measurable and relatively well documented core categories of NREGA, the number of people reached and the days allocated per household. These are weak proxies if we are to make any argument about the real welfare gains and livelihood improvements of the participants. Therefore, the assessment, whether NREGA can be deemed successful or not, in realising welfare will also be assessed by participants and administration at the research locations.

Overall, looking at the implementation of NREGA in two States and several locations therein, rather than doing either a global quantitative

assessment or a case study in just one location, is based on several arguments. A global overview based on official data does neither allow to assess demand and realisation of welfare gains, nor to explore the local dynamics. The comparison between two States and several locations helps to understand the how of implementation and whether that implementation leads to welfare gains for the poorer sections of the population. A comparison thus helps to get a fuller picture of implementation in the sense that it can validate whether the observed dynamics can be found across space or are location specific.

The design of the study is chosen in way, which is deemed representative, in the sense that the plurality of perspectives on implementation can be gathered in the selected research locations. This is of central importance for research questions pursued, and congruent with an interpretivist research design, in which cases may be selected “on the basis of their inherent interest (for example, paradigmatic cases), not because they are typical of a category but for what they tell us about complex social processes” (Della Porta & Keating, 2008b: 29). Also with regards to reliability a qualitative, interpretative approach is chosen, which seeks to achieve reliability e.g. through the “triangulation of various methods and methodologies within the same research project” (Della Porta & Keating, 2008b: 37). For this research it is of particular important to combine and contrast different views on implementation from a large number of interviews with each other, as well as with the scheme’s official data. This of course may not constitute reliability in a positivist sense, but it suffices for a post-positivist research perspective, which treats the researched ideas, perceptions and interpretation as “as the product of a chain of interpretive judgments, ... arrived at by researchers in particular times and places” (Fischer, 1998: 136).

After this review of relevant literature on both welfare development and implementation, and the clarification of basic theoretic premises underlying this book, the next fourth chapter will lay out the corresponding methodological choices and methods used. Following that, the fifth chapter provides a historical review of India’s welfare trajectory and traces influential ideas that have shaped it. This fifth chapter is guided by the first part of the literature review and seeks to answer the first research question. This debate will help to understand why historically and in NREGA specific forms of social policy intervention to expand

social security have been chosen. Chapter 5 will also outline the nature of India's welfare regime today and introduce the most important institutions. In the sixth and seventh chapters I explore the politics of implementation in the selected locations. I look at the differences in interpretations and perceptions of the scheme, by administration and citizens, and aim to understand how these affect the implementation process, and the politics of welfare expansion.

4 Research Framework, Methodology and Data

The problem of objectivity in research cannot be solved simply by attempting to eradicate valuations. ... The fact that valuations are implied cannot be deemed as unscientific. On the contrary, every study of a social problem, however limited in scope, is and must be determined by valuations. A 'disinterested' social science has never existed and never will exist. For logical reasons it is impossible. A view presupposes a viewpoint. Research, like any other rationally pursued activity must have a direction. The viewpoint and the direction are determined by our interest in a matter. Valuations enter into the choice of approach, the selection of problems, the definition of concepts, and the gathering of data and are by no means confined to the practical or political inferences drawn from theoretical findings. (Myrdal, 1968: 31f)

As outlined in the introduction, this research is informed by a pressing political and a social problem – which is explored in this book with the help of social and political theories – which should contribute to the better understanding of the problem at hand. The research contributes to social science that is committed to practical knowledge.⁷⁶ Such social science should be understood as “a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 4). It is not about uncovering general laws, but aims to assess values, norms, and structures of power and dominance (Caterino & Schram, 2006: 8f). For the researcher this implies that he or she takes a viewpoint, as Myrdal also argues above, that also needs to be made explicit.

The epistemological and methodological implications of such a perspective on social science research for my own research are outlined below. This is followed by an introduction to the approaches that are used in the two core undertakings of this book, a) the historical analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory, and b) the analysis of the extension and implementation of a specific Indian social policy, as well as the methodology of the data collection in the field. The techniques used are outlined and discussed in the light of the epistemological assumptions on which this book rests.

⁷⁶ Flyvbjerg (2001: 2ff) calls this “phronetic social science” building on Aristotle’s distinction between *phronesis* –practical wisdom –, *episteme* – analytical or scientific knowledge –, and *techne* – technical knowledge. Flyvbjerg argues that a social science must go beyond *episteme*, *techne* or both.

4.1 A post-positivist research framework

The study is embedded in a post-positivist research framework. Post-positivism – also called or post-empiricism – is no strict theoretical programme but rather an orientation which comprises various approaches (Fischer, 2003: 12f).⁷⁷ A common ground is an understanding of the world, and of research practice therein, which does not seek one truth, that can be discovered through “an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text of their research” (Gibbs, 2007: 91). Neither are researchers objective, nor is there an external objective reality to which we could compare research results. As highlighted in the chapter quotation by Myrdal a core assumption is that there is no disinterested social science. The process of understanding itself has “ineliminable subjective elements that require researchers to forgo a disinterested position of detachment and to enter into dialogue with those they study” (Caterino & Schram, 2006: 9).

It also means that a *described* assumption of a rationale or motivation of an interviewee, or analysis of another piece of data, is always *ascribed* in the sense that it e.g. reflects the researcher’s ideas about the interviewee’s rationale (see Cappai, 2008: 14). Thus, research results always reflect to some degree the prior knowledge, personal background and preferences of the researcher. “Interpretation itself is a practice of power, implying an a priori involvement in the world that researchers have to take into account” (Caterino & Schram, 2006: 9). Instead of futile attempts “to try and eliminate the effects of the researcher, rather we need to understand these effects and monitor and report them” (Gibbs, 2007: 92).⁷⁸ What is

⁷⁷ The post-positivist framework encompasses quite different epistemological and ontological approaches, ranging from critical realism – promoted by authors such as Bhaskar (see Laclau & Bhaskar, 1998) – which postulates that there is a real material world out there and that it is our knowledge which is limited, “socially conditioned and subject to challenge and reinterpretation” (Della Porta & Keating, 2008a: 24), to discursive approaches (see e.g. Laclau & Bhaskar 1998; Glynos, Howarth, Norval & Speed, 2009). The latter postulate that meanings are not given but are only formed in the process of social interaction between societal actors see (Dzudzek, Kunze & Wullweber, 2012).

⁷⁸ Reflexivity is also concerned with the choices made for a specific research project – and hence most likely against another – with its relevance, and the source of relevance, as well as the choice to increase the visibility of a certain phenomenon or case

needed is 'reflexivity', "the awareness and acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge" (Gibbs, 2007: 36). What follows is that the subjective foundations of social reality, its construction and its understanding need to be and are explicitly acknowledged. The focus shifts to the investigation into different meaningful inter-subjective understandings of reality (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

Epistemologically this implies that the aim of research cannot be to render the standpoint of the observer invisible, to 'objectify' it through efforts to correct the observers gaze.⁷⁹ Instead it is part of such an approach for researchers to be "explicit about their preconceptions, power relations in the field, the nature of the researcher/ respondent interaction, [and] how their interpretations and understandings may have changed" (Gibbs, 2007: 92). It is the awareness for the own standpoint, which is not random but chosen, and these choices need to be explained.

Though we might wish it otherwise, human action is not scientific in a positivist way, subject to prediction and control. Nor can we make it so by wishing or by writing implementation and administrative theories, which prescribe conditions that run counter to human practices. (Yanow, 1996: 238)

The post-positivist framework shapes the research strategy of the study. There are two core undertakings a) the historical analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory, and b) the analysis of the extension and implementation of a specific Indian social policy, the MGNREGA. These two themes partially call for different sources of data, methodological approaches, or varied emphasis within approaches. While it is valid to have a research topic, which can better be explored using different data, methods and approaches, one should be cautious not to bring together two approaches or methodologies, which do not rest on the same ontological and epistemological premises (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 133f). This is

and not another (Gibbs, 2007: 92f). These concerns have been addressed in the different parts of the introduction.

⁷⁹ However, when I was in the field in India I was confronted with the expectations to produce an "completely unbiased and objective study" (21ADM). I was deemed particularly suitable for this undertaking because I was deemed to be an outsider, without a (political) agenda.

not the case here, as both approaches outlined in this section build upon a post-positivist framework. The two, in my opinion often synergetic, approaches are the qualitative-interpretative policy analysis of Yanow & Schwartz-Shea (2006; 2012) and the political and ideational analysis of Hay (2002, 2011). In the historical analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory in Chapter 5 I mainly build on Hay, while in the analysis of the extension and implementation of MGNREGA in Chapters 6 and 7 I rather use an adapted IPA framework. The following two sections explain how the two approaches complement each other.

4.2 Political and ideational analysis ...

At first, also policy analysis with its dedicated problem and meso- to micro-orientation, which also matches the phronetic research agenda, might seem like a suitable approach. However, mainstream policy analysis, as outlined in Chapter 3, is discarded for its embedding in a positivist framework. The problem solving orientation in positivist context easily becomes a problem solving bias: A problem at the outset of the policy formation is deemed to be objectively discoverable and there supposedly is an objective factual solution, which can be identified through an unbiased policy analysis (adapted from Yanow, 1990: 225). In such a perspective, criticises Fischer (2003: 4f), political and social issues are translated into

technically defined ends to be pursued through administrative means. Vexing social and economic problems are interpreted as issues in need of improved management and better programme design; their solutions are to be found in the objective collection of data and the application of the technical decision.

What appears as a problem then, are not societal conflicts surrounding social issues, but administrative or institutional barriers that prevent their solution. Governments are seen to have – or ought to have – an (natural) interest in resolving these (social) problems. In such a case policy analysis becomes “just another instrumental activity, ultimately in the service of technocracy” (Dryzek, 2002: 35). Questions on how a certain problem is socially and discursively constructed, who is not represented in this process, and who might not be interested in bringing up a certain problem, and who has the power to define a problem, are not part of positivist policy analysis.

A re-emphasis on the political nature of policy processes and the unequal distribution of power within these processes are at the core of various strands of interpretative policy analysis (see e.g. Yanow, 1996; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Turnbull; Fischer, 2003; Caglar, 2009: 43ff; Zittoun, 2012). Still, the ideal of solving social problems is also present in a post-positivist policy analysis, which

is about solving problems [and] ... also about defining problems, and questioning and destabilizing accepted definitions. ... No apology is necessary in a world that features poverty, inequality, violence, and ecological devastation, none of which are merely social constructions. (Dryzek, 2002: 35)⁸⁰

In this quote Dryzek rightly points to the complicated relationship between the ideational or the interpretative and the structural or material dimensions, that need to be addressed. To conceptualise the relationship between the material and the ideational, as well as between actors and structures, Hay (2002) builds on Jessop's (Jessop, 2001, 2008; Moulaert & Jessop, 2006) strategic-relational approach. Such an approach

involves examining how a given structure may privilege some actors, some identities, some strategies, some spatial and temporal horizons, some actions over others; and the ways, if any, in which actors (individual and/or collective) take account of this differential privileging through 'strategic-context analysis' when choosing a course of action. In other words, it involves the study of structures in terms of their structurally inscribed strategic selectivities and actions in terms of (differentially reflexive) structurally oriented strategic calculation. (Jessop, 2001: 1223)

What is important for the analysis is that "political actors inhabit complex and densely structured institutional environments that favour or privilege certain strategies over others" (Hay, 2002: 57). In line, with the earlier introduced phronetic view on social science, Hay emphasises the power relations entailed in social relations, and stresses that "politics is not defined by the locus of its operation but by its nature as a process"

⁸⁰ This is similar to Flyvbjerg (2001), and Caterino & Schram (2006) arguments for social sciences that matter, because they are theoretically informed, empirically founded and socially meaningful.

(2002: 3). And, he continues that “such a definition political analysis is synonymous with the analysis of the distribution, exercise and consequences of power” (ibid.: 3, 256). Approaches with such an understanding, therefore, focus on “the identification and tracing of causal processes over time and the theoretical elucidation of such processes” (ibid.: 48).

Also in IPA some argue that policy outcomes are not only explained by socio-political interpretations, but must also be seen as “concrete manifestations of relatively fixed social processes” (Fischer, 2003: 11). And Brand, in his introduction to historical material policy analysis (HMPA) points out,

policies have asymmetrical consequences for social actors, and their formulation takes place asymmetrically as well, not only because of power relations or more or less legitimate discourses and frameworks, but also because of the institutionalised and discursive selectivities of the polity - and therefore of policies. (Brand, 2013: 432f)

The institutionalised selectivities are the result of “struggles and compromises of the past [and] are inscribed into the state as institutional practice, as the political orientation of state officials, and as laws” claims Brand (2013: 432) further. For the process by which concrete societal power relations have been inscribed into the state, and how they shape policy-making, he suggests Poulantzas’ concept of ‘condensation’ (ibid.).

However, agents that operate in certain institutional contexts may not be fully aware of these selectivities. Agents’ knowledge of the institutional context in which they are situated is “at best, incomplete and ... might often prove to have been inaccurate after the event” (Hay, 2011: 67).

Actors devise strategies that build on prior knowledge and experiences when they form their perceptions – and mis-perceptions – of the respective context. This implies that agents neither act rationally – in a positivist sense, which would presuppose complete information – nor are their interests a mere reflection of material or social circumstances. Instead, interests, desires, and motivations “are irredeemably ideational” (ibid.: 67), are always historical, social, and political constructions that reflect an agents perception of his or her situation and aspirations in a context about which he or she cannot establish certainty.

Actors “have to *interpret* the world ... in order to orient themselves strategically towards it. Ideas provide the point of mediation between actors and their environment” (Hay, 2002: 209f emphasis in original). Ultimately, “it is the ideas actors hold about the context in which they find themselves rather than the context itself, which ... informs the way in which they behave” (ibid.: 258). Therefore, ideas are central to understand “the relationship between agent and structure, conduct and context” (ibid.: 213). Ideas matter greatly in political processes because they inform agents perceptions of the issue at hand and the choices available to them to react to it; they provide “guides for action” (Béland & Cox, 2011: 4). As such ideas entail aspects of understanding and cognition (what is) as well as normative (is this good or bad) components (Schmidt, 2008: 306f). In such an understanding, ideas play a key role for social interaction and thus for political analysis as suggested by Hay.⁸¹

Ideas and other ideational guides such as paradigms “through which actors interpret the work, ... must retain a certain resonance with those actors’ direct and mediated experiences” (Hay, 2002: 212). Ideational guides that are repeatedly or permanently perceived to be contradicted or questioned may lose influence. Thus, it is a complex relationship between material and ideational, in which the latter is only ever relatively autonomous of the former. And yet, “ideas and beliefs are both real and have real effects” (ibid.: 213).

Political outcomes are ... neither a simple reflection of actors’ intentions and understandings nor of the context which gives rise to such intentions and understandings. Rather, they are a product of the impact of the strategies actors devise as means to realise their intentions upon a context, which favours certain strategies over others and does so irrespective of the intentions of the actors themselves. (ibid.: 208)

Hay, thus, suggests that material and ideational factors are closely intertwined in structuring human action. On the one hand, we should not misunderstand the actors as omnipotent, the “parameters of their capacity to act is ultimately set by the structured context in which they find themselves” (ibid.: 253f). On the other hand, contingency “is characteris-

⁸¹ For a review on the role of ideas for politics see Béland & Cox (2011) as well as Mehta (2011).

tic of human agency” (ibid.: 50), it is based in “the [human] capacity to shape the environment in which they find themselves” (ibid.: 253). Therefore, Hay insists, that when we are making a causal argument about political outcomes, we must ensure that we identify the actors involved, and reject “structuralist or functionalist ‘logics’ operating over the heads or independently of social subjects” (2002: 256).

Hay’s approach is particularly relevant to the first research question on what triggered the Indian central government’s decision to expand social protection policies historically and to legislate NREGA in 2005. It is therefore the basis of the analysis of these developments in Chapter 5. Hay offers a dedicated ideational political analysis, which is I deem particularly useful to explore how (local) ideas shaped welfare development, initially and throughout further developments.⁸² Herein, institutions are another focal point of analysis. Institutions are understood as “humanly devised rules that affect behaviour, constraining certain actions, providing incentives for others, and thereby making social life more or less predictable” (Harriss, 2006: 14). These are “subject and focus of political struggle” (Hay, 2011: 68). The nature of these struggles is contingent and “outcomes can in no sense be derived from an extant institutional context itself” (ibid.: 68). Institutions do not necessarily arise because are they are the most effective, their “functionality or dysfunctionality is an open – empirical and historical – question” (ibid.: 68).

This analysis also builds on previous strands of institutionalism. In Thelen’s historical institutionalist work on we find the argument that institutions “rest on a set of ideational and material foundations that, if shaken, open possibilities for change” (Thelen, 1999: 397). Yet, in her work the notion of ‘ideas’ remains somewhat underspecified. Hay rightly points out that traditional historical institutional approaches, which operate with the notion of path-dependency, are rather static.⁸³ His focus on ideas shifts the emphasis to “an adequate account of postformative insti-

⁸² A similar approach has been popularised by Schmidt (2008, 2011) under the label of ‘discursive’ institutionalism. And, also an interpretative perspective on policy analysis stresses that prior debates and past policies shape the ways in which a new policy is perceived. Neither policy makers, nor implementors are “isolated from the general historical and value context of the policy” (Yanow, 1990: 219). They hence, also make the argument for an historical analysis of the policy context.

⁸³ For a discourse theory based critique on path-dependency see (Scherrer, 2001).

tutional change” (Hay, 2011: 66), and allows to identify ‘path-shaping’ logics and dynamics.

Additionally, ideas are recognised as an important part of culture in a more sociological strand of institutionalism (Rieger & Leibfried, 1999; Kaufmann, 2003b). Kaufmann (2003b: 32ff) emphasises that societal processes and phenomena, be they rural-urban migration or income poverty, have to be articulated as social problems, identified as fields for political action and to find resonance among policy makers and their constituencies before they are included in welfare policies by the state.⁸⁴ Culture acts as a filter for ideas on problem definitions and influence which policy solutions are favoured over others (Kaufmann, 2003b: 32); they frame the boundaries within which specific social policy development routes are either opened up or closed (Rieger & Leibfried, 1999: 455) according to a “logic of appropriateness” (Schmidt, 2011). ‘Culture’ in this context can be understood as “(historically specific) habits of thought and behaviour of a particular group of people” (Harriss, 2006: 18). Cultures are not static but fluid, and undergo developments and changes. They have to be upheld through practice, and can be internally and externally contested (*ibid.*: 7).

Ideas, may they be embedded in institutions or part of a culture, can be deemed to be successful ideas. One part of the study of ideas needs to be

⁸⁴ Kaufmann argues that socio-political ideas are filtered by cultural parameters before they are turned into institutions of a welfare state (2003b: 32). One component is the societal acceptance of social (in)equality, which leaves an imprint on the design of social policy responses to societal phenomena. Kaufmann refers i.e. to different experiences in the United States versus Sweden. In the US, key explanatory factors for the higher acceptance of inequality are the big original income disparities as well as the tradition of slavery and the related structural presence of a coloured lower class (*ibid.*: 90f,123). In Sweden, on the other hand, a relatively egalitarian structured society of free farmers, hence the lack of a feudal order, lay grounds for egalitarian thinking way before the institutionalisation of welfare mechanisms by the state (*ibid.*: 163f,170f). Culture in this context frames the boundaries within which specific social policy development routes are either opened up or closed down (Rieger & Leibfried, 1999: 455). Culture, however, is not monolithic or static, cultures undergo developments and changes, they have to be upheld through practice, and can be internally and externally contested (Clarke, 2004: 34ff). The influence of culture varies, also depending on structural factors, and hence cannot be determined *ex ante* (Rieger & Leibfried, 1999: 454).

devoted to the question why some ideas gain more importance than others. Mehta (2011: 35ff) points our attention firstly to *agency*: Who are the individuals and groups that advocate a certain idea? What is the backing that these groups or individuals enjoy? Who assumes ownership for the idea in the long run? And, secondly to *consistency* and *context*: Does the idea of a social problem also offer a corresponding policy solution and how does this fit within the larger ideational and institutional environment? What is the framing provided for the idea and what is the context in which they were promoted?

For the study on the triggers for the Indian government to expand social protection policies historically and to legislate NREGA in 2005 – the first research question – this means to study individual and collective actors that have effectively promoted social policy ideals, or objected these. Ideas are deemed particularly successful when they managed to shape institutions of the welfare regime. They can also be deemed drivers for change, when they change institutions in which older ideas had been embedded. Also, competing ideas that were less successful will be taken up, in particular if they had prominent actors arguing for them.

In the analysis in Chapter 5, I concentrate on major national parties and movements and their respective leading circles. The focus on ideas within policy-making circles, rather than on their communication to a larger public is based on Schmidt's (2011: 59) argument that, in "compound polities" with multiple authorities and federal structures, as we find in India, this level of discussion is crucial for legitimating ideas among policy makers' constituencies as well. Such a focus is further supported by the argument of Grindle (1980: 16f) that in Southern contexts parties do not necessarily form opinions bottom-up, but rather work as organisation of mass followers for elites. Therefore policy makers are of special importance (Grindle, 1980), sometimes even individuals (Baldock, 1999: 469; Kaufmann, 2003a), this justifies the concentration on leading figures within government.⁸⁵ In terms of the material used for such an analysis, ideas and perceptions of the institutional context, as well as policy ideals, can be studied in the language and acts of (public) organisations (Yanow,

⁸⁵ One example can be seen in two main forms of the organisation of social welfare in Europe, that are typically called Beveridge or Bismarck models, by the name of their leading founders.

1996). These represent artefacts of meanings, values and beliefs. This part of the analysis builds on existing literature on the economic and social development of India, as well as texts by selected Indian thinkers on social policy, government documents and newspaper articles. Additionally, background information has been obtained through interviews with Indian researchers and decision-makers.

4.3 ... with an interpretative turn

For the second and third research question the focus shifts from national institutions and their leaders to various lower levels of administration as well as participants' perceptions. The second theme of this book links policy changes to actual achievements for participants in social protection schemes. It tackles the question, how the scheme is perceived by the (target) population, and whether it leads to welfare gains in their opinion. The third research theme addresses the question how the implementation of the MGNREGA differs between locations, and what contributes to these differences. For both, the politics of implementation, including perceptions of the scheme's administration and participants, as well as practices of in- and exclusion are deemed to be important.

This part of the book particularly draws on interpretative policy analysis approaches, in the sense that it inquires into the "disturbances ... in the spaces between the 'creation', the 'transmission' and the 'interpretation' or 'reception' of policy meanings" (Lendvai & Stubbs, 2007: 173). This approach is chosen because it explicitly makes the link between policy prescriptions and those affected by the policy – a perspective that is rare in other schools of policy analysis. The link from welfare regimes to an inquiry into participants' perspectives is one of the central innovations of this book.

With regards to implementation, the starting point of the analysis of an interpretative approach to policy means that we expect a gap between policy intent and implementation because we know that policy does not have one literal meaning and there are different interests involved in interpreting policies (see Yanow, 1990: 220ff). For each policy there are competing understandings or definitions of its "purpose, its substantive content and potential consequences" (Fischer, 2003: 64). Therefore, each policy has different meanings for each participant,

the exact meaning of a policy, then, is ... not self-evident but, rather, is ambiguous and manipulable, and ... the policy processes is – at least in part – a struggle to get one or another meaning established as the accepted one. ... From this perspective, it is not the actual policy outcomes, but rather the *expectations* of outcomes that determine policy issues and shape their politics. (ibid.: 65, emphasis in the original)

The importance of different meanings is not confined to decision-making, it continues into implementation, where policy implementors interpret policy meanings, potentially different than at national level, and may also do so suit themselves (Fischer, 2003: 65). However, ambiguity is seen as potentially purposeful – to accommodate varying interests – and more generally as unavoidable, given that language always carries multiple meanings (Yanow, 1990: 220; Fischer, 2003). What follows is the need to investigate differences of “implementors and other relevant publics’ interpretations of the policy culture and to analyse the effects of these interpretations and meanings on implementation efforts” (Yanow, 1990: 221). This way implementation becomes an interactive process of co-construction, in which the definition of success and failure of implementation activities is negotiated among a variety of actors, that have not all been traditionally conceived of as implementors, i.e. policy target groups (Yanow, 1990: 222; O’Toole, 2000: 266).

More generally, a constructivist understanding of the world, subject of interpretative research cannot be events or processes as such, but rather their receptions, interpretations and the meanings attached to such by people that are affected or involved in a given policy. Such research focuses on perspectives, frames, attributions and corresponding strategies of action (Froschauer & Lueger, 2009). Overall, interpretative researchers thus engage “interpretations of interpretations” (Bevir, 2006: 283). And they are meaning-makers themselves.

Another aspect of an interpretative approach to policy analysis concerns the ways in which “target populations that policies are designed to deal with are socially constructed” (Fischer, 2003: 66). Such definitions are neither arbitrary nor benign.

Policies specify – directly or indirectly – which players are virtuous and which are dangerous, which actions will be punished

or penalized, and which will be encouraged and rewarded. At the same time, citizens and politicians are constituted as subjects with particular sorts of self-conceptions, self-aspirations, fears, and beliefs about the relative importance of events and objects. (ibid.: 66)

These conceptions of the self and the other play a significant role for example in the interaction between programme participants and administration. Simultaneously, some conditions are defined as non-problems. Thereby, policies shape

the contours of the world of the citizen, although not in the same way for all. ... The divisive, value-laden social construction of target populations interacts with the power the target groups have over future careers of politicians. (ibid.: 66f)

Hence, policies also establish the contours of the relationship between administration and citizens. And, they set the stage for processes of exclusion and inclusion. As outlined above, implementation does not adhere to a literal meaning of a law, a government directive or programme guidelines; it is centrally the interpretation by local actors that shape policy implementation. Thus we need to examine the images of beneficiaries and vice versa the administration to see in what way the construction of target groups influences implementation. Political analysis with an interpretative turn as introduced above is suited to exactly that; to trace the development of a policy and its ideational legacies, including selectivities, and to explore the process of implementation in which policy is re-interpreted in numerous ways.

4.4 An abductive research process

The interpretative-qualitative approach was also influential for the overall research process adapted. This is expressed for example in the abductive (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 27ff) research process of the entire study. The latter was shaped by the continuous confrontation of prior theoretical knowledge and assumptions with the experiences in the field, in discussions with colleagues and friends, in fiction and academic literature on India. Abduction is marked by the constant move between the theories, which have inspired the research and form the background of the researchers thinking, and the experiences, which they make in the

field and/or with their data (ibid.). Abduction is neither a deductive nor an inductive research strategy. Induction and deduction typically suggest linearity of the research process, though in different directions: deductive approaches start with theoretical hypotheses that have been gained from the literature review and which are to be verified or falsified.⁸⁶ In inductive processes all arguments are build on experiences on the field. But, Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012) rightly remark that many research projects look linear only *ex post facto*. In contrast, abduction consciously allows for moving back and forth between different types of research activities (deskwork, fieldwork and textwork)⁸⁷ – as was also the case in this research project.

This is consequential for knowledge-claims based on such research, as well as criteria to assess its quality. The “focus on meaning and insistence on its contextuality or situatedness, as well as on the situatedness of those claiming knowledge of it, whether researchers or researched are central characteristics of interpretative research” write Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012: 32f). It implies that this research project aims for situated knowledge, “knowledge from somewhere” (ibid.: 111), knowledge connected to a specific time and place. It is such *contextuality* – not *generalizability* – which is aimed for and a sign of quality for interpretative-qualitative research (ibid.: 10,20,47f, 113).

As criterion for quality of such research Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 108) point to the “adequacy of explanation and analysis.”

The explanatory coherence of the argument... [is underlined by] (1) the consistency of evidence from different sources ..., (2) the ways in which conflicting interpretations have been engaged, and (3) the logic with which the argument has been developed. (ibid.: 108f)

⁸⁶ The role of the literature review is a key difference between abductive–interpretative and deductive-positivist research designs as Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) point out. In positivist approaches the literature review is a key activity as it is the source for the generation of hypotheses to be tested. In abductive research literature situates the researcher, but is not necessary for hypothesis generation.

⁸⁷ Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 7) make a three-fold distinction between deskwork, fieldwork and textwork. The latter is a central analytical activity for them, writing is “worldmaking” (ibid.: 56) not just ‘writing up’.

On the first point Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012) highlight the importance of mapping and exposure to enhance the intertextuality of the analysis.⁸⁸ One way of addressing this concern is the comparison with what research has previously been found in the same area of study (see chapters 6 and 7 below). The second point is constant comparison while coding and analysing data. This is the continuous checking of codes for consistency and accuracy, as well as the explicit looking for differences and variations and dealing with these. And what matters lastly is a self-reflective and transparent logic of argumentation with a focus on its explanatory coherence (ibid.: 109). All three are principles of the analysis are applied in this study. More generally,

alternative approaches ... all challenge the primacy of positivistic models of causality. While causality generally refers to an account that 'explains' and occurrence through the force of a variable that exists logically independent of any participant's understanding, causality as used by an interpretative theorist refers to the reason why an actor carries out an action. (Caterino & Schram, 2006: 5)

Such an approach is fundamentally at odds with a positivist perspective that treats researcher's person and positionality as irrelevant for the research results. Positivist approaches call for validity, reliability, replicability, and rigor to achieve an "objective, accurate and unbiased" (Gibbs, 2007: 91) research, assuring its trustworthiness. But, the positivist concern for external validity runs counter the ontological assumption that there is no outside truth to which we could test validity. Similarly, the idea of replicability assumes that different researchers with the same question in the same field would arrive at identical conclusions. In this research, even 'understanding' is understood to be personal to some extent. It cannot be neutral because it needs engagement between re-

⁸⁸ Other qualitative approaches suggest triangulation or respondent validation (Gibbs, 2007). I opt for the term intertextuality, rather than triangulation following Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 88). This is based on the association of 'triangulation' with a positivist research agenda, in which the combination of different methods, theories, or types of data is supposed to bring us closer to a "single, valid and accurate interpretation of reality" (Gibbs, 2007: 94). Yet, authors such as Gibbs, do not presuppose an external reality and truth, and still find the term triangulation useful.

searcher and researched (Caterino & Schram, 2006: 8f). Such non-positivist science is limited as a predictive science because of “the inherent complexity and contingency (or open-endedness) of processes of change in which human subjects are involved” (Hay, 2002: 48; also see Caterino & Schram, 2006: 8f).

The importance of positionality – of the researcher herself and in the interaction with others throughout the research process – is even more evident in research situations that are characterised by (cultural) strangeness. Positionality denotes the awareness of the researcher that he/she herself does not come to her research from empty space and time, but that she has a certain position in terms of her geographical origin, her age and sex, her education, her institutional background etc. Each comparison, each parallel drawn is based on implicit frames of reference, which need to be made explicit (see Cappai, 2008: 15). For this study the importance of positionality became particularly apparent throughout the fieldwork phases in rural areas of central India. Generally, my (self-) ascribed status as an unmarried, relatively young, white female from the West and a member of academia influenced my interactions with research participants though in different ways, which will be outlined in the empirical chapter. For example, being an academic turned out to be central as door opener in several instances.⁸⁹

Besides the awareness for positionality, flexibility is another quality, which Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012: 36f) treasure for an interpretive researcher. It is central

due to the researcher's on-going and evolving learning in the field, as well as his or her limited control over settings and the persons in them, or over materials in an archive ... This flexibility is a conscious, intentional strategy. (ibid.: 55)

⁸⁹ In terms of my epistemic community, the name of TISS, my Indian host university, was a much more powerful reference than my German home University of Kassel. This was particularly true for many of the higher ranks of the administration as well as some civil society activists. TISS is among the leading educational institutions in social science in India. It emerged from a school of social work and emergency disaster relief during the turmoil of Indian partition into a “deemed university.” Students at TISS have to undergo extensive fieldwork and Block postings.

Flexibility is crucial in a research paradigm that is not limited to pre-defined theory-driven hypothesis and their testing. I remained flexible and open to be able to find phenomena or concepts looking much different on the ground, or more relevant than expected. For an interpretative qualitative researcher it would be a miss not to follow such a thread. For me this meant being ready to go to areas, which I had originally not scheduled for my field research, it meant devising a focus group questionnaire on the spot, after I realised that in many situations it was difficult to talk to one person on his or her own and that more people wanted to participate – whom I also wanted to hear. Flexibility was also demanded time-wise. I wanted to talk to my interview partners at the time of their choosing, wherever possible. Moreover, flexibility also meant that I asked questions, which I had not foreseen and adjusted the questionnaires.⁹⁰

The choice for a post-positivist qualitative-interpretative approach impacts also on a number of other strategic decisions of the research strategy. These are outlined below.

4.5 'Sampling', field access and research locations

The decision for the fieldwork locations was taken according to a qualitative 'sampling' process in line with the post-positivist research strategy.⁹¹ What sampling is for positivist research, might be called 'exposure' in interpretative research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 87). Exposure can be understood as the encounter with a "research relevant variety" (ibid.: 85) of actors, books, events etc. Qualitative research typically does not seek to determine frequency, but rather aims to explore a certain behaviour or preference in greater detail (Kruse, 2009: 76). The selection of research material or locations is guided by heterogeneity and similarity. A typical aim of qualitative sampling would be to reflect the heterogeneity of a predefined research area, but it could also be explicitly driv-

⁹⁰ I changed questionnaire for households during fieldwork. The first round of interviews had brought to the fore problems with the initial version of the questionnaire (see the discussion on the questionnaire below).

⁹¹ In positivist quantitative research the key criterion for sampling accuracy is to form a sample, which is as representative as possible for a selected whole. A typical research question is to determine how frequent a certain type of behaviour or preferences is present within a given whole.

en by the research question or developed during the data collection period. The choice of fieldwork locations is also not strictly guided by their representativity, but may be determined by accessibility for the researcher or prior knowledge.

In the case of this study, my decision for the selected locations was guided by discussions with predominantly Indian researchers who had previously done research on NREGA, the literature reviewed, and the official data on the scheme. Guiding criteria for the selection of research locations was that the States should not be too different in terms of their economic performance, not too poor – because I do not want to explore the impact of fiscal capacities – and not too far geographically, but differ in their performance in NREGA. The economic and geographical similarity are desired, so that the analysis can focus on the political and administrative nexus, and the relevance of ideas, which promised to be important factors according to the literature review.

I settled on Andhra Pradesh (AP)⁹² as better performing State and Maharashtra (MH) as less well performing State. Table 4.1 below shows, AP has an above average participation of rural households in NREGS compared to the national average. In MH participation rates among rural households are below the national average. Also in other categories, such as the number of days worked per household MH fares much worse than AP and the national average (see Table 6.14 on page 250 for more data on the two States and the research locations therein).

⁹² In 2013 the process for the division of the state of Andhra Pradesh was set in motion. In March 2014 the Lok Sabha, the national parliament, endorsed the separation into two states. The decision to split the state was highly controversial. Since the announcement of the plan in 2013 violent clashes took place in the concerned areas as well as in Delhi, and even in the Lok Sabha itself. On 2 June 2014 the new State of Telangana was announced India's 29th state. It comprises the North-eastern Districts of the former State of Andhra Pradesh. The remaining Southern and Eastern Districts of coastal Andhra still carry the name of Andhra Pradesh. The research locations of this study are actually located in the new state of Telangana. However, at the time of the research this State did not yet exist, and all processes that I describe are valid for the former, larger State of Andhra Pradesh. Therefore, and for practical reasons such as the unavailability of data for Telangana, I stick to the term Andhra Pradesh. The consequences of this division on the State and the District – also with regards to NREGA – are still to be seen.

Table 4.1 Population and NREGS participation for AP and MH

Population data for 2011					
	Population	Households			
	Total	Total	Urban	Rural	As share of Indias rural HH in %
Maharashtra	111.147.778	24.296.607	11.134.775	13.161.832	7,8
Andhra Pradesh	83.232.560	20.927.188	6.736.573	14.190.615	8,4
India	1.200.536.286	248.408.494	80.329.751	168.078.743	
NREGS Data 2011-2012					
	HH with NREGS Job Card	HH that worked in NREGS	Share of rural HH with Job Card per State /India	Share of rural HH that worked in NREGS per State /India	Share of HH working in NREGS in State as share of all HH working in NREGS
Maharashtra	6.797.949	1.504.521	51,6	11,4	3,0
Andhra Pradesh	12.046.902	4.998.185	84,9	35,2	9,9
India	125.075.528	50.642.949	74,4	30,1	

Source: Population data from www.censusindia.gov.in Census 2011, NREGA data for financial year 2011/2012 from www.nrega.nic.in as on July 30 2015⁹³

MH is an additionally interesting case, because it has a long-standing history of state-wide employment guarantee. The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act (MEGA) was legislated in the 1970s and formed an important source for the legislation of MNREGA (see Gaiha & Imai, 2006; Datar, 2007; Shah & Mehta, 2008). The relatively worse position of MH is surprising given that theories on the importance of prior institutional paths would suggest that the State's earlier experience with employment guarantee should be an advantage.

A commonality between the two states chosen was that at the time of the field work both states were governed by governments led by the Congress Party. Thus, the regional governments were not in opposition to the central UPA government. Party differences or rivalries could have potentially explained a reluctance to implement a scheme.⁹⁴

⁹³ According to the 2011 Census Maharashtra is the second most populous Indian State, 9% of India's total population lived there. Andhra was ranked 5th largest state in terms of population, with 7% of India's total population residing in AP.

⁹⁴ Although it remains true that both States were Congress governed at the time and there was no party rivalry between centre and regional government, in hindsight, the looming bi-furcation of the state of AP, may have acted as an incentive for the

When I prepared my fieldwork, in late 2012, AP was often displayed as a role model for NREGS implementation.⁹⁵ The less wealthy, in terms of per capita income, AP has introduced employment guarantee only now, but fares much better with regards to parameters such as person days and number of days per household. AP combined strong political will, rural worker and community mobilization, with computerization and e-governance mechanisms for implementation and monitoring (NCEUS, 2009: 220; Palisetty, 2011; Reddy, 2013; Gopal, 2014). Additionally, I had made more connections with researchers from AP, who were willing to help me gain field access.

Other levels that influence the politics of implementation are the Block and the District level, where decisions from local level have to be sanctioned and where administrative processes are organised.⁹⁶ Within the States I selected one District each: Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh and Amravati in Maharashtra. These belonged to those Districts, where NREGA was implemented first in 2006-2007. The Districts of the first phase were deemed to be particularly in need for employment generation, and are often called 'backward' regions. Both Districts have a relatively high share of Scheduled Caste population, who belong to the most marginalised and deprived groups in the Indian society. They are furthermore in similar climatic locations at the centre of the Indian subcontinent, thus, belong roughly to the same climatic zone, and agriculture follows the same patterns. Typically three seasons are differentiated: *rabi* (winter) from October to January, summer from February to May, and *kharif* (rainy season, monsoon) from June to September. Another geographical commonality between the two is that they are border Districts,

Congress party to win over the rural population through NREGA. This is a question, which I did not specifically address.

⁹⁵ Originally, I had favoured Rajasthan over AP, because I had hoped that there would be larger parts of the population with whom I could communicate in Hindi. In AP large parts of the State's population speak Telugu, a language not related to Hindi and with a different alphabet. But, another relevant section of the population of Andhra speaks Urdu, which similar to Hindi in its spoken version, yet written in Arabic letters, not the Devanagari alphabet. This made some interviews and the navigation in the State's capitol Hyderabad much easier.

⁹⁶ More information on the units in the administrative structure of India and in NREGA specifically can be found in Figure 3.1 above. Hirway (2012: 66) discusses that it is useful to focus the analysis on Districts, rather than States only.

far from the respective State capitals. Adilabad borders Maharashtra in its Northeast and Chhattisgarh in the Northwest. Amravati borders Andhra Pradesh in the East and Madhya Pradesh in the North. In terms of NREGS performance, both Districts performed average in an inner-state comparison in the year of fieldwork, though with significant inner-District variation.

The argument for the selection of average performers is, that it was not possible to include more than one District in per State, if I wanted to explore the local implementation in more than location within the Districts. Therefore, I rather settled on average performers than the top-performers. I assumed that in a more standard District setting, this would leave more room to understand local processes. Also Mukhopadhyay (2012: 27) agree that variation in implementation is large between States. But, the processes of targeting and the provision of work in “is surely best understood at the local level.” Therefore they call “for more studies at the local level that aim to understand the mechanics of this [elite] capture so as to better inform debates on decentralization and its efficacy on public provision” (ibid.: 27).

Within the Districts I chose two Blocks each, one with above average performance and one with below average performance in terms of the number of people participating in NREGA and the person days realised. Through that I hoped to gain an understanding of these local dynamics that can make NREGA more or less successful in extending social security in an overall not extra-ordinary location.

However, so far we have been talking about success in the easily measurable and well documented core categories of NREGA, the number of people reached and the days allocated per household. These are only weak proxies if we are to make any argument about the real welfare gains and livelihood improvements of the participants.

Additionally, the secondary data as reported in official statistics needs to be confronted with “quantitative and qualitative data sets collected either conducting surveys or in the format of more localized case studies”, argue Breman and Kannan (2013: 15). In this study the assessment, whether NREGA can really be deemed successful in realising welfare in these four locations, will be largely left to the evaluation by participants and administration.

It is beyond the scope of a PhD research to do qualitative interviews in a whole Block. Therefore, I selected one village each per Block, but with occasional visits to other settlements in the same Block. For the selection of the villages I could not primarily rely on theory guided criteria, because these suggest to look at primarily at the how of implementation, at the way citizen-state encounters take place, at access to and exclusion from decision-making, at the level and type of conflicts, at the ideas and perceptions of citizens and policy implementors in the locality. These phenomena can only be explored once one is at a certain location and has learned about its ways, and could not be used for location selection.

In terms of exposure or sampling of the interviewees, I aimed to reach NREGA staff at all levels, for a broad coverage among key positions within the administrative structure of the scheme, from field assistants (lowest rank) to the State programme director (State level top bureaucrats). However, I was differently successful in arranging meetings with these officials in the two States. In Andhra I have a number of rich interviews with the administration, but the interviews with the NREGS participants are less rich, and entail some misunderstandings. The availability for interviews among the bureaucracy was higher in Andhra Pradesh than in Maharashtra. But, in AP it proved to be difficult to establish contacts to local CSOs. Hence, for contacts with NREGA participants I mainly relied on the local administration. My translator, who worked at the training institution of the District Water Management Agency (DWAMA), established most contacts in the field.

In Maharashtra I experienced difficulties to get interviews with the administration. And, those that I got were often short or interrupted. But, in Maharashtra the interviews with the villagers are much richer than in Andhra.

In Maharashtra the access to NREGA participants mainly worked through colleagues and friends from TISS through whom I had established contact to a local CSO in the Chikhaldara Block of Amravati District. Additionally, at the District headquarter in Amravati the head of the Gram Sewak Training Centre brokered contact to some leading staff of the administration. Yet, in Maharashtra I faced more difficulties to get interview dates with officials from various levels. One possible explanation for the difficulties could be that the timing of the research was more

inconvenient, as it was very close to the end of the financial year, which is a very busy period for the administration. Additionally, in Maharashtra, as opposed to Andhra Pradesh, there is much less staff, which is specifically employed for NREGA, and the potential interviewees, hence, also had more other responsibilities.

Overall in Maharashtra access to the population proved comparatively easier than in Andhra, while access to the administration had been easier in Andhra. The effect of these differences is that I have more interviews with staff members in Andhra and more interviews with participants in Maharashtra.

4.6 Data

Part of an interpretative approach to research is a conception of data, of 'evidence', as being generated (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 78ff). In such a research perspective data has no "prior ontological existence as data outside of the framework of the research project: the research question is what renders objects, acts, and language as evidence" (ibid.: 79). Evidence is brought into existence through the research itself. Hence, it is generated, rather than collected; it is not an objective, value-free item, made up of answers or numbers. It is a piece of information that is assumed to be a manifestation of a meaning, an event or an occurrence that is of relevance to the research.

In the generation of data the researcher is not alone. Part of this research agenda is the search for local and contextual knowledge, which depends – at least in parts – on the interaction with those who explain themselves to the researcher e.g. through interviews. When the researchers "sense-making ... depends, ... on the sense-making by those actors ... in interviews ... We might then say that research project evidence is 'co-generated' by actors and researchers together" (ibid.: 80). Co-generation or co-construction of data, thus, entails the explicit acknowledgement of the crucial contribution of research participants. They centrally contribute to the researcher's – my – emerging understanding together with other material.

Generally, interpretative approaches are open to a variety of data from (participant) observation, to questionnaires and interviews, to unofficial documents or newspaper articles. Overall, "interpretivists can devise

their interpretations of interpretations by drawing eclectically on data and heuristics associated with all kinds of methods” (Bevir, 2006: 283). What is distinct about interpretative analysis is not the way data is created – not collected – but “rather, it prescribes a particular way of recounting data. ... The crux of ... [interpretative] analysis is the need to treat data as evidence of beliefs or meanings” (Bevir, 2006: 283). An interpretative approach to qualitative data explicitly states that data is always interpreted and does not speak for itself.

This conception of data has been important for the decision to work with qualitative data in this research: The social programme studied in this book, NREGS, has a relatively better online availability of quantitative data than any previous Indian welfare programmes. But, on the one hand, this official data is increasingly criticised as patchy and unreliable (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 5; NCEUS, 2009: 217; Drèze & Oldiges, 2011; Hirway, 2012: 66; Mihir Shah Committee, 2012; CAG, 2013). On the other hand, the data available – for example, quantitative data on the number of participants in a certain District and the number of days they worked – does in fact say little on whether people in this region have experienced increased social security or not, whether there were many more people who would have liked to work or who would have liked to work more days. Only by being in that location and speaking to people, we can get this type of information. Working with quantitative data would have neither allowed me the same glimpses into practices, nor to ask back, when I did not understand a certain meaning.

More importantly, a qualitative approach also does not limit the voice of the research participant to ticking boxes, but allows them to provide their own interpretations, with which the interpretative-qualitative researcher has to engage. I frequently explained the research participants the process of data generation as one, in which I was collecting many small stones of all colours through the interviews, from which I would make a mosaic, a picture, based on their inputs. This is another way of saying that potentially a multitude of interpretations of the social world studied exist, and that exposure to this variety is wished for and needed to gain understanding, enable interpretation and found knowledge claims (see Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 84ff).

This core feature of qualitative approaches and research techniques is particularly suitable for research in contexts of cultural strangeness, because these techniques build on the assumption of a plurality of perspectives on reality, and make these the explicit focus of inquiry (see Cappai, 2008: 21). The main forms of data on which I base my empirical chapter are different types of interviews. But, for research in strange cultures it is additionally advisable not to rely on interviews only. These may be complemented with a variety of data sources such as socio-cultural data, ethnographic and historic knowledge (ibid.: 22). Hence, additional types of data have been generated (FN, photographs) or collected (aggregate data). The latter play a role as evidentiary sources, which will be drawn on to enhance the intertextual validity and overall quality of the research. I'll come to these other forms of data after an overview of the interviews.

4.6.1 Interviews

What the interviews are supposed to achieve, is to “illuminate ... ‘how government works in practice’” (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005: 8), to understand public policy debates in India not only on policy formulation level in Delhi or a State capitol, but also at the level of implementation, where government works in practice. For such a purpose Corbridge *et al.* (2005: 8f) suggest to include three vantage points: “the sightings of the state made by poorer people; ... the sightings made by government officers; ... and the sightings made by members of the wider development community, including ... senior bureaucrats in the Government of India.” These were roughly the three different perspectives, which I aimed to capture through interviews.

Overall I conducted 67 formal interviews and focus group discussions (FGD), in which a total of 197 people participated. The interviews primarily took place in the two States Andhra Pradesh (32) and Maharashtra (33), only 2 formal interviews took place at central level. Out of these interviews 34 were with members of the administration or local representatives, seven with civil society groups and 26 with villagers. Among the villagers that participated either in an interview or a FGD, 92 were NREGA workers and 24 did not work in the scheme. Most of the interviews have been fully recorded and transcribed. Besides these, I also conducted a number of helicopter interviews mainly with fellow aca-

demics and members of the development community, which were neither recorded nor transcribed.

4.6.1.1 *Semi-structured expert interviews*

A central corpus of data, which was generated for detailed analysis, is formed by semi-structured expert interviews with bureaucrats and elected leaders and representatives of CSOs working on NREGS at various levels. In sum, 34 such expert interviews with a total of 39 interviewees were conducted. Three slightly different questionnaires were used for State and central level bureaucrats and elected leaders, local level bureaucrats and elected leaders, and CSO representatives.

Generally, three broad types of expert interviews can be distinguished: exploratory, systematizing and theory generating (Meuser & Nagel, 1991; Bogner & Menz, 2009). The decision for each type of knowledge – and interview – comes with consequences in terms of objectives of the data collection, interview and questionnaire organisation as well as data analysis, as Table 4.2 opposite shows.

All of the experts interviewed for this book participate in various ways in the process of the implementation of NREGA, and through this involvement they have gained knowledge that is of interest to this research. Occasionally, such process knowledge was sought if it was not otherwise available. The focus of the interviews with administration and CSOs, however, was theory generating. Through the interviews, I aimed to uncover specifically knowledge that gave my interviewees “institutionalized authority to construct reality” (Hitzler, Honer & Mader 1994 cited in Meuser & Nagel, 2009: 18); in other words, knowledge that allows them influence over the actions of others. In the case of administration, this could be knowledge about the implementation of NREGA, which they put to use by implementing the scheme in varying ways. In the case of NGOs, their knowledge of NREGA, which they pass on to the scheme’s participants, potentially allows them to influence how participants act towards the scheme.

Table 4.2 Types of expert interviews

Type of Interview	Exploratory	Systematizing	Theory generating
Objective of the interview,	Exploration of a field of knowledge, gain a	Participation in exclusive expert knowledge,	Reconstruction of subjective guides for

data generation	better understanding of a problem, generate hypotheses, participation in exclusive expert knowledge	expert as source of information for the reconstruction of processes and social events	action and mechanisms of decision-making, experts as research subjects
Type of expert knowledge sought	Context and specialised knowledge ('Fachwissen'), also technical knowledge	Process knowledge – knowledge generated through practice, reflexively and spontaneously available knowledge through action and experience	Theoretically rich conceptualisation of (implicit) knowledge, norms, routines, interpretation and practices
Interview & questionnaire organisation	Not systematic, no need for direct comparison, entirety and structure	Systematic, flawless gathering of information as well as comparability of data is desired	Reconstruction of implicit knowledge, knowledge as socially relevant
Desirable interview situations	Interviewer as co-expert, expert from another discipline or accomplice	Interviewer as co-expert, expert from another discipline or accomplice	Interviewer as non-expert, expert from another discipline, accomplice or eventually as potential critic
Data analysis	No full transcription, paraphrase and coding	Transcription of relevant passages, coding and analysis	Transcription of relevant passages, coding and detailed analysis

Source: own table and translation based on Bogner & Menz (2009: 64ff)

The production of expert knowledge was not at the core of the research interests. Yet, "biographical motivation and milieu-specific embeddedness of knowledge" (Meuser & Nagel, 2009: 26) can be of importance to understand how knowledge is used (for an example see 1ADM).

Semi-structured interviews are typically constructed around a number of themes that are guided by the research interest and may vary in the degree of openness and flexibility (Kruse, 2009: 63). In this case the questionnaire mainly served as a "topic guide" (Meuser & Nagel, 2009: 31), as an instrument to check whether all relevant themes had been covered, and that gave the interviewees the chance to explore the same themes in his or her own words (ibid.: 35). The explicitly open interviews structure enabled me as interviewer to leave space for the relevance structures of the interviewee (see ibid.: 33). This was deemed more desirable than strict comparability of the answers.

The three questionnaires have been developed in a four step process: collection of relevant questions, checking whether all questions are necessary, and sorting of the remaining questions by theme and degree of openness, which lastly feeds into the construction of the questionnaire

(Kruse, 2009: 72). The themes covered largely overlap between the three questionnaires. Common themes are the involvement and self-assessment of respondent's role in MGNREGS, main objectives and benefits of MGNREGA, inclusive growth and MGNREGA, and MGNREGA in the respective setting (State, Block, District, AP, MH). Differences are mainly to be found in questions on the respective States, comparisons between States, and specificities of the central and local level. To leave room for the concepts and explanations of my interview partners, the questionnaire entails open stimuli for discussion/starter questions that are potentially followed by circling a specific topic to get a more focussed answer (on questionnaire construction see Kruse, 2009: 62ff).⁹⁷ In a way the thematic complexes addressed in the questionnaires set the agenda for the interview, but I always aimed to ensure that the interviewees could bring up other topics if they wanted to.⁹⁸

Most people, whom I asked for an interview, were open to the suggestion. Only in one case a member of the local administration in the Block of Bhatkuli evaded being interviewed. The interviews overwhelmingly took place at the office of the interviewee, in a few cases in the field, in some cases in their homes. The interviews with the administration were predominantly with male counterparts, with only six female interview partners, as opposed to 33 with men. This reflects the overall low number of women that I met working in India's administration, though this may not be true at an aggregate level. The male interview partners, in particular those in leading positions, tended to treat me as a non-expert and partly in paternalistic manner (on interviewing men see Bogner &

⁹⁷ Meuser & Nagel (1991: 454) also point to the importance of the organisation of the questionnaire, the way in which questions are posed, as well as which questions are posed, because they determine the later suitability of the interviews for data analysis. The development of the questionnaire should therefore not be taken lightly and follow explicit, openly stated criteria. It can be seen as 'reverse coding.'

⁹⁸ One exception in this respect was the question on 'inclusive growth', with which I specifically wanted to explore which relevance this term and concept had for my interview partners. Already during the field interviews I discovered that this slogan, which is frequently mentioned as one of the objectives to which NREGA should contribute, has little relevance at local level. Finally, I decided not to explore the question of the rhetoric on inclusive growth further and focus on implementation. The theme inclusive growth was, hence, not further analysed.

Menz, 2009: 81; Schwalbe & Wolkomir). The interviews with CSOs were gender balanced, and I was rather treated as a co-expert.

The majority of these interviews I conducted myself in English without translation and alone with the interviewees.⁹⁹ Most of them are recorded on tape and have either been fully transcribed for analysis or I have produced a summarised analyses. The only exception is one interview for which I was not given the permission to record it. In this case in particular, but also in general, I took notes on the interview situation, the interaction with the interviewee and other significant impressions and answers as soon as possible after the interview (Luker, 2008: 165).

Critical reflections on these interviews point two issues. First language: Although the large majority of my interview partners had agreed to do the interview in English, not all of them were equally able to express themselves fully (this is i.e. mentioned by the interviewee in 38ABM). This leads to limitations in the analysis of the exact wording (also see Section 4.6.1.6 below). A second crucial issue was time. In more than one case the interviewee was called during the interview and had to leave immediately, with no chance for the interview to be continued (for example 36ABM). In another case the interview was disturbed by frequent phone calls and repeatedly people entered the room to discuss their requests (63ASF).

4.6.1.2 Structured household questionnaires with open questions

One key part of this research, and what makes it distinct from other research on welfare regimes, is the third research question on the beneficiaries' perspective. At the same time, these interviews posed a major challenge because of my limited knowledge of Indian languages, the fact most of the rural population does not speak English, and because I did not know how good translation would be. This is why I chose a more structured form for these interviews, in which I pre-formulated a number of possible answers. Although administering a questionnaire typically means sticking to the researcher's frame of reference (Kruse, 2009: 62ff), I tried to be as open as possible for the interviewees arguments. The interviews were neither conducted like a survey (with pre-

⁹⁹ The local translator in Adilabad sat in the interviews that I did with his superiors (the director of the DWAMA and the District Collector).

formulated answers read out), nor where the responses noted in a survey fashion. Instead the interpreters and I adapted the questionnaire to the interview situation, and I took notes of the answers.

In the construction of the questionnaire fellow researchers, who had previously studied NREGA using survey techniques, guided me. My final questionnaire for interviews with individuals that were potential or actual NREGS workers resembled rather a household survey than a qualitative interview guide. It contains closed questions on household details, covers similar themes as the expert questionnaires, and has a number of open questions on the respondents' life and the scheme. The themes covered are participation, wages and worksite; availability, wages and nature of work; and the effect of NREGS on the interviewee and the members of household; awareness, access and obstacles; NREGA vis-à-vis other social programmes; assets, decision-making and transparency; and lastly perceptions of aims and objectives of the scheme. Thus the questionnaire included questions on all three dimensions of welfare; material gains, reliability and agency.

In total I conducted 15 interviews and 11 focus group discussions in a total of 4 Blocks. I aimed to do the discussions with NREGA participants and non-participants either in the village or at the work site. Conducting interviews at the worksite opened the chance to see NREGA work being performed, get an idea of who was doing what, for how long, and whether the statutory requirements of shade, water, first aid kit and crèche were met. However, the workers are paid according to the accomplished works and the Schedule of Rates. Therefore, I did not want to interfere with their working day too much, to avoid potential losses of income for them. Therefore, I rather spoke to people in their homes or at a public place in their village. The additional advantage of interviews at home was to get a more detailed impression of their living arrangements.

In the end, the household interviews were mainly conducted in public places in the villages. This is case with all interviews in the Chikhaldara Block (MH), where all interviews were held in the shade next to the shopkeeper's house. Neither the members of the local CSO that had introduced us in the village, nor any official related to the programme

implementation – such as the Gram Sewak or the field assistants – were present during these interviews.

This was different in District of Adilabad, where I had to rely on a translator who worked for the District administration of NREGS in a training institution. Hence, he was not directly involved with the steering of NREGS. Yet, he was recognised as a member of the administration by the interviewees, not the least because we drove a government car, which the District Water Management Agency had allowed us to use.¹⁰⁰ In terms of the effect of his presence on the interviews, it is difficult to establish what it has been. The interviewer was not charged with the implementation, neither was he known to the participants, nor did they know him. This was different when the field or block level staff was present at an interview site. They partially actively tried to influence the answers and it was a difficult to tell them to leave. Yet, participants brought up critical issues despite their presence. Although the translator did not seek to influence the participants' answers, he also certainly affected the interviews through his translation, which was not always accurate as the latter transcripts showed (see below).

In terms of the villagers to whom I talked, I aimed for the broadest possible representation of women and men, different age groups, landed and landless workers, NREGS participants and non-participants, as well as different caste and religious groups where possible. The actual interview partners were found in all locations through 'convenience sampling' of those people present and willing to talk to me, and my translator. One major flaw in the variation of villagers to whom I talked, is that I did not talk to any Dalits / Scheduled Castes. Adivasi or Scheduled Tribes on the other hand are strongly represented, partly because the Districts in which I did the fieldwork have above average Adivasi populations. Two research locations are actually deemed to be purely 'tribal villages' (in the Utnur and Chikhaldara Block). Nonetheless, it is a drawback that I did not talk to any Dalits in the communities visited. The lack of Dalits in the sample raises questions about the field access in the

¹⁰⁰ Cars of the bodies of the Indian government on all tiers (national, state, District) are white and marked with red letters as "Government of India." Therefore they are easily recognised as government cars.

mixed villages, because I did not talk to one of the typically most deprived and marginalised groups.

A difficulty was that conducting an interview took much longer than expected, due to the translation process. I had envisaged about 30 minutes, but several interviews lasted over an hour. Less interviews than originally foreseen were conducted. Besides, the answers to the structured questions entailed more information than expected, and I therefore took extensive notes throughout the interviews.¹⁰¹

4.6.1.3 Focus group interviews

Besides individual interviews, I also conducted group interviews in the villages.¹⁰² These discussions allowed me to get more opinions and also see the reaction among the peers to some of the things said. A disadvantage of this method is that less is known about participant.

In the construction of the FGD interview guideline, again, I received advice from other institutions that had kindly provided me with their FGD guidelines. The bigger problem for group discussions was that I could not adhere to commonly used standards for the recording of FGD (Angrosino, 2007).¹⁰³ I had to take notes on who spoke, who did not speak, who tried to speak for others, listen to what was said and prepare the subsequent question, all at the same time, additionally the FGDs were audio recorded. Without an extra person and audio-footage it is partly difficult to attribute the statements in the discussion to particular persons. With more observers the data could have been more complete, however, it is rich as it is.

¹⁰¹ During the first interviews I had asked the interviewer to tick boxes on the pre-formulated answers and I took notes on a separate sheet. However, due to the linguistic difficulties encountered, I soon figured that it was more useful for me to take the notes on the questionnaire sheet and let the translator conduct the interview with a blank questionnaire.

¹⁰² This proved necessary because it often was impossible to talk to one person at a time. In particular when I conducted interviews in the field, bystanders would participate in the discussion, even more so if I tried to interview women. Given the impossibility to create uninterrupted interview situations with individual NREGA (non-) participants, I *ad hoc* developed a questionnaire for focus group discussions.

¹⁰³ Typically one person takes notes on the group dynamics, and another person poses the questions. Additionally, FGDs are often video recorded.

4.6.1.4 *Helicopter interviews*

Although they are listed last, helicopter or overview interviews were chronologically first. The first were conducted in late 2009, mainly with fellow researchers, and with officials working in the development sector in India. More such interviews were conducted during each field trip. The purpose of those interviews was to ask about previous and current experiences with (research on) NREGA and other social programmes in India, to learn who are key people in the making and the running of the schemes, to collect studies on NREGA, to discuss what other researchers saw as gaps of current research on NREGA, and lastly to identify places for field work.

These interviews have not been recorded, but I took extensive notes, which have also informed this research. They are either marked as personal communication or come in as field notes.

4.6.1.5 *Consent*

All interviews with villagers were digitally audio-recorded. The interviewees were orally asked whether they agree to participate in the interview and to the audio recording of the interview, which was to be solely used for this research project. I only started recording after I had explained the background of the research and consent for the recording had been given. In one case, the interviewee wished not to be recorded at all. In two more cases members of the administration – asked me to switch of the recorder while they were outlining what they perceived to be issues too sensitive to be on tape. In cases in which I was not allowed to orally record the interview or sections thereof, I took few notes during the meeting and extensive notes after the meeting. Generally recording quality was good, but in few cases fans, passing cars, conversations by bystanders, livestock, and other background noise reduced the audio quality to an extend that it was inaudible. These sections have been clearly marked in the transcripts.

4.6.1.6 *Language and translation*

Wherever possible I conducted the interviews myself and in English. But, English is neither mine, nor the mother tongue of most of the people with whom I spoke. In India it serves as rather accepted than loved *lingua franca* of the elites. For all interviews with NREGA participants, for a

few interviews with local administration as well as one State level NGO I relied on local translators. In total I worked with five translators, two in Andhra Pradesh – one in Adilabad and the other in Hyderabad – and three in Maharashtra – one in Chikhaldara Block and two in the District capital Amravati and Bhatkuli Block. I am deeply indebted to all translators. The whole field research would not have been possible without them. I learned a lot from each of them, not only what the respondents had said.

Most of the political science literature had left me unprepared for the difficulties connected to language and translation that occurred. Valuable hints on the difficulties of literal – rather than policy – translation I found in ethnographic methodological books (see e.g. Cappai, 2008). For example, more than once I got an immediate reply to a question from a translator. When I asked, whether this was what the interview partner had said, he/she revealed that this is what he/she – the translator – thought they *would* say. In such cases I asked again to get an answer from the respondent. The transcripts – to be discussed more detail in the next section – suggest that I in some cases the translation in the field (from the translator) varies strongly from the transcription (translated by the transcriber) (see 25MN). Another problem was a lack of awareness for the nuances and the variation in the interviews. After just three to four interviews one of the translators commented that “all the same answers are coming” (FN 04.03.2012).

Another problem with translators can arise when they become the *de facto* interviewers. In more than one interview the translators proceeded with questions that I had not asked. That translators became interviewers could also be seen in the fact that some respondents started to address the translator throughout the interview. This happened both with male and female translators.

I devoted care to the framing and wording of the questionnaires. However, I realised in the field that both the translators and the respondents had problems with some of them. One issue was the level of abstraction. (White, Jha & Marshall, 2012: 15) point out that during their field work in rural India people found it much easier to answer questions “if they are more specific and tangible.” And they continue, that “this is in part due to the structure of the language itself: English is relatively direct and

abstract; Hindi (for example) is much more indirect and concrete” (ibid.: 15). An additional issue was that without prior experience of being surveyed and questioned, more time was necessary “with respondents in settling on responses and providing examples” (ibid.: 15).

4.6.1.7 *Transcription*

Transcription sounds like a technical process in which the audio recorded data is transferred into a written text. Similar to translation, little attention is typically devoted to the interpretative effect of transcription in political science. But, “the act of transcription is a change of medium and therefore necessarily involves a transformation of the data” (Gibbs, 2007: 13). Transcription, hence, is an interpretative process which will never produce accurate representations of the interview (ibid.: 10f; Kvale, 2007: 92ff). Transcription may thus be called a “hybrid” (Kvale, 2007: 93), that neither matches an oral conversation, nor the form of a written text. In the two-step process of audio recording and transcription, much of the original interview situation is lost – such as gestures, body language, intonation and the tone of the voice.¹⁰⁴ Transcripts are “impoverished decontextualised renderings of interview situations” (ibid.: 93).¹⁰⁵

Yet, transcripts are a much more easily accessible and comparable type of data than i.e. audiotapes. For this reason, also for this research a significant share of the interviews, about half, were fully transcribed. Of these, I transcribed about half myself, and (former) TISS students transcribed the remaining share. To avoid a loss of reliability of the transcripts, which can be caused i.e. by transcribers ‘mishearing’ what has been said, all the transcripts were reheard and checked by myself for such mistakes prior to data analysis. But even then, there is no way of establishing validity of the transcripts (Kvale, 2007: 98). This is due to the fact that there is no “true, objective transformation from the oral to the written” (Kvale, 2007: 95). Following the suggestion of Kvale, (2007) I did

¹⁰⁴ Transcribers were asked to be as accurate as possible, neither to omit or correct, nor to “tidy-up” (Gibbs, 2007) what has been said.

¹⁰⁵ It is astonishing how much more abstract the interview transcripts are compared to the audio files, which still capture much of the interview environment such as a hen and its chicks running across my papers and past the recorder, or the fans and air conditioning in the offices.

not use the transcript as authoritative ‘rock bottom’ of research, and frequently went back to the audio file.

Although full transcripts are not deemed necessary for expert interviews (see e.g. Meuser & Nagel, 2009: 35) I commissioned full transcripts as a way to double check the translation, not the least for those cases in which translation proved difficult in the field. For those interviews fully transcribed and translated I *de facto* have two translators for the same interview. Firstly, the interviewer who accompanied me to the field, and secondly the transcriber who has not been in the field and only knows the context of the study, the audio files and partly the notes of the interviews. This way I hoped to, and did, detect problematic translation that occurred in the interview situation in the field. However, while I can double-check the English passages, and have largely been satisfied with the transcription of these passages, I cannot control the quality of the translations from Telugu, Hindi and Marathi to English. This causes certain limitations with regards to the depth of the interpretation.

Of those interviews that were not fully transcribed I produced shorter summaries of the various themes that were brought up during the interview. Some of the summaries also contain selected direct quotations.

Throughout the text the interviews will be referenced by the number of the interview and a combination of abbreviations on the characteristics of the interview partners. They are listed in Table 4.3 below

Table 4.3 Short hand reference for abbreviations in the interviews

A	Administration	L	Local
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	B	Block
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	D	District
ER	Elected Representative	S	State
M	Male	C	Centre
F	Female		
Y	NRGES participants	N	not a participant in NREGS

Source: Author’s own

4.6.2 Field notes and visual material

Another source of data are my notes, taken during the field trips to the two selected Districts. These capture impressions, visual memories, and feelings. They note my thoughts following formal interviews as well as informal discussions with interpreters, drivers, co-travellers, and hosts.

They also entail notes of meetings with co-researchers, students, friends in form of a loose research or fieldwork journal (see Gibbs, 2007: 26ff). They contain descriptions of whom I met, what we discussed, which suggestions were made and my reflections on the same. Some entries also deal with literature that I read. There is no strict division between observation and reflection as demanded by some grounded theory advocates (see *ibid.*: 28).

As discussed above, the conviction underlying this research is “that even the primary data of field notes are not value-free and incorporate biases, perspectives and theories that reflect the analyst’s view of the world” (*ibid.*: 28). Even a seemingly descriptive report of an event, is not the event but a representation of it, a personal account given by the researcher and therefore involves an act of interpretation (*ibid.*: 27). Naturally, this is also the case for the notes. Throughout the book I refer to field notes with the abbreviation FN and the date on which I took them.

4.6.3 Aggregate quantitative data

Lastly, besides these forms of qualitative, self-generated data, I also reviewed aggregate data such as population statistics, poverty rates, economic performance etc. to learn more about macro-economic indicators of the regions in which the fieldwork took place. A major source for secondary data used is the website of MGNREGA (www.nrega.nic.in). Other data is collected and published by national institutions such as the Planning Commission, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), the Census Bureau, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), or by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. These statistical data are mainly used to contextualise, embed or contrast the qualitative data gathered in the field.

4.6.4 Media articles

Media articles serve as one more source on the debates surrounding MGNREGA. Many of the articles collected are opinion pieces that reflect the opinions of farmer groups or industrialists, whom I did not interview. The articles collected are exclusively in English and mainly from domestic Indian newspapers and political magazines. The focus on English represents a clear limitation, because I am bound to miss debates that are held in India’s official 23 and several hundred more spoken

languages. However, as a national scheme, the central debates on MGNREGA can be assumed to be covered in national media.

4.6.5 Reflections on the data, its collection and production

Overall, the time of the fieldwork with the interviews has been a very enriching and stimulating experience. I have been able – and enabled by the help of friends and fellow researchers, who have been mentioned in the footnotes throughout this chapter – to conduct a large number of interesting and rich interviews.

Yet, every process of research and data collection has its drawbacks, some of which have been highlighted above. The interviews are not always the rich qualitative material that I would like to have gathered, but sometimes a collection of rather monosyllabic answers. Sources of this problem have been not ideally formulated questions, and too many of them closed, as well as difficulties related to language and translation of researcher, interviewer, and respondent. Where rich description of processes, perceptions and meanings are lacking this limits the analysis.

A research process, as introduced in this chapter, is a continuous learning process for the researcher. The abductive process that I followed enabled me to take up new themes that I had not yet thought of when starting the fieldwork. The themes that had not been developed before going into the interviews, and were not well explored with the interview partners, are therefore results of the data analysis.

Another issue was that despite clear instructions in preceding discussions and information on the cover sheet of the questionnaire, I was in some cases introduced as someone who has access and the ear of all the big shots in the administration. This was most prevalent in Adilabad District. This as well might have influenced the answers of my interview partners.

4.7 Analysing data

The main body of data to be analysed in greater detail are the interviews. For these qualitative methods of textual content analysis are used.

(Kvale, 2007: 103) points out that there is no standard method to uncover essential meanings or hidden implications in qualitative data such as an interview, there is no “technological fix” to analysis and meaning making. Therefore, qualitative content analysis always needs to be adapted

to its specific subject, the data and the research question (Mayring, 2008: 43).

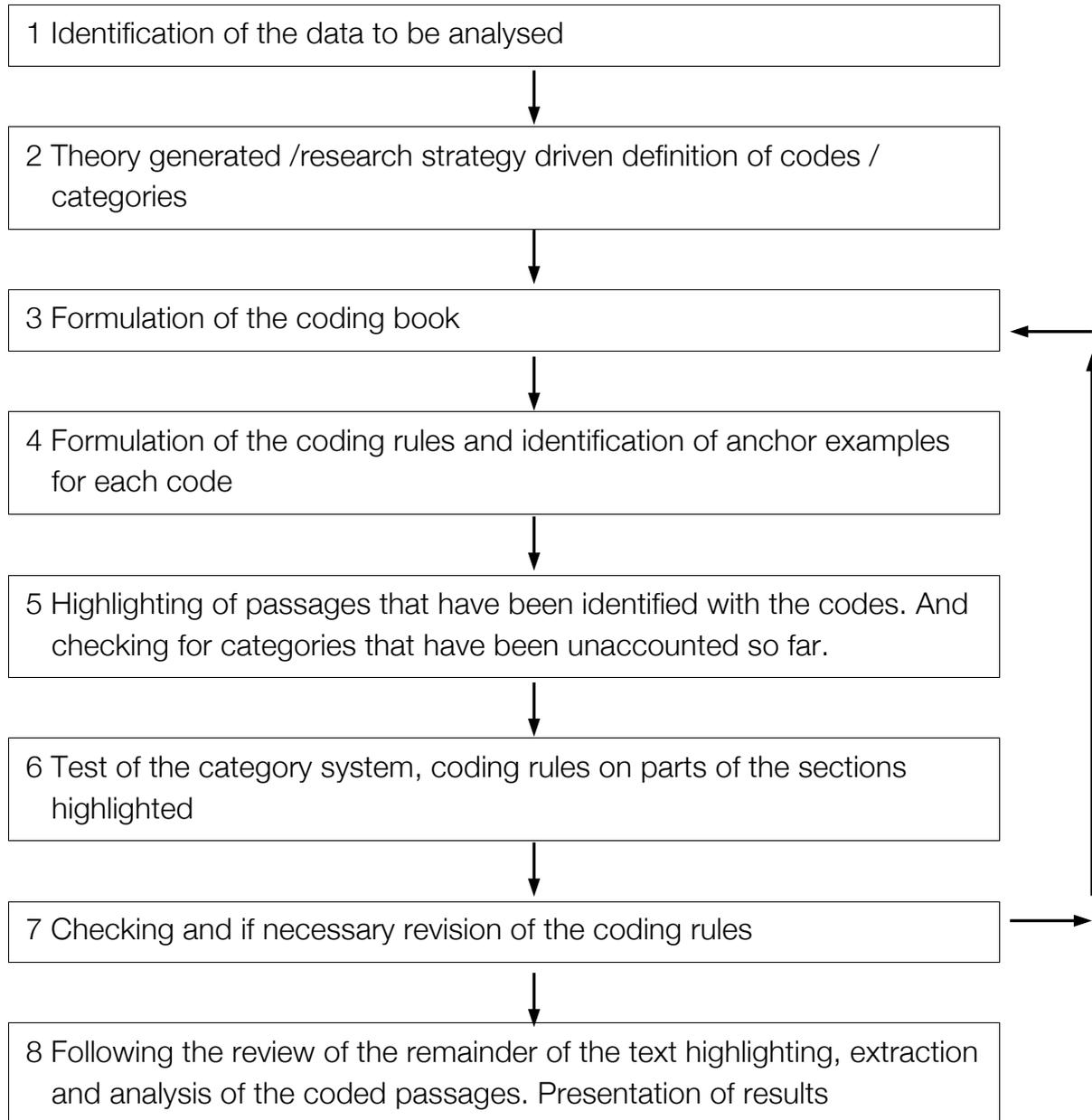
Mayring lists some general rules of and for qualitative content analysis: the necessity for a systematic approach; categories /codes at the centre of analysis; sensitivity for the context of the production and the material; transparency and explanation of presumptions, attention to latent meanings; orientation on daily processes/ routines of understanding and interpretation; adaption of the perspective of the other, and awareness for the possibility of reinterpretation (Mayring, 2008: 41). Applying these rules is a way of assuring the quality of qualitative analysis through transparency, testing and justification of every step in the process (Mayring, 2008).

Among the different approaches to qualitative analysis two main directions can be identified: inductively/ data-driven or deductively/ concept-driven (Gibbs, 2007: 44ff).¹⁰⁶ The first emphasises the generation of codes or categories through the analysis of the data alone, the latter assumes that the approach to the data is strongly theory and research question driven. These methods exemplify two opposite approaches to data, but I would emphasise that they always work together to some degree. Neither is it possible to empty one's head completely from all prior experiences, theoretical assumptions or expectations, nor does qualitative theory promote to look for pre-defined categories only. There always is interplay between the two approaches and it is up to the researcher and the research objective pursued how they are balanced. For this research an abductive approach has been chosen, which emphasises the roles of both, the prior theoretical knowledge of the researcher and the experiences and themes from the empirical exposure. It is hence, neither deductive, nor inductive but integrates both approaches to data.

¹⁰⁶ For two inductive approaches, analytic induction and grounded theory see e.g. Bryman (2004). Inductive approaches to data analysis can typically not be separated from data collection, for which also in many cases another form of data collection and analysis would have been necessary.

For the analysis of the data used in this book a one orientation has been “structuring by content”(Mayring, 2008: 82ff).¹⁰⁷ An ideal-typical process of data analysis is depicted below.

Figure 4.1 Structuring by Content



Source: Adapted from Mayring (2008: 84)

While Mayring assumes a completely theory driven definition of codes in step two, this has been adjusted to comply with the abductive research

¹⁰⁷ Mayring (2008) distinguishes three types of qualitative analysis a) summarising, b) explanatory and c) structuring but does not see them as strictly separated. Depending on the purpose of the research and the data collected, they can and may be combined.

strategy chosen for this research. Hence, the codes and themes – which are overarching several codes – at the outset of the analysis are not only theory driven. They also include experiences from the field. Thus, the approach used here started with a list of (potential) codes in mind and writing, and even a hierarchy between the codes, before doing parts of the analysis. This was balanced by a high awareness for the text and the readiness to revise and drop codes if they were not in the data. This was to ensure that I would “not impose an interpretation based on pre-existing theory” (Gibbs, 2007: 46).

I chose a more inductive strategy of analysis for the interview transcripts and the notes collected. In doing so, I follow Bevir (2006: 283), who points out, that interpretative approaches can rely on a variety of techniques to collect data, “the crux of ... [interpretative] analysis is the need to treat data as evidence of beliefs or meanings.”

Starting with Step 1, the data to be analysed according the process specified here are the transcribed interviews, as well as selected sections of the interviews of which I only created a summarised transcripts.

A key process in any qualitative textual content analysis is coding. It can be defined as the process of “identifying one or more passages of text that exemplify some thematic idea and linking them with a code¹⁰⁸, which is a shorthand reference to the thematic idea” (Gibbs, 2007: 57). Developing codes is an interpretative process, which typically involves moving from a more descriptive statement to a thematic idea or analytical category. Each code typically appears in a number of variations or dimensions, which also have to be defined. The descriptions of the codes and their variations together form the codebook or coding frame (Gibbs, 2007: 39f).

In the model above, all the steps 2 to 8 are part of the coding process. In this research the codes are developed through the following steps. In step 2 initial codes and their variations are formulated based on the results of the literature review, the theoretical background, the experiences in the field, as well as ideas developed during transcribing inter-

¹⁰⁸ Gibbs, 2007 (39ff) highlights that there are different terms such as codes, themes, categories and indices, which reflect different aspects of the ‘coding process’, as it is most commonly called in English. In this paper I will stick to the most commonly used term ‘code’. On coding in general also see (Saldana, 2008).

views or checking their transcription. These codes form a draft coding scheme (step 3). Based upon this scheme interviews from all strata (the different levels of administration and NREGS beneficiaries from both States) are reread, anchor quotes, exemplary for the codes and its variations are identified. While doing so, interview sequences can be checked for the presence or absence of a certain code or different variations or dimensions thereof (Kvale, 2007: 105f). In this process of intensive reading of selected interviews additional, still rather descriptive codes are noted, and after an analytical categorisation, they may be added to the code book.

What is coded in this initial stage is the combination of units of social organization and aspects thereof (see Saldana, 2008: 14). Units denote the intersections between actors, activities or behaviours, at a given time and in a specific place such as cultural practices (daily or yearly routines, occupational tasks) and roles (worker, farmer, village head). Aspects include 'cognitive aspects' or meanings (such as perceptions, self-concepts, identities), 'emotional aspects' or feelings (e.g., (in-)security, being discouraged), as well as 'hierarchical aspects' or inequalities (e.g., dependencies, inequality), and finally "how participant agency interacts and interplays with structures and processes, plus causes and consequences observed in the data" (2006, pp. 144–67). (adapted from Saldana, 2008: 14 based on Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland 2006). Partly in parallel, the codes are organised into a hierarchy as a means of structuring the data further, and easing comparisons between different texts. Again, this process is crosschecked with the data already coded (Step 4). Throughout coding process of the remaining texts, care is given to verify that the selected reference really matches the attributed code, and where necessary this leads to a revision of the codes (Step 5&6&7). Coding typically is a cyclical process, in which codes are reviewed, reformulated and exchanged (Saldana, 2008: 8ff). These steps are followed by the review of the remainder of the text highlighting, extracting and analysing the coded passages (Step 8). Not the least in this last step *constant comparison* is crucial. It means a constant checking of the codes for consistency and accuracy, as well as looking for differences and variations (Gibbs, 2007: 96). It is one way of ensuring validity. Two main points therein are comprehensive data treatment and dealing with negative cases.

5 The Indian Welfare Regime and its Trajectory

The service of India means, the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest men of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

Jawaharlal Nehru in the
Constituent Assembly of India, August 14, 1950

This section addresses the question on forces behind welfare development in the South. More specifically it asks for the Indian case ‘what led to expansion of social protection policies historically and the legislation of NREGA in 2005?’¹⁰⁹ Building on the literature review and the methodological approaches outlined above, these questions, cannot be answered by an analysis, which limits itself to the current state of affairs. As I argued above, knowledge of historical institutional and ideational developments are central to understand change today. The role of the existing institutional environment and its history for the making of policy choices today need to be studied (similarly see Haggard & Kaufman, 2008: 346). One question thus is ‘what triggered the Indian central government’s decision to expand social protection policies over time?’

In the literature review above I highlighted the importance of three themes for the welfare regime and social protection expansion debate: ideas, actor constellations and the role of the international environment. Additionally, for the non-OECD we have to consider other models than class based identity formation and coalition building; indeed, we do not necessarily find similar party structures. Instead, identities might centre on clan, kinship or caste, and coalition building needs to take account of this heterogeneity. If we cannot treat the interests of stakeholders in the welfare regime as a given – for example class does not determine what ideas are pursued by a certain actor – what then shapes regimes and its institutions?

My approach to answer these questions – as outlined in the preceding chapters – is a political ideational analysis of welfare regimes. What can

¹⁰⁹ Some ideas of this chapter have been previously published as ‘Ideas in the Indian Welfare Trajectory’ in *Austrian Journal for Development Policy/Journal für Entwicklungspolitik* XXVIII 1-2012, pp. 80-102.

be gained from such a focus is a better understanding of the distinct developments of welfare regimes in the South. Instead of assuming that Southern welfare organisation simply follows one or the other Northern model, this approach allows to identify domestic ideas and analyses the contested processes in which some ideas gain dominance over others. Studied are a selection of ideas that have been formative and/or leading for the changes in welfare organisation. Expressions of socio-political ideas can be found in speeches of politicians, in newspaper articles as well as in the organisation of social policies that adhere to certain ideas and not to others. An ideational analysis then means to study such material. Additionally, this chapter builds on previous studies by historians as well economists on the history of social policy in India. Of special interests are times of ideational shifts, in which existing ideas are losing relevance and legitimacy and new ideas are coming to take their place (Berman, 2011). Such phases can be understood as junctures, similar to historical institutionalism. Yet, the ideational perspective does not treat them as largely exogenous, but looks at changes in ideas before, in and after the juncture, at how old ideas were unmade and delegitimised and new ideas come to take their place. In this chapter four phases around which ideational shifts occurred are examined in greater detail: the situation prior to independence, the upheaval around independence, economic liberalisation in the 1990s, and the recent expansion of social protection under the UPA government.

This chapter will thus investigate, which and how (local) ideas shaped the welfare organisation and social policy geography in India, and ask what have been obstacles to changes and what has facilitated such. One connected question is, which role the domestic and the international setting played for policy changes.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ There are many and different ways in which a historical account can be given. The account presented here may give the impression “as if all the events were objectively factual ... [and] the author is not visible in the telling,” (Yanow, 1996: 28), nonetheless it is an “authored tale” (ibid.) in the sense that I have chosen which events, persons and articulations, which I deem to be of particular importance to answer the research questions. This fits with the overall interpretative approach chosen in this book.

5.1 Welfare before independence

The Indian subcontinent has been inhabited by complex civilizations for the past three thousand years or more. Power was dispersed among rulers and local empires of different religious orientation – to name a few: Islamic, Dravidian, Buddhist and Hindu – some of which were competing, others cooperating. India has thus a rich history of empires, religions and cultures that left traces in terms of welfare traditions. Three important pillars of solidarity formed the base of welfare organisation in pre-colonial times: extended families, village and religious or caste communities (Muzumdar, 1964: 5).

The joint family – the original source of welfare in nearly all traditional societies – may strive for self-sufficiency, but in most cases it is necessary to enter reciprocal or hierarchical relationships within the larger community to ensure greater (food) security (Platteau, 1991). Within the village, especially in Northern India, different groups were linked to each other in reciprocal duty relationships of the *jajmani* system (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009: 207; Guha, 2007: 202). Reciprocity, however does not mean equality, and most parts of India could be characterised as strongly differentiated agrarian society in which the access to resources was unequally distributed among the members of the community (Platteau, 1991: 155). Social relationships were governed by customary, non-contractual rights-based on the principles of status and fairness (*ibid.*: 119f). This could also favour the weaker sections, as in the entitlement of the sharecropper to minimum subsistence provided to him by his landlord.¹¹¹ Customary social rights were limited in reach and did not necessarily extend to all sections of society. At least partially excluded were those groups not residing within the village such as mobile craftsmen, landless labourers, the outcast(e)s and the indigenous tribes (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009: 207). Karl Polanyi (1944/1977: 75ff) highlights that reciprocity and redistribution generally are governing principles of socio-economic relationships in traditional societies. Economic

¹¹¹ Platteau refers to (good) landlords, who in years of bad yields would not be much better off than their sharecroppers (1991: 133). The material situation of the sharecropper, however, would not be much better in good years either, only the landlord would profit from the excess production. Such minimum subsistence is a typical traditional form of social security provision for strongly differentiated agrarian societies (*ibid.*: 155).

activities were not conceived of as a separate spheres, but as part of the social order.

Redistributive activities could also be found among some of India's ruling dynasties – like the Mughal empire. Early forms of “targeted interventions like public works” existed already, according to de Haan and Sabharwal (2008: 72). And, there is evidence in even older texts, for example in the *Arthashastra*, a document on statecraft from the 3rd century BC, that “rulers to discharge special responsibilities to their people in times of famine “ were supplying them with “food and seeds either from their fields or stores, or from the hoarded stocks of the callous rich, or by obtaining wealth from other resources” (Centre for Environment Concerns, CEC, 2009: 1).

There is little written proof as to whether rulers *de facto* applied such redistributive measures. But some of the large-scale public works from this period, such as canals, roads, structures for water conservation, bear testimony until today that there have been early employment schemes (*ibid.*).

In any case, extreme social differences existed at the time: “On the one hand were the rich and powerful nobles steeped in luxury and comfort, and on the other hand, backward, oppressed, and impoverished peasants living at bare subsistence level and having to bear all sorts of injustices and inequities” (Singh, 2006: 29). Besides social and economic status differences, people were divided along caste, tribe, language and regional lines. Hindu and Muslim groups did not form distinct communities but lived next to each other. Regional differences were thus much bigger than religious ones (*ibid.*: 32ff).

Another traditional source of welfare and social security was provided within castes.¹¹² Castes as endogamous groups had an all-pervasive

¹¹² Caste, however, is a word that has only been found for the structuring principle of the Hindu society by the colonialists, first the Portuguese, *casta*, later the British, *caste*. The Hindu term is *jati*, it stands for the group into which one is born. Although originally more fluid, the relationship between castes became rigid and hierarchical. This, happened, around the beginning of Christian time when they were incorporated in an authoritative formulation of a hierarchically graded social order of the four *varna*, which, henceforth, established an ideology of rule of and for *brahmins* (priests) (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009: 201f). The *varna* are firstly, *brahmins*, priests; secondly, *kshatriya*, warriors; thirdly *vaishya*, traders and farmers; and

influence on the social, economic and ritual life of the individual as it determined rights and duties within and between groups, marriages, the profession, access to education and more (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009: 208; Thorat, 2008: 168f).¹¹³ Castes, according to one observer have done “yeoman service in promoting welfare, even if only in the form of meeting some basic needs of constituent members” (Muzumdar, 1964: 5f). Notwithstanding the strong internal mechanisms of solidarity and recognised social obligations within the village structure, the relation between castes is one of graded hierarchy with extreme forms of economic and social exclusion. Upward social mobility is traditionally extremely limited as the social position cannot be changed individually i.e. through greater wealth, but only if a whole caste moves up the social ladder.

Next to ritual authority exercised by high castes, the control over agricultural land was an important source of power at the local level. In the South, where a small group of Brahmins held control over substantial portions of arable land, “caste, wealth and power tended to converge” (Frankel, 2005: 6). In many parts of Northern India lower ranking peasant castes were strong in number and landholding and could exercise power as dominant land-owning castes, or ‘landed communities.’ Those who owned large shares of land among these communities held authority – equal to those of high-ranking castes – over the poor peasantry for whom they acted as patrons providing “minimal economic security in return for personal deference and loyalty” (ibid.). Hence, the access to resources differs between castes, and consequently the ability to achieve security for its members is also graded. According to B.R. Ambedkar, the Hindu social order as a system of governance in general, and as system of production, organization, and distribution is based on three inter-related elements (Ambedkar, 2008a; also see Thorat & Kumar, 2008: 7): fixed rights, unequal and hierarchical (or graded) division of social and economic rights across castes, and provision of strong instruments of

fourthly, *shudra*, craftsmen and servants. Outside this order are the casteless the *a-varna*, aka the untouchables or Dalits, literally broken people.

¹¹³ The members of other religions were also treated as quasi-caste in environments in which Hindus dominated. In terms of welfare, i.e. the Muslim religion does have different traditions, which foresee an individual and principally equal access to god. In terms of redistribution towards the poor and needy, *zakat* is important and considered one of the five pillars of Islam.

social and economic ostracization to sustain the rigid system with a philosophical justification in Hindu religion.

There certainly have been and are other traditions within Hinduism,¹¹⁴ but the caste order has an enduring impact on India's society, not the least through reliance on castes in the coming period of colonialisation.

The old order of the multitude of rulers was challenged and ultimately overthrown by the arrival of new economic techniques of production and exploitation, new methods of administration and new ideas as part of colonial rule, of which the British (1757-1947) doubtlessly exercised the strongest influence. Colonialisation was a major transformative force that, on the one hand, opened up the rigid determination of occupations by caste when the colonial industries and the military offered jobs and upward social mobility to some of the most oppressed groups. On the other hand, the pre-colonial economic order of the *jajmani* system was disturbed by the arrival of industrially manufactured goods, with which craftsmen could not compete (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009). Those who lost their place in the old economic system, became subject to a new mode of economic exploitation: as part of the incipient working class.

The old reciprocal or redistributive relationships were gradually broken through the introduction of a market system that relied on the commodification of money, labour and land (Polanyi, 1944/1977). Traditional customary rights were replaced with legal property rights, i.e. in the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The relationship between landholder and sharecropper was substantially changed through this aspect of British rule: When legal titles for land were established, that often meant that former sharecroppers – holders of customary rights – were now treated as illegal encroachers. Scott describes this as a

colonial imposition ... imposed by alien conquerors using an unintelligible language and institutional context. ... [It] created a new class who, because they paid taxes on the land, became

¹¹⁴ For example Jürgenmeyer & Rösel (2009) stress the diverse currents in Hinduism such as *Bhakti* movements, which preach equal access to a caring and salutary god, and natural religion or ascetic practices. In these, as in Buddhism and Jainism, the *varna* order is rejected. However, these traditions have not been recorded to the same extent as Brahman traditions. But some key Hindu texts, such as the *Bhagavadgita* from the 2nd century AC, do speak of access to salvation independent of *jati*.

full owners with rights to inheritance and sale where none had existed earlier. (Scott, 1998: 48)

Even if legal titles did go to smaller farmers, the land was usually registered in the name of male household head, to the detriment of customary rights of women to the land.¹¹⁵

Such processes of shrinking opportunities for self-sufficiency caused by the appropriation of land through private property law had been triggers for the introduction of the early poor laws in England under Queen Elizabeth I. in the late 16th century (Kaufmann, 2003b: 45).¹¹⁶ In India it was the British colonial administration that drove these processes, but it did not provide activities of poverty alleviation to go with it. Famine Commissioners were installed who brought wide-spread poverty to the administration's attention, and yet it did not lead to wide-spread action (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005: 51f; Muzumdar, 1964).

According to Kaufmann (2003b: 38), societal processes and phenomena, may they be rural-urban migration, child labour or income poverty, have to be articulated as social problems and identified as fields for political action before they will be included in welfare policies by the state.

Whether or not action will be taken, is furthermore conditional upon the political resonance for the problem, and on the shared judgement of political decision-makers or the public controlling them. Colonial rule however, was not based on public consent but on military (and potentially scientific etc.) supremacy.

The English, who had been among the first nations to install a poor relief at home, reacted to urban poverty in India with containment and zoning, and the problem of the rural poor was perceived as a result of their backwardness, untouchability and finally of "Indianness" itself (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005: 52f).¹¹⁷ Corbridge *et al.* (2005: 53) argue, "the alle-

¹¹⁵ De Haan (2008) points out that this practice continued in the Indian state of Odisha during independence, and that it has further weakened the economic and social position of women, in particular tribal women, in that state.

¹¹⁶ These early poor laws were however repressive. They introduced the categories of the deserving and undeserving poor. Those poor that appeared to be reluctant to work were sent to houses of correction, later called workhouses and were forced into labour.

¹¹⁷ Midgley & Piachaud (2011) analyse the effect of colonialism and imperialism on welfare in the former British colonies. Especially Midgley has previously argued

violation of poverty was thus confined mainly to famine relief, or to urban-based interventions that mixed a fear of the undisciplined body of the native with the a growing emphasis on the virtues of private and/or religious philanthropy." The colonial administration was active in the field of welfare, and "'betterment' of the native population, and generally the encouragement of 'civilised' behaviour within and between those populations" (Lewis, 2011: 25). But overall "social welfare remained the poor branch of colonial government, never anything more than a patch over social distress. ... Colonial subjects were not citizens, entitled to help, unless they were white", argues Lewis (2011: 25). The administration's efforts to establish social security for the native population thus hardly went beyond what Loewe (2009a) has called the "small segment of the population whose contentment was particularly important for the colonial powers to stabilise their rule." For these some of the earliest state welfare mechanisms in India were institutionalised, i.e. the Workmen Compensation Act of 1923.

Under British rule limited targeted interventions were "dominant in a variety of food distribution and micro-credit schemes, and became the basis of a well-developed system of categorization, of social and economic categories" (de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008: 72). At the same time, British rule partially eroded the old economic order and decreased the ability of the population to self-sufficiency. Yet, the cause for poverty, were not seen in the new, but in the traditional economic regime. J. Lewis (2011: 32) concludes, "the reality was that the changes that accompanied the colonial state (though not necessary imposed by it) brought as much social distress through change and disruption, intervention and non-intervention, as it brought economic improvement."

From the late 19th century till the first decennia of the 20th century social reform activities were largely limited to philanthropic and charitable societies and groups (ibid.). In particular, untouchability and the custom of *sati*, to burn the widow with her husband after his death, spurred moral sentiments among British and Indian social reformers alike (Muzumdar, 1964: 13ff). Early reform movements from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds firmly believed that such customs, which started to be

that "imperialism created an enduring trajectory that continues to affect current social policies and practices" (Midgley & Piachaud, 2011: 5).

perceived as wrong or unjust, are not indispensable parts of Hinduism or Islam, but internal reform would be needed, and could get rid of these practices (Muzumdar, 1964: 13ff). Nonetheless, Muzumdar describes the encounter with Christian missionaries and their believe in the equality of all human beings as a shock to the Hindu society, as it deeply questioned its customs (1964: 13).¹¹⁸ The ideas of individualism and of equality of men, were clearly at odds with defining principle of caste: the hierarchically graded group (Thorat, 2008: 169). Yet, the colonial administration and the ideas and beliefs that they imported, did not only weaken caste ties. According to (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009) the colonial rulers' attempts to understand the Indian social structure, led to a more rigid division into castes than before. Colonial governmental techniques such as the census actually perpetuated caste in its cultural importance, lifted it from its local and regional context, and made it viable at an all India level (Jodhka, 2010: 156ff; Midgley & Piachaud, 2011).

5.2 *The social question emerges: India's independence (movement)*

Against this backdrop the social question was finally raised, not by the colonial rulers, but by its challengers: the Indian independence movement. Yet, even in the Indian National Congress – the movement's key political organization founded in 1885 – the social question was displaced from its reform agenda at first: from 1890 onwards the Indian National Social Conference was separated from the National Congress (Chandra, 2012: 53f). At the time, one social reformer within Congress explained this decision with the words “The *raison d'être* for excluding social questions from our deliberations is that if we were to take up such questions, it might lead to serious differences, ultimately culminating in a schism, and it is a matter of the first importance that we should prevent a split” (Surendra Nath Bannerji cited in Chandra, 2012: 54). To maximise political unity, social and socio-religious questions were deliberately excluded and delegated to the religious communities.

Henceforth, this hereditary belief – that welfare was better organised in each of the communities – was deemed to be a political necessity and

¹¹⁸ However, movements – such as Buddhist groups, the Bhakti movements and other strands within Hinduism – which questioned caste – had been present in India at all times (Jürgenmeyer & Rösel, 2009).

unsuccessfully challenged until 1917 (Muzumdar, 1964: 51). Only after a group representing the untouchables within Congress had been formed, Congress as a whole adopted policies to condemn untouchability (ibid.: 50,56), and embraced a social reform agenda in which the question of self-government was tied to the demand for more just government for India's people. However, the Congress never condemned caste as such (Anderson, 2012).

Self-governance was henceforth seen as more than just a moral right: as the only way to relieve the majority of the Indians from their poverty; the belief was prevalent that "political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving masses" (Congress 1931 cited in A. Kumar, 2005: 388). Congress, hence, identified foreign rule as a cause of poverty and starvation, and the primary solution to this problem was seen in self-governance.

Despite this shared analysis, different ideas were advocated by important intellectual leaders of the independence movement within Congress, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and outside by Bhimrao Ambedkar, leader of the 'untouchables' or Dalits. The following discussion focuses on ideas by those three influential thinkers, who have all left their mark on Indian social policy.

The question of which ideas prevailed over others was partially decided in the formulation of the 'best of all constitutions' (Kaviraj, 1997: 22) of the Republic of India. This first constitution of independent India can be seen as the culmination of the institutionalisation of new ideas, in a long process during which colonial rule and the corresponding ideas had gradually lost legitimacy and were followed by those promoted by the independence movement. The Indian Constitution was discussed for nearly three years by more than 300 members of the Constituents Assembly before it was passed in November 1949 and entered into force on 26 January 1950.¹¹⁹

Mohandas Gandhi, under whose leadership Congress developed into a mass organisation and started to overcome its earlier urban bias, blamed poverty on a decline in morals and lack of education, as well as on foreign rule. India was to be rebuilt through its villages, which needed to be

¹¹⁹ See Guha (2007: 103-123) for the discussions in the Constituents Assembly.

cleared from the defects of untouchability, the oppression of women, illiteracy, drug abuse, and diseases, through local reform and individual change triggered by education (Muzumdar, 1964: 25). In a “glorification of village life” (Frankel, 2005: 10), he evoked a picture of the moral superiority of village knowledge over modern materialism. Part and parcel of his ideas was the rejection of industrialisation and the call for self-rule, *swaraj*. This included economic self-reliance, *swadeshi*, of the Indian village, as well as of the country as a whole, based on village cooperative economies. It was meant to challenge the British rule economically, through a boycott of British products and increase self-determination of the individual through economic self-sufficiency. The social question to Gandhi could not be won through new structures alone, but was one of local reform and individual change. Another key component of his strategy was the refusal to attack the existing class structure for the sake of national independence and unity (ibid.: 10). Gandhians argued that, if the reconstruction through villages and education came into full play, the economic and social inequalities would largely disappear peacefully through a “strategy of gradualism” (ibid.: 11, 44).

Gandhi was in a very prominent position; nationally and internationally he attracted a large fellowship. However, Gandhi was neither himself a member of the Constitutional Assembly, nor was the group that advocated Gandhian structural and economic reforms strongly represented. Gandhi’s ideas called for a path to democracy without reference to modern British, Continental or American traditions, but to ancient India. That the latter should guide a modern nation did not fit with the aspirations of the many urban and Western educated members of the Assembly. The Gandhian idea of decentralised village councils was rejected in favour of a federal structure with a strong centre. This was partly a legacy of the late colonial Government of India Act of 1935, and a concession to pressure groups that had formed around commonly spoken languages. The politics of accommodation and class conciliation fell back on Gandhi also when the federal states, not the Central Parliament and Government in Delhi, assumed the rights to rule on education, local government, land reform and land revenue assessment, to name just the most important fields.

Nehru, who was to become India’s first Prime Minister, was a close friend and follower of Gandhi. Yet, his reform agenda was quite differ-

ent: Nehru advocated what he called a “third way which takes the best from all existing systems – the Russian, the American and others – and seeks to create something suited to one’s own history and philosophy” (cited in Frankel, 2005: 3). Nehru aimed for a socialist society through the development of modern industries in state led economic reform (Kohli, 2010: 502f). With regards to the agrarian sector he advocated the development of cooperative organisation too, but neither collectivisation nor Gandhi’s idealised village economies. What India needed was to “throw off the shackles of tradition; whole economies had to be structurally transformed, entire people subjected to modernization” (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005: 53f). Nehru’s, and his fractions’, handwriting could clearly be seen in the Constitution of the Republic of India, which was to be “sovereign, socialist, secular, [and] democratic.” The group around Nehru succeeded in officially abolishing the *zamindari* – revenue collectors who had gained full rights to land under British rule. Yet, they had less success in other areas: the list of Fundamental Rights entailed the right to property within ‘reasonable restrictions.’ In the central question as to what extent property should be protected, conservatives in the Constitutional Assembly prevailed (Kaviraj, 1997: 4; Frankel, 2005: 79f). This deal had been struck by Sardar Patel, another key Congressman, and conservative opponent to Nehru (Guha, 2007: 105). While the idea to reverse some of the most grave injustices introduced under colonial rule found a majority in the Constitutional Assembly, Nehru and his fraction had too little clout to overturn older inequalities in landholding. The right to property had serious implications for future social and economic reforms, which had to be carried out in compliance with the Fundamental Rights.

Ambedkar, who was the President of the Drafting Committee of India’s Constitution, and its Minister of Law, opposed the views of both Gandhi and Nehru on the causes of exploitation and poverty. He actually held the villages responsible for many social wrongs and called for the establishment of separate settlements for the so-called Untouchables, to whom he belonged himself (Ambedkar, 2008a: 247f). For him, the causes of poverty and exploitation lay in the domestic caste system; colonial rule had eased rather than worsened the situation. He called for the abolition of untouchability and condemned the caste system as such. He succeeded in the first, as the constitution officially abolished untouchability, but not in the latter. To achieve the objective of equality for those who had

been historically excluded from economic and social domains, and who continued to face discrimination, he suggested a clear set of policy instruments: ensure formal equality, laws that penalise discriminatory actions, and adequate representation in legislatures, education institutions and public services (Ambedkar, 2008b). These were all legislated, including welfare measures for those former untouchable castes and indigenous tribes, which were listed in a schedule of the constitution (and are hence called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST)). Through these reservation policies – the Indian term for affirmative action – India became active in the field of compensatory discrimination long before such schemes were established in countries of the Northern hemisphere.

Ambedkar also called for far reaching economic reforms and a strong state that could intervene to ensure the economic independence and welfare of marginalised groups (2008b). However, social objectives such as a commitment to “promote the welfare of the people, [...] the right to an adequate means of livelihood”, and the aim to minimise inequalities between individuals and groups in income, status, between castes and regions – became part of the ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’. These are – unlike the Fundamental Rights – not directly legally binding.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ The Directive Principles of State Policy are not directly enforceable, but they “are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws” (Constitution of India, 2007: Part IV -Directive Principles of State Policy). Social security is enshrined in these ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’ and is a subject in the ‘Concurrent List’, of shared responsibilities between states and the central government. These provisions include for the State to strive to “promote the welfare of the people [...] to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations”, it shall secure that the citizens “have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.” The principles demand from the State “within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases.” Another source of differences in social security arrangements is that India does not have a unitary Civil Code, but that these are still different for the different religious communities (Anderson, 2012).

Ambedkar could not meet his ambitions, as he laconically said himself, because he “was not the only member of Drafting Committee” (Drèze, 2010: 510). Moreover, he drew attention to the new inconsistencies arising from the constitution, which could not simply legislate a new order into existence, when he said

We are going to enter a new a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality [...] In our social and economic life we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man, one value. (Ambedkar cited in Corbridge *et al.*, 2005: 54)

Hence, only the questions of ‘untouchability’ and ‘indigenouness’ had gained momentum among the politicians at the time and moved to centre stage of the social question.¹²¹ Their earlier exclusion and continuing discrimination was successfully framed as an injustice that demanded a remedy through state action. But, today the reservations for certain castes are often viewed critically, as policies that have contributed to the importance of caste, rather than diminishing its importance for social and economic life. At the time, no special provisions were made for other reasons of marginality, such as gender, religious minority groups or regional origin – even after lengthy debates and despite awareness of them (Guha, 2007: 111f).

5.3 Competing ideals on welfare in early independent India

Moreover, many decisions that shaped the post-independence order had not been not determined through the constitution. They were made during the first years after independence with Nehru as Prime Minister – a period of “politics in pursuit of ideals” (Kohli, 2010: 502) under a “Gandhian-socialist collaboration” (Frankel, 2005: 15ff). Despite all differences, both factions within Congress agreed that economic policy should lead to the progressive removal of inequalities and create a new

¹²¹ This argument is taken up by Chatterjee (2004), who points out that India is a formally democratic order, but one in which formal rights and universal principles cannot be claimed by every citizen to the same extent. The essential argument of Chatterjee is that there is a contradiction between the (theoretical) universalism of civic rights, popular sovereignty and nationalism and the real inequality and marginality of many people.

set of cooperative motives for economic activity. Both Gandhians and socialists held prominent positions in the leadership of Congress, which had won the first national elections with an absolute majority. The theoretical discussion above suggested that agency is central for ideas to gain influence. With a view to post-independence India one may hence expect that there were good chances for the reformers to pursue an agenda of social change. In the following, several reasons why these were not realised are discussed.

First, the composition of Congress changed; with the arrival of universal suffrage, Congress needed to strengthen its support base in the rural areas. It chose the easiest way: the inclusion of the landed communities who could organise large personal followings or 'vote-banks' (Frankel, 2005: 21ff, 30f). This setting harboured two problems: a) the local loyalties and kinship ties were stronger than the affiliation with the party – in consequence the parties were rather more dependent on their rural middlemen, than these on the parties. And, b) the organisation along caste and kinship ties had a tendency to hamper the political power of the marginalised, who did not organise around a potentially shared experience of exploitation.¹²² In these circumstances, "universal suffrage and an open electoral process 'by themselves' could not create conditions of popular pressure from below to accomplish peaceful implementation of social reforms" (ibid.: 23, emphasis in original). The momentum of agency was lost and the accommodative party structure subsequently inhibited the possibilities for democratic pressure for social reform.

Second, Nehru and other reformers reluctantly gave in to the Gandhian principle of class conciliation: it was the dread of caste and class-based social unrest as well as religious and linguistic communal violence which loomed large at independence, as well as the experience of Partition that convinced "even committed socialists" (ibid.: 22). The political struggle after independence, hence, sought to accommodate "linguistic, religious, and caste sentiments and structures as the only way to accelerate national integration, enhance legitimacy of the political system, and maximise

¹²² On the other hand, Kaviraj (1997: 8ff) points out that the listing of a number of scheduled castes and tribes in the constitution also formed new grounds of solidarity and agitation for, for example, the Dalit community. Caste is not a static social structure, but it has been significantly altered during its transition to post-independence India and caste mobilisation in electoral politics (ibid.: 17).

the possibilities for peaceful adjustments of social conflicts that arise during the development process" (ibid.: 20). In other words, radical social reforms were sacrificed for the sake of the nation's (and Congress') unity in the overall policy environment in the early years after independence. But, as outlined above, the chances to take up a more radical reform agenda had significantly deteriorated.

Third, the urban industrial and rural reforms failed to reach large sections of the workforce: neither did the predominantly publicly run industries ever grow enough to absorb the large labour surplus (Kohli, 2010: 502), nor did the agrarian reforms sponsored by the central government in the 1950s and 60s change the basic economic and social structures; rather, they "perpetuated and aggravated income disparities in rural areas" (Frankel, 2005: 584). Yet, the central government could do little to change the continuity in land holding, as the power to legislate further reaching land reforms had been entrusted to the States.¹²³ The early economic reforms thus failed to reach the nearly three quarters of the workforce that were engaged in agriculture at the time of independence, and which contributed 60 per cent to India's GDP (Guha, 2007: 201). Despite the socialist leaning in the constitution the impact of redistribution remained limited and the development path strengthened capital over labour (Kohli, 2010: 502). Consequently, a domestic consumer market did not develop, which impeded further growth of industries (Ghosh, 2004).

Fourth, the administration was to bear a large colonial legacy: Patel ensured continuities in personnel and structure from the British colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS) to the post-independence Indian Administrative Service (IAS) (Frankel, 2005: 80f). The ICS maintained law and order in the British ruled territories of India and served as its 'steel frame' (Brass 1994). Its successor, IAS, was not readily equipped and devoted to the tasks of socio-economic planning and development required by the new government. This meant that a key institution for the implementation of any change perpetuated ideas of the old regime.

¹²³ Land based reforms were not successful in India, except in the communist governed West Bengal, due to "dynamics of land, caste and local power structures" (Pankaj, 2012b: 10). Breman (2010: 11) points out that only 2 per cent of arable land were actually redistributed.

Fifth, the State's early welfare activities were limited. They mainly catered to the small industrial working force, the civil service and SC/ST for whom special provisions had been made in the constitution. Employment-based social protection was only available to those workers who were organised and who possessed a voice in the political systems. In colonial times this had primarily been civil servants, in the new economic regime this group was broadened to the industrial workers in state enterprises and certain parts of the private sector.

The early social programmes for rural areas were community based rather than focused on individuals and citizenship – as exemplified by the Community Development Programme, which started in 1952 (Dev, 2007). For the rural population greater emphasis was given to prize stability for farmer's products as well as to affordable food prices than to social welfare programmes. When schemes for rural areas were designed, they were mainly employment or self-employment programmes.¹²⁴ Ambasta *et al.* (2008: 49) points out that

even during the Nehru-era, rural development was never seen as a professional activity. The legacy of Gandhian anti-state anarchism, where people know best and can manage their affairs on their own, without any external help, only reinforced this tendency.

When tax-financed welfare programmes were expanded in the 1970s, they largely remained targeted at the 'deserving poor'. Social policy evolved fragmented "along caste and 'tribe' lines. This fragmentation has been central to the nature of the Indian secular state and the social compact after Independence" (de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008: 71f). This led to multiple beneficiary groups of welfare provision, which tended to organise along target group lines. Yet, even when programmes were universal in spirit, they often profited groups with more voice and better political ties rather than the poorest (Ehmke, 2011b). Social policy was an ad hoc instrument for groups that were able to stage political voice for their needs (Ghosh, 2004: 293f).

Consequently, a plethora of measures was introduced but lacked effective implementation (Dev *et al.*, 2001). The social programmes for the

¹²⁴ Generally, however, rural social policies play a comparatively big role in different stages in India's development process (see de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008: 69).

majority of the population remained residual in character (de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008). In particular for women access to in principle citizenship-based entitlements tended to be via men, or was only granted if they were without male support (Chhachhi, 2008: 138). "Social policy which ensured the provision of basic needs to the entire population was never a priority", concludes Ghosh (2004: 293).

This, ultimately, led to a continued reliance upon the traditional forms of social security, i.e. within families and religious communities or castes. The redistributive capacity and the scope of solidarity of these institutions is acknowledged to be limited. The continued reliance on them points to the acceptance of inequalities, roots of which can be found in the caste system and in the strong tradition of the communal organisation of welfare in general. According to Arora (2004: 330) in post independence India, "large parts of people's subsistence and welfare needs were managed outside the market system. Joint family system as well as traditional community and caste relations catered to the welfare needs of a large part of society." The state accepted that this restricted scope of solidarity with limited redistributive capacity remained the main source of security for the biggest part of the population. Several authors have claimed that India's pre- and post-independence order showed a "high level of social tolerance for high and growing asset inequality, persistent poverty and low levels of human development among vast sections of the population, especially in the rural areas" (Ghosh, 2004: 293; also see de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008: 71f). Cultural conventions, accustomed ways of thinking and behaviour formed a pattern in which the acceptance of inequality was high (see the argument of Kaufmann, 2003b above). It paved the way for a welfare trajectory that did not challenge these inequalities. Culture also played a role in terms of the larger democratic culture. Kaviraj (1997: 123) argues that the underlying societal and cultural "grammar of politics" did not keep pace with the speed with which the modern nation-state was erected by its elites. He points out that, "even if the state could insulate itself completely from societal influences, ordinary people would respond and react to the new state according to rules of experience generated from their dealings with earlier forms of power" (ibid.: 123). Hence, traditionally influential local strong men continued to be important in the new democratic order.

To sum up, within the larger policy environment, preference was given to stability of rule and the unity of India to the detriment of radical social transformation. Social reforms that would have changed the basic inequalities were seen as a potential source of social unrest and were put on hold when Nehru and other socialist-minded Congressmen embraced the idea of class conciliation, which had originally been advanced by Gandhi as well as the conservatives. But, after independence, to a much greater degree than under colonial rule, the “legitimacy of state rested on its capacity to take people's needs into account; and welfare gestures were the first step in that direction” (Arora, 2004: 330). Even if these policies did not actually succeed in all they attempted, the gesture, the symbol that politics cared about the need of the poor was much needed.

However, the stability of rule also justified the reliance on the hardly reformed IAS as a local outpost of the Delhi government in rural India. This implied that those representing the new state were those who had stood for the old state too. Local power structures were additionally preserved – rather than democratically transformed – through the reliance on local party brokers from the landed communities. The consequence was a smooth transition of pre-independence patron-client-relationships into the new order, which seriously compromised the potential for social reform through democratic processes. Pre-independence loyalties also remained powerful, because they continued to be the primary sources of welfare for the large majority of Indians in the absence of social reform. Overall, the ideas of social reforms continued to fill the Five Year Plans of the Indian government, but they did not succeed in transforming key institutions for their delivery, or in other words, their implementation.

5.4 From license raj to liberalism

The next shift that occurred was not accompanied by the overall change of the social order, this time it rather was a shift of the economic order. Berman (2011: 107) argues out that ideologies change in a two-stage process: in the first stage the existing ideology is called into question and thereby opens up a space for its successors to fill. Once this process has started, the second stage, the development of (competing) alternative approaches, begins.

The Nehruvian socio-economic order remained largely unchallenged under the rule of his daughter, Indira Gandhi. The ideas of state-led industrial development and *swadeshi*, economic self-sufficiency in the sense of import substituting policies remained essentially intact, but with some detours. Under Indira Gandhi's rule there initially was an economic reorientation, which gave priority to growth over redistributive concerns. This phase was characterised by a neglect of the welfare dimension within economic and developmental policies (Arora, 2004: 331f). Yet droughts and economical problems led to food scarcity and to the re-discovery of poverty as a political issue. In the run up to the 1967 elections the Socialist Party, under the leadership of Ram Manohar Lohia, grew strong and challenged the Congress and the three privileges of the Indian ruling class: caste, wealth, and English language (A. Kumar, 2005: 343). Congress and Indira Gandhi responded with a moderate reform programme under the slogan '*garibi hatao*' – eliminate poverty – which put distribution ahead of growth (A. Kumar, 2005: 343). Congress was re-elected, and the era witnessed "a spurt in the welfare policies and programmes" (Arora, 2004: 331). The Rural Works Programmes, Drought Prone Areas Programme, Desert Development Programme, Tribal Development Programme, Integrated Child Development Programme were all instituted at the time. Yet, the mandate of '*garibi hatao*' was not translated into effective socio-economic change for the large majority of the population, and culminated in frustration that led to pressures for political change. As a reaction to rising internal protests Congress declared the state of emergency and removed several rebellious State governments from its positions.

This phase of the 1970s, in which Congress had campaigned with the slogan '*garibi hatao*' and subsequently failed to deliver, was one in which "the collapse of the welfare functions of the state had become the cause of national unrest," argues (A. Kumar, 2005: 343; also see Arora, 2004: 330).

During the 1980s spending on centrally sponsored poverty alleviation programmes increased. They received higher allocations in the Five Year Plans, the public distribution system and nutrition programmes spread to rural areas (Dev, 2007). Yet, the state-led growth that resumed in the 1980s was based on public external debt. In the long run it led to the

balance of payments crisis in 1990-91, which formed a backdrop for the following liberalisation policies (Ghosh, 2004: 290).

It was in the mid 1980s that the old economic regime came under serious pressure. Then the first phase of ideological change started. The economic regime was deemed to be exhausted by (liberal) reformers within and outside Congress. At the time, India was experiencing stagnating growth rates and had increased its foreign debt to finance its imports up to a point that was increasingly deemed unsustainable. The problem definition staged was that the public control over large shares of industries, the import substituting policies and the strict regulations on domestic private companies and foreign capital – called *license raj* – were hindering economic progress. The domestic critics of the old regime could count on international support too; during the peak of the Washington Consensus, privatisation and liberalisation were the clear policy preference of, or condition for loans by, the international financial institutions. Alternative problem definitions, as, for example, by Frankel (2005: xi), argued that it was the failure of Congress not to have carried “out agrarian reforms and institutional changes at the core of the great Nehruvian experiment”, which weighed heavily on the development path of India. Similarly, Ghosh (2004) argues that it was the resulting lack of domestic demand, not the lack of openness of the economy or *license raj*, that caused the crisis. This analysis, however, neither enjoyed international backing nor was it strong in public debates at the time.

Still, the change of this fundamental policy orientation, and the embrace of liberalisation did not come to India easily. As early as 1985, the Congress Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi proposed a liberalising path, but his ‘pro-rich’ policies were successfully rejected by the still numerous socialist Congressmen. In 1989 Congress lost the national elections and when it returned to power in 1991, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi during the electoral campaign, it was in a minority government under the leadership of Narasimha Rao. His government, and the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, still met opposition to the plans of liberalisation and the resort to IMF lending to solve the balance of payments crisis. Only after the collapse the Soviet Union, India’s ideologically and economically important partner, was the opposition from the left temporarily silenced. The event instantly reduced the viability of a socialist development path. The IMF credit was sanctioned and followed by

Asian Development Bank and World Bank lending, while the parliamentary opposition of the left and the right was too weak to produce an alternative government or policy solutions.

India, however, did not experience radical liberalisation, due to a broader public resistance from urban and rural middle classes who were the main beneficiaries of fertiliser, electricity and telecommunication subsidies (Frankel, 2005: 591). Also, the public sector unions that feared large scale job losses, and the rural administration that did not want to give up their patronage networks successfully resisted. Other groups were not equally successful in shielding the programmes from which they benefited; for instance, the spending on employment programmes was reduced (Ghosh, 2004). The claims of poor peasants, landless rural workers and daily wage labourers in the cities on welfare programmes of the government were recognised by state agencies “but those claims could not be regarded as justiciable rights since the state did not have the means to deliver those benefits to the entire population of the country” (Chatterjee, 2004: 40).

As elsewhere, liberalisation was accompanied by a shift to human development policies as well as safety nets, and away from the provision of subsidised food. There was a swing to programmes that do not necessarily focus on the traditional poor, but specifically on the losers of the liberalisation process (Dev, 2007: 134). In rural areas traditional means of social cohesion furthermore eroded through a reduced interaction between different social classes,

and a diminished concern on the part of the rural elites towards the poorer sections, that used to mark the more paternalistic relations of the past. As social relations fragment and become more contractual, they also lose the few elements of cohesiveness that make location-specific communities functional.
(Ghosh, 2004: 304)

In sum, social policy “has been directed to specific (and restricted) target groups. And almost always, these groups included those with sufficient political voice, such as urban organized workers or, increasingly during the 1990s particular caste groupings” (ibid.: 293; also see Arora, 2004).

According to Ghosh (2004: 290), the growth path on which India embarked after 1991 was “openly based on the demand stimulus emanating

from certain sections of capital and what could be called ‘labour aristocracy’ comprising middle-class professionals and more skilled workers” and meant “very substantial increases in income accruing to a small minority in the population.” She points out that between 1993/1994 and 1999/2000 rural employment generation remained below rural population growth, per capita food grain consumption declined and the provision of public service worsened (ibid.: 291). The period around liberalisation between 1980 and 2000 did show some reduction in poverty, improvements in health and literacy argues A. Kumar (2005: 345, 350). Yet, the post-reform period was also one of job-less growth, rising unemployment, and the increasing casualisation of labour.

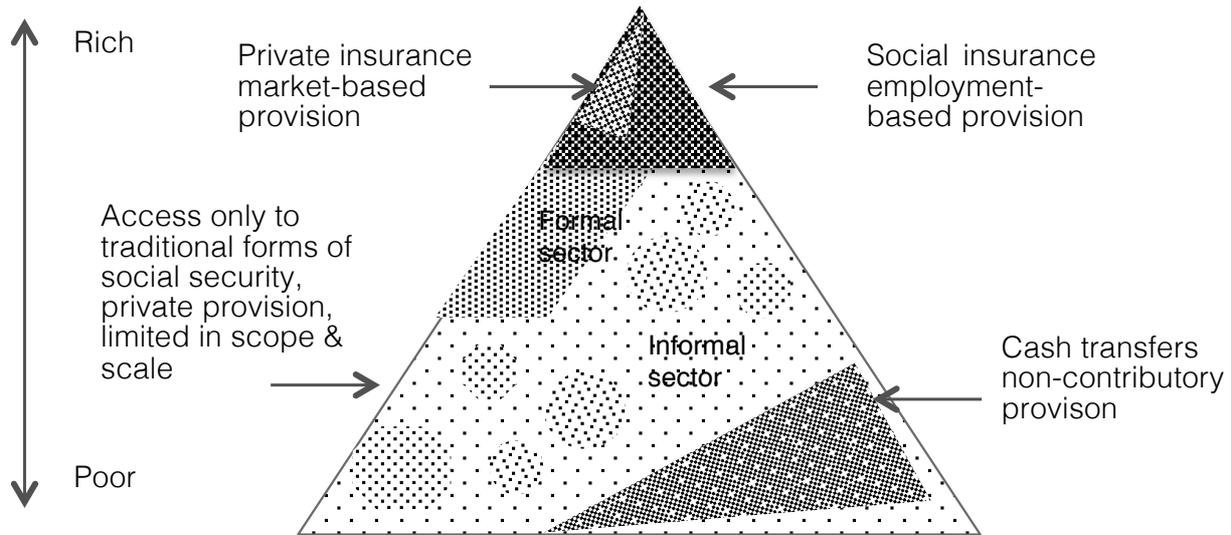
The ideological shift of the 1990s marks the change from development to growth as the primary aim of economic activities, and from state-led economic planning to greater market reliance. It only became possible after the domestic opposition was de-legitimised by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The new paradigm of liberalisation could additionally count on large and financially strong international backing in the international financial institutions. An alternative analysis that stressed the lack of domestic demand and the need for further reaching agricultural reforms as a basis of economic growth, could not find a majority in a situation in which the structural settings that had prohibited such reforms under Nehru had not significantly altered.

5.5 The Indian welfare regime at the turn of the millennium

At the turn of the millennium, i.e. before the most recent expansion of social protection that will be discussed below, the above-described trajectory had shaped the welfare organisation of India in a distinct way.

One central characteristic of welfare organisation in India is that access to welfare provision is differentiated between groups (for the general argument for Southern contexts see Dombois, 1998; Gough, 1999; Seekings, 2008; Loewe, 2010). There is no coherent pattern of the welfare mix across the whole population. Rather, the Indian welfare regime is characterised by inegalitarian access to welfare provision and a great internal heterogeneity with regards to levels of social security coverage. These differences are illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 Access to social security provision in India



Source: Figure adapted from Loewe (2010)

Figure 5.1 above shows that there are different forms of social security provision, which are not equally accessible to India's population. Four major forms can be differentiated: employment-based provision of social welfare, mainly in the form of social insurance, market-based provision of private insurance, private provision of welfare within families and kinship groups, and non-contributory provision in the form of cash and in-kind transfers.

The access to employment-based provision of social welfare is very limited in India. Such social insurance schemes are typically only open to those working in the formal sector, called the 'organised sector' in India. The share of workers that has access to these schemes is small and even declining: The share of formally employed workers peaked in the late 1990s and stood at 8.5 per cent of the total workforce in 1999/2000. By 2004/2005 it had fallen to 7.7 per cent (NCEUS, 2009: 13; also see Ambati, 2007; A. N. Sharma, 2004: 247). Employment growth between 1999/2000 and 2004/2005 was mainly informal, even when it was in the formal sector (NCEUS, 2009: 9).¹²⁵ In 2004/2005 even in the formal sector only 33

¹²⁵ The NCEUS differentiates between in/formal enterprises and in/formal workers. Whereas the first refers mainly to the size and the legal status of the enterprise, the latter is connected to the provision of employer based social security benefits. They arrive at four types of employment: a) formal in formal enterprises, b) informal in formal enterprises, c) formal in informal enterprises, and d) informal in informal enterprises. In 2004/2005 category d) constituted around 86 per cent of employment (NCEUS, 2007). The NCEUS report thereby also opens up the (false) dichotomy of

per cent of the workers had access pensions, gratuity and health benefits, another 10 per cent only to pensions, whereas 47 per cent had no access to benefits (Srivastava, 2008). According to different estimates no more than 2 to 14 per cent of the work force are covered under various formal sector schemes (Ambati, 2007; Kurz, 2001; Sakthivel & Joddar, 2006: 2113; NCEUS, 2007). Of those covered, coverage is highest among state employees (82.6 per cent). Hence, only a small labour elite – of public sector workers and a smaller number of medium income earners in the private sector – has access to state organised and comprehensive employment-based social security. The prospects that this type of social security could be extended to the majority of the population via an expansion of the formal employment are bleak, and thus employment-based formal sector schemes are not the focus of this book.¹²⁶

Similarly, market-based solutions of private insurance are primarily relevant for high-income groups.¹²⁷ Whereas most of the insurance options offered by private companies are solely attractive to India's aspiring middle and upper classes, the poor partly rely on private provision of social services in the fields of health and education. Where access to state social services is either unavailable or of extremely low quality also the poor go to private providers. In order to do so, they need to spend comparatively high shares of their budgets (Government of India, GoI 2011: 87), up to the point of falling into poverty and indebtedness. Indeed, out-of-pocket health spending is one of the prime factors for households to fall into poverty (A. K. Mehta, 2011).

Hence, there is a large group consisting of those in urban informal employment, agriculture, casual labourers and all the others that do not have employment-based social protection and find it hard to pay for market-based options. Of informal workers no more than 8 per cent had

formal and informal jobs. Informality and formality should not be understood as opposites, rather as the extremes of a continuity of different possible forms of work argue Altvater and Mahnkopf (2002: 87f).

¹²⁶ Other obstacles to the extension of predominantly insurance based, and employer-employee co-funded social security mechanisms are discussed by Ginneken (2004). Formal sector schemes also face critique and reform proposals (see Mahadeva, 2002; Subrahmanya, 2002; Agarwal & Sharma, 2004; Asher, 2004; Saini, 2005).

¹²⁷ High income earners are excluded from the state schemes. Those who earn incomes above a certain threshold per month cannot be insured.

access to social security in the form of pensions, gratuity or health benefits (Srivastava, 2008: 121). Of those, only 1 per cent had access to pensions. In the agricultural sector coverage is particularly low. Among agricultural workers only 2.9 per cent had access to pension, gratuity and health provision, another 2.6 per cent to pensions only. Women in agriculture had no access at all (*ibid.*: 119). The access to social security is also particularly scarce for the socially vulnerable groups ST/SC/Other Backward Classes (OBC). Their share in unprotected work is over proportional, and so is the share of higher caste groups in the protected occupations (Sakthivel & Joddar, 2006). Hence, “the coverage of social security schemes has been largely against economically and socially vulnerable sections” (*ibid.*: 113). Or in other words “the extension of social security has, to a large extent, remained limited to a ‘labour elite’” (de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008: 71). Chhachhi (2008: 138) adds that this elite was predominantly male. For most women access to social citizenship entitlements therefore used to be via men.

Another type of social protection mechanism, which is limited to selected groups of informal workers, are welfare funds.¹²⁸ These funds are typically financed through taxes on the specified goods, but can also be supported by the state, as well as employer or employee contributions (Srivastava, 2008: 116; S. V. Kumar, 2004). They aim to improve and provide health schemes and health prevention, improve sanitary facilities, housing, nutrition, education opportunities, and facilitate family planning (Kurz, 2001: 170f). Welfare funds also face problems with regards to coverage and access. Lately, the ‘Building and Other Construction Workers’ Welfare Fund’ has been criticised: since its foundation a cess of 1 per cent of the cost of construction incurred by the employer is levied and collected, the funds accrued are enormous, but they are underutilised (Working Group on Social Security, 2012: 19ff; R. Shah, 2012).

¹²⁸ Sectoral welfare funds for informal workers exist on national and State level. At central level the following funds have been founded: 1946, Mica Mines Labor Welfare Fund, 1961, Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (4 mn workers in 2005), 1971, Limestone and Dolomite Mines Labor Welfare Fund (100,000 workers in 2005), 1976, Iron Ore, Manganese Ore and Chrome Ore Mines Labor Welfare Fund, 1981, Cine Workers’ Welfare Fund (100,000 workers in 2005), and lately in 1996 the Building and Other Construction Workers’ Welfare Fund. These central funds are administered by the Ministry of Labor.

The collected cess is unused because the eligibility criteria make it easy for employers to effectively prevent workers' access to the Fund. Additionally, knowledge about entitlements among workers tends to be low, not the least because they are often not registered in the place of their employment and migrate frequently. This highlights one of the challenges of organising social security schemes for informal labour, whose employment relationships are often short-term, with varying employers, and who might not have a permanent residence.

Micro-insurance solutions are only available for few. Such – often NGO assisted – schemes do exist, but again these do not reach more than 2-3 per cent of the unorganised work force (Srivastava, 2008: 120; Ginneken, 2004: 191ff).¹²⁹

Those without coverage from employment- or market-based schemes mainly have to rely on traditional family, clan and kinship ties. These are generally limited in scope and scale, and especially unsuitable to protect vulnerable groups against co-variant risks, such as hazardous weather conditions. Additionally, such traditional welfare mechanisms in extended families have been weakened through rural-urban migration, which makes it difficult to maintain close contact or to support family members that have stayed in the countryside, because of poorly developed banking infrastructure and wide spread illiteracy (Kurz, 2001: 164).¹³⁰

For this group, which would otherwise only have traditional means of social protection, non-contributory programs have been devised by India's central government, and to a smaller extent by the State governments. These are typically targeted towards the elderly, widows, or disabled, i.e. those that are perceived as unable or that are not supposed to work. The biggest cash social assistance scheme is the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) with its various sub-schemes, which

¹²⁹ For difficulties associated with the extension of micro insurance solutions see (Loewe, 2010).

¹³⁰ Over the past decade faith based organisations may have increasingly stepped in to support the poor in times of adversity (Chhachhi, 2008: 151f). Chhachhi argues that they are especially strong in the aftermath of disasters, and that such humanitarian relief should not be equated with enduring social security structures. Additionally, she cautions that these forms of support are highly prone to clientelism and often discriminate against women (Chhachhi, 2008).

mainly are social pensions for elderly, widows and disabled (ISSA, 2013: 80ff, also see Table 3.1}. On a subnational level family benefits as well as special benefits for girls have also been introduced.¹³¹ The question whether or not cash transfers should be extended in India is on-going and controversial (Drèze & Sen, 1991: 20f; Shah, 2008; Editors, 2011; Ghosh, 2011b, 2011a; Kapur, 2011; Narayanan, 2011a; Pankaj, 2012b; Zepeda & Alarcón, 2012).

Next to these schemes, public employment schemes have traditionally been a major type of social intervention, especially in rural areas (Dev & Ranade, 2001; Sharma & Mangain, 2001; Sharma, 2004). They offer wages in return for labour in public infrastructure or other communal projects. The earliest public employment schemes in democratic India date back to the 1960s, but as outlined above, there have been wage employment programmes long before. Wage employment programmes will be discussed in more detail below (see Section 5.6.1).

Another form of non-contributory welfare is provided in kind. Most importantly the Public Distribution System (PDS) allows households below the poverty line to purchase staple food at subsidised rates in special ration or fair price shops.¹³² It is among the schemes with the widest coverage compared to other programmes, though with considerable regional differences (Dev, 2001: 30ff). In the mid 2000s 20-25 per cent of the population and about 40 per cent of the population BPL made use of the scheme and actually consumed grains provided under PDS (World Bank, 2011b: 34ff). PDS is criticised by many authors for its low cost effectiveness and poor quality of delivery (World Bank, 2011b: xviii; also see Dev, 2001: 35; Paul *et al.*, 2006: 50ff). In 1997, of every Rupee spend by the government only 22 Paisa reached the beneficiaries (Paul *et*

¹³¹ In some regions of India there is a strong bias for male children and considerable evidence for sex-selective abortions – although they are legally banned (Sen, 2005: 220ff). In consequence, in particular in the North Western regions of India the ratio of boys to girls is very low compared to international and even national averages.

¹³² The PDS used to be a citizenship-based entitlement until the late 1980s. Due to major leakages it was converted into a targeted scheme, first with regional and later with means-tested targeting for the BPL population (on PDS see e.g. Dev, 2001: 35ff; World Bank, 2011b: 34ff). Later the category of APL (above the poverty line) was added, who can also purchase in the ration shops, at subsidised but slightly higher prices than those living below the poverty line.

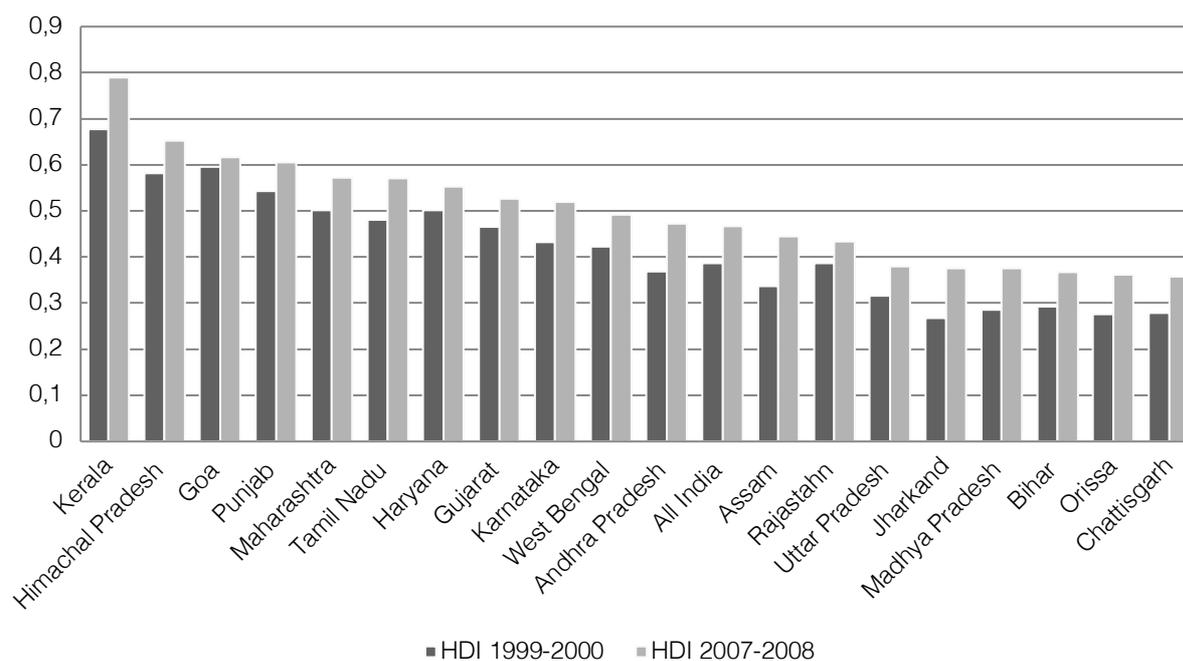
al.: 52). The costs for PDS stood at about 1 per cent of GDP in the early 2000s, but its impact on poverty and nutritional status is weak in most States. Nonetheless, the distribution of food has been and will be a major pillar of India's strategy to overcome poverty, malnutrition and hunger (Suryanarayana, 2011). Also, there is recent evidence that the PDS is not the "irreparably dysfunctional scheme" that it has been believed to be (Khera, 2011a: 36). In many States coverage rates and delivery mechanisms have been improved. Where functional PDS structures exist, beneficiaries preferred the distribution of food over cash (Khera, 2011a).¹³³

Besides these initiatives on the central level, there are also numerous schemes sponsored by the Indian States. The administrative duties related to social security, namely "social security and insurance, employment and unemployment" (item No. 23) and "welfare of labour including conditions of work, provident funds, employers' liability, workmen's compensation, invalidity and old age pension and maternity benefits (item No. 24) are shared responsibilities among the central and the States' governments (List III, Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India). Considerable inter-state differences in the provision of public social services and grants are a fact. The central government is nonetheless more important, because it devotes considerably more resources to the social field, and sets priorities and policy directions for the whole country (A. Kumar, 2005: 347).

However, concerning welfare outcomes – e.g. infant mortality, life expectancy, literacy rates, and shares of children in secondary schools – great variance between different States can be observed. This is captured in the Human Development Index (HDI) (Institute of Applied Manpower Research, IAMR, Planning Commission & GoI, 2011)/ (IAMR *et al.*, 2011).

¹³³ This was also the preference of NREGS workers interviewed during a pilot field visit in Dhule in November 2010 (see Ehmke, 2011a). Generally, the importance of food provision has gained renewed importance through the debates on the National Food Security Bill, which passed the Lok Sabha in September 2013 after years of debates (also see Khera, 2009; International Social Security Association, 2013: 101).

Figure 5.2 Human Development Index (HDI) for selected Indian States



Source: Based on (IAMR *et al.*, 2011: Table 2A.5)¹³⁴

The State most often praised for its good basic health and education services and the respectively high achievements in the field of human development is Kerala (Ghai, 2000a; Ramachandran, 2000; Sato, 2004; Sandbrook *et al.*, 2007). Not only does the State on the South-western tip of India has a much higher life expectancy and literacy as well as low infant mortality rates, it also boasts more than 30 social programmes ranging from social assistance measures to statutory welfare funds for around 20 professions. Of these programmes 14 are completely state funded and in 1991 Kerala's spending on social security and welfare was 2.77 per cent of the revenue budget while the corresponding figure for India was 1.02 per cent (see in more detail Dev, 2004). Also Tamil Nadu, and Himachal Pradesh are named as positive examples. Hence, some of the more successful States, in terms of human development achievements, are also more active in terms of the number of state-wide social programmes, as can be seen in Table 5.1 below.

¹³⁴ The Human Development Index is calculated as simple average of three indices in different dimensions: health, education and income. The health index uses life expectancy at birth for the years 2000 and 2008. The Education Index is a weighted simple average of literacy and adjusted mean years of schooling. The Income Index uses per capita consumption expenditure adjusted for inflation and inequality (Gini coefficient). For details see (IAMR *et al.*, 2011: 18).

Table 5.1 Selected major social security schemes of State governments

Target group	State	Year of introduction, scheme name, beneficiaries,
Children	Tamil Nadu	School feeding programmes: Chief Minister's Nutrition Meal Programme (CMNMP), Tamil Nadu Integration Nutrition Project (TNIP)
Women	Gujarat	1975, 1986 Maternity benefit
	Karnataka	1984, Maternity benefit
	Kerala	No year, Maternity benefit
	Tamil Nadu	1975, 1986 relief for destitute women
Elderly	Andhra Pradesh	1960, State old-age pension 1984, Pension for agricultural landless
	Gujarat	1978, State old-age pension (56,470 beneficiaries in 1991-2) 1981, Pension for agricultural landless
	Karnataka	1965, State old-age pension
	Kerala	1960, State old-age pension (27,795 beneficiaries in 1991-2) 1982, Pension for agricultural landless (323,781 beneficiaries in 1991-2)
	Maharashtra	1980, State old-age pension (328,592 beneficiaries in 1991-2)
	Tamil Nadu	1962, State old-age pension (232,821 beneficiaries in 1991-2) 1981, Pension for agricultural landless
	Uttar Pradesh	1957, State old-age pension
	Survivors, Widows, Orphans, disabled	Gujarat
Kerala		1982, Assistance to the disabled 1975, Assistance to widows (133,401 beneficiaries in 1991-2)
Tamil Nadu		1974, Assistance to the disabled 1975, Assistance to widows (191,140 beneficiaries in 1991-2) 1986, Marriage benefits for orphaned girls
Informal sector working age population, poor, under- or unemployed		Gujarat
	Kerala	1982, Relief for the (educated) unemployed (264,314 beneficiaries in 1991-2)
	Maharashtra	1972, Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), various activities for employment generation in Maharashtra had started in the 1960s they were given a legal basis in 1977. The programme is commonly seen as a forerunner of the national programme NREGS. 1979, Relief for the (educated) unemployed (12,140 beneficiaries in 1991-2)
	Tamil Nadu	1980, Relief for the educated unemployed

Sources: Own presentation based on Asher, 2004; Dev, 2004; Usami, 2004; A. N. Sharma, 2004; NCEUS, 2007; Rajasekhar, 2008.

The differences between the States aside, the welfare mix in India at the turn of the millennium shows that the constitutional cry for welfare for all India's citizens has not been realised more than 50 years after inde-

pendence. Instead of strengthening cohesion through social policies and social security provision we find distinct social policy regimes for various groups of the population. They are a manifest proof for the fact that citizenship-based mechanisms never really set off and employment-based policies were not successfully expanded to the majority of the population. Given the heterogeneous structure of welfare provision, it is not surprising that the Indian State is not frequently discussed as a welfare state (A. Kumar, 2005).

Given the small number of workers in the organised sector and the even smaller number of people covered by formal sector schemes, it seems odd to discuss India as a protective welfare state, as Rudra does. She claims that India is a protective welfare state because it ranks “among the highest in the developing world in terms of the percentage of workers employed in the public sector, it also maintains some of the most worker friendly rules and norms governing working conditions and industrial relations” (Rudra, 2008: 111). The share of public sector employees among those in the formal sector may be high – around 70 per cent, but their share among the total work force is low – about 5 per cent. And, all the ‘worker friendly’ regulations are directly applicable only for the same small group.¹³⁵

Rather than as a welfare state, Gough (2004b) and his co-authors (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b) classify India as an informal security regime. This classification points to the fact that much of the welfare outcomes need to be explained by informal welfare arrangements. The state is only one among several providers of welfare. Moreover, “the Indian state ... has not succeeded in providing for the basic needs of the people of India” (Arora, 2004: 334). Traditional forms of social protection, no matter how limited in scope and scale, do make a major contribution to welfare achievements. India combines “high but different levels of insecurity with low levels of public responsibility”, which is a defining trait of informal security regimes for (Gough & Abu Sharkh, 2010b: 37). The

¹³⁵ Altvater and Mahnkopf (2002) point out that the rules of the formal sector maybe only be directly applicable to those in such protected jobs, but they are also of relevance for the informal sector. On the one hand, the informal sector is typically defined as the absence of those formalised norms. On the other hand, the norms of the formal sector may serve as normative orientation, or aspiration of labour regulation even for the informal sector.

Indian welfare regime also exhibits “low income, an ex-colonial ancestry and high cultural diversity; ... more extensive democracy and income equality” (ibid.: 49). It also meets the description of such regimes, because there are many different public programmes and also informal security mechanisms, but these do not prevent “high levels of insecurity among the mass of the population” (ibid.). In that sense, India does fit Gough and his co-authors’ description of the informal security regime, and potentially is an exemplary case.

The welfare arrangements today and their legacy also show features that are deemed typical for agrarian regimes by Seekings (2008; 2012: 18). A prominent example is the focus on social stability and development. India has, besides its social security instruments for the small formalised work force, also a long tradition of rural development policies¹³⁶ and other support measures for farmers, such as minimum support prices and subsidies. The Indian welfare regime furthermore corresponds with Seekings’ description of agrarian regimes, which “were ostensibly pro-poor, ... [but] public policy was typically oriented more towards better-off or ‘middle’ peasants, rather than the very poor” (ibid.: 18).

5.6 The recent politics of welfare expansion under UPA

Shortly after the turn of the millennium, the prioritisation of growth of the liberal period started to be called into question. In 2004 the centre-right National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, which had been in power from 1999 onwards, surprisingly lost the elections to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), a coalition of several left and regional parties and Congress. While the NDA had pointed to high growth rates and claimed that India was ‘shining’ under its rule, the UPA campaigned around the needs of the *aam admi*, the common man, which it promised to take up. The credo was aimed at the rural and urban poor. Apparently these did not perceive of themselves as beneficiaries of the high growth rates of the preceding years; neither had growth trickled down. In 2004 they voted the NDA out of office.

¹³⁶ De Haan and Sabharwal (2008: 69) highlight that support to the rural population was given importance in different stages of India’s development process. But, discourses on social security have not been linked to those of rural development.

Since these elections and the formation of the UPA government, even though not always on its initiative, there has been a shift towards a rights-oriented policy and citizenship-based social policy (Dev, 2007: 134).¹³⁷ Popular examples of rights-based legislation are the Right to Information Act of 2005, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) from the same year – discussed in greater detail below, the Right to Education Act of August 2009 (see e.g. Paul, 2009), and the Right to Food Act of September 2013. The rights-based paradigm has been heralded as a major change by many activists (MacAuslan, 2008) and as a sign that “India’s underprivileged majority is not completely marginalised in this elitist political system” (Drèze, 2010: 511). It is taken as an indicator that those who have traditionally not necessarily benefitted from a rights discourse, have now successfully appropriated such a discourse.

Additionally, there have been social initiatives, that are not right-based such as the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act (UWSSA),¹³⁸ and the *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana* (RSBY)¹³⁹ a health insurance for the population below the poverty line, as well as the *Aam Admi Bima Yojana* (AABY), which offers life, disability and accident insurance to the rural landless population below the poverty line (World Bank).

¹³⁷ An active role was also played by India’s Supreme Court, its pro-active judiciary has been vital for the extension of social rights, i.e. the right to mid-day meal at school for pupils (Chandhoke, 2007; Sen & Drèze, 2011).

¹³⁸ After years of debate it passed the Lok Sabha in 2008 (see Jhabvala, 1998, 2005; Nayak, 2005; Hirway, 2006; P. K. Kannan, Srivastava & Sengupta, 2006; O’Keefe & Palacios, 2006; Rao, Rajasekhar & Suchitra, 2006a, 2006b). In terms of its objective the UWSSA would have been a suitable subject for research, however its implementation was postponed because of contestations of the scheme in parliament.

¹³⁹ In India access to health services is hitherto not organised via insurance, but through the access to state run health service centres. Despite large achievements in the field of health since independence, India’s record with regards to longevity, life-birth, child mortality and other indicators has fallen back behind its South Asian neighbours (Dev, 2001: 41ff; Sen & Drèze, 2011). Public health centres are notionally wide spread also in rural areas, but access varies in particular between rural and urban areas. The new initiative, RSBY, is a subsidised insurance solution for the poor based on a smart card, which is operated in partnership with private providers (for details see e.g. BMZ, 2011).

This recent spurt in social legislation is domestically embedded in a narrative in particular by the central government and leading parties of 'inclusive growth' (see e.g. GoI, 2008, 2011, 2013; INC, 2004, 2009).¹⁴⁰ Indeed parallel to the expansion of social legislation India realised consistently high growth rates in the second half of the decade from 2000-2010. Whereas (neo-)liberalism attributes little importance to the state in organising the distribution of gains by economic growth, the notion of inclusive growth does. The process of growth and the outcomes of the growth process, both, should be organised in a way that it also benefits the poorer and disadvantaged sections of society (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2011). Because of this emphasis various schemes and government policies more generally have been evaluated with regards to their 'inclusiveness' (Dev, 2007; Gill, 2012). NREGA in particular is seen as a programme that should contribute to inclusive growth (Chhabra, Raina & Sharma; Amita Sharma, 2010; MoRD, 2012).

5.6.1 The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed by the Parliament on September 7th 2005. Its stated objective is to "provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of wage employment in every financial year to every household" (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005; see section 3.4 for more details on NREGA). With its rights-based character, self-targeting and universal access, the provisions for women and SC/ST groups, as well as participation and transparency provisions NREGA is frequently hailed as an innovative scheme (see e.g. UNDP, 2011), but many of the features of NREGA have in fact been part of earlier welfare schemes in India and its states. There is a historical legacy of employment schemes on which many features of NREGA draw. There certainly is a degree of a continuation of past institutional decisions and learning from these past experiences. For example, the first rural works programme in democratic India, which was started during the Third Five-year Plan (1961-66), already aimed at providing employment for 100 days in a year (CEC, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Internationally it is similarly often framed as 'growth with equity' or 'pro-poor growth' (for an overview see e.g. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2009).

Table 5.2 Major self-employment programmes since independence

Years	Wage- and self-employment programme
1961-66	Rural Works Programme (RWP) to provide 100 days of employment per year for 2.5 mn people
1967-77	Onwards (4 th plan) RWP was discontinued and replaced by the Drought Prone Area Programme aimed at the development of small and marginal farmers
1977-80	Food for Work Programme (FWP)
1980-89	FWP is restructured and renamed into National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)
1982-89	Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) aimed at providing 100 days of employment for at least one member of each landless household.
1989-99	RLEGP merged with NREP into the new Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) which adds infrastructure development but reduces the commitment towards unemployment
1993-99	Employment Assurance Scheme introduced in 175 backward Blocks and extended to all Blocks in 1997
1993	Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY) scheme for the educated unemployed aimed at creating self-employment opportunities rather in urban areas.
1999-2002	Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) replaces the earlier JRY, with a stronger focus on improved quality of life in rural areas through productive employment
1999	Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) targets the urban poor and encourages self-employment as it provides public wage employment.
1999	Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is a comprehensive self-employment and micro-credit programme for the rural poor.
2001	Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) , programme for the development of rural infrastructure and employment generation for the rural poor is created as a merger from EAS and JRY.
2004	National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) targeted towards the 150 most backward Districts provides public employment and pays in food grains.
2005	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) guarantees 100 days of manual labour to every rural household per year, remunerated by the respective State's minimum wage (Ministry of Rural Development).

Sources: Own presentation based on Asher, 2004; Dev, 2004; Usami, 2004; A. N. Sharma, 2004; Ambati, 2007; NCEUS, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2008; Rajagopalan & Bhatnagar, 2008; Rajasekhar, 2008; Srivastava, 2008; Centre for Environment Concerns, 2009.

In 1978-1979 the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) introduced a focus on the construction of productive assets. The Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), initiated in 1983-84, repeated the commitment to provide employment for 100 days in a year to at least one member of each landless household. Five years later the scheme was merged with another scheme to form the *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)*, which combined the objectives of gainful employment for the rural un- and underemployed with the creation of infrastructure and community assets. At the same time, the guarantee of 100 days of employment available under the RLEGP, was removed and replaced by geographically different targets with regards to unemploy-

ment. The later Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) of 1993 made reference to statutory minimum wages, introduced the fixed wage-material ratio of 60:40, was based on self-selection, and issued cards for the families working in the scheme to record employment details. By September 2001, the EAS was merged with another scheme into the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, in which the implementation responsibility was entrusted to village councils, the *panchayats*. Additionally, the EAS, its successor SGRY and the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) have already been self-selective (Sjoblom & Farrington, 2008). Another important forerunner of MGNREGA is the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act (MEGA) of the State of Maharashtra, which was legislated in the 1970s and has been running for four decades (Gaiha & Imai, 2006; Moore & Jadhav, 2006). The MEGA already gave a guarantee for employment in unskilled manual work to every adult who demanded work, stipulated equal payment for men and women at minimum wage rates, and it entailed provisions of “work for women closer to home, crèche facilities for children and even provisions for maternity leave” (Chopra, 2009: 38). This was the first time an Indian State government “created a legal ‘Right to Work’” (Chopra, 2009: 38).

Hence, in many regards, NREGA is not new, but a continuation of and development from past social programmes (also see Chopra, 2009). Where NREGA is innovative in comparison to earlier employment or welfare schemes are its legal anchorage as an Act of Parliament, the rights-based character, the transparency guarantees, the provisions for the participation of disadvantaged groups, the unemployment allowance and the proximity clause for the works, and the demand-based nature – even of the budget of the scheme. Also the ban of contractors is a new feature in the Act and crucial one, argue Ambasta *et al.* (2008: 41).¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Earlier employment schemes were also universal in design, nonetheless they were mainly geared towards the (male) able-bodied working-age population. Because piece rate wages gave preference to the strong, who can realise a certain salary. Additionally, the childcare provisions that public employment schemes sometimes foresaw were seldom in place and thereby the schemes discriminated women (Chhachhi, 2008: 149). Another reason why these schemes remained low in coverage and impact, says Dev (2004), is that they have been enacted in a top-down manner and the potential beneficiaries were not well informed about their existence. He argues that for the availability of “promotional and protective social programmes to

5.6.2 The long road to NREGA

Today NREGA is often showcased by the Indian government as an exemplary model for the provision of social protection. However, the road to the legislation of the Act has been rocky, it was preceded by a “series of unlikely events” (Drèze, 2011b: 6).

The Indian labour movement had long called for a national Employment Guarantee, but had not been able to get a breakthrough. As pointed out above, other wage employment programmes were in place in the early 2000s. But, these had a reputation as poorly implemented schemes (CEC, 2009). In the Ninth Plan period the performance was particularly bad and compared to the Eighth Plan, the “number of families assisted and person-days of employment generated under SGRY dropped to a half” (CEC, 2009: 5; also see GoI, 2002: 299). India witnessed a growing number of starvation deaths and farmer suicides.

Between 1997 and 2001, more than 80,000 farmers committed suicide. The number of in-debt farmers increased from 26 per cent in 1991 (out of 575 million people dependent on agriculture) to 48.6 per cent in 2001 (600 million dependent on agriculture). Eight million quit farming altogether. (Jeelani, 2010)

In response to this “hunger amidst plenty” (Burra, 2010: 2), the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), a regional CSO in Rajasthan, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) at the Supreme Court on the issue in mid-2001. The core of the petition was that the right to life, a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution (Art. 21), was violated by central and State governments’ insufficient response to the drought situation (Burra, 2010). The petition specifically “asked the Supreme Court to intervene by directing the government to provide immediate open-ended employment in drought-affected villages” (Burra, 2010: 2). The PIL, the public interest it generated, and the mobilisation of movements helped to create an atmosphere “conducive to the passage of legislation” (Burra, 2010).

the poor, decentralized access to information and social mobilization is important” (Dev, 2004: 219). Pankaj (2012b: 11) adds that earlier public employment schemes failed because they were supply driven, and thus not responsive to the livelihood needs of the rural population, they had poor accounting mechanisms and were beset with corruption, leakages and wastage, and they were not entitlement based.

And, it caught the attention of the then opposition leader and president of the Congress Sonia Gandhi.¹⁴²

In early 2004 the demand for an Employment Guarantee Act entered the election manifesto of the Congress and shortly after the National Common Minimum Programme – the joint election manifesto of the United Progressive Alliance. This happened at a time when the Congress and the UPA did not expect to win the national elections in 2004. Yet, the UPA did win and the pressure to deliver on the promises was high. The National Advisory Council (NAC), a non-statutory advisory committee to the government that had been established by Sonia Gandhi, prepared a first draft of NREGA. Its members are well-known civil society activists and scientists. The first draft was based on an earlier proposal that had been developed by citizens groups. From the NAC the Bill was passed on to the Planning Commission. The deputy chairman at the time, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, formerly a senior official with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, “resisted the guaranteed employment clause, arguing it would make implementation of the programme too costly” (Jeelani, 2010). When the draft entered the parliamentary discussions in December 2004 it did so without the employment guarantee clause (Economy Bureau, 2004). It had overall been so diluted that it caused uproar among civil society groups and left parties (Karat, 2004; S. Gupta, 2004).

The draft was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development for further discussion. At the time, the Committee was headed by Kalyan Singh “a veteran BJP leader who vehemently criticised the bill in Parliament ... [and] boycotted meetings on NREGA for six month” (Jeelani, 2010). The effect was that the passing of bill was delayed from the budget session to the monsoon session of parliament (Jerath, 2005). Only after persistent lobbying of the BJP leader Arun Jaitley by Jean Drèze and others could K. Singh be convinced to reconvene the meetings. In the following first public hearing CSO activists repeated their demand for guaranteed employment at a minimum wage of 100 rupees (Staff Correspondent, 2005). But the resistance from within Congress, the Planning Commission, the Finance Ministry, several

¹⁴² Unless cited otherwise the following paragraphs strongly draws on Drèze (2011b: 6ff).

members of the Cabinet, and even the Prime Minister's Office was unbroken (Jeelani, 2010). Hence, the opposition against the Bill did not come from the opposition parties alone, also the Ministry of Finance was opposed to all amendments that would increase the costs. It argued against a universal employment guarantee, for targeting, and for a confinement to rural areas (Sood, 2005; Jeelani, 2010). An attempt to convince Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, head of the Group of Ministers, which negotiates important deals for the Prime Minister, was futile, "the activists were told that they must terminate the guaranteed employment clause and limit the scheme to poor households" (Jeelani, 2010).

The "one remaining option" (ibid., 2010) was to convince Congress President Sonia Gandhi, whose reputation at the time strongly profited from the fact that she had declined the post of Prime Minister although the party had won the elections. Although not part of the government, she was influential among government circles. When she was finally convinced she also convinced others. By July 2005 the Standing Committee on Rural Development (SCRD) had endorsed most of the changes called for by the campaigners. In last minute bargaining the left parties were able to extract further concessions. These were i.e. to fix the wage rate a minimum 60 INR a day, to remove the targeting of the guarantee to BPL households, and to increase the number of Districts in the first phase from 150 to 200 (Sood, 2005). After all, when the bill was reintroduced in Parliament in August 2005, the compromise found meant that "NREGA would retain guaranteed employment for just 100 days, not a complete year, as promised earlier" (Jeelani, 2010). After all, the Act was passed unanimously on August 23 2005.

What do these latest developments tell us about the drivers of welfare and social politics in India? The UPA government has engaged in much more substantial social policy making and promoted the slogan of 'inclusive growth.' In some ways it faces the same institutional constraints as earlier, but there are also important differences between the setting of the early 1990s and the mid 2000s. For example in the international policy environment there also was a swing to an increased attention to social policies and a loss of legitimacy for the Washington Consensus (Deacon, 2007). Also domestically the increasingly unequal distribution of the

benefits of growth has led to a questioning of the liberal regime.¹⁴³ Additionally, the continued high growth rates make it less difficult for the government to finance social programmes; there is greater fiscal space. Conversely, several observers doubt the commitment of the government to inclusive growth policies (Patnaik, 2011; Chandrasekhar, 2011). Not the least because Manmohan Singh, the UPA Prime Minister, acted as Finance Minister and key organiser of liberalising policies earlier. Additionally, the rights-based policies are seen to have been enacted due to civil society pressure and the strength of left parties in the first term of UPA. These parties have not been part of second UPA coalition. And, the concept of 'inclusiveness' is seen as incoherent and lacking indicators, as opposed to that of 'growth' (Chandrasekhar, 2011). It remains yet to be seen whether the latest ideological swing from a primarily growth oriented approach to more inclusive economic and social policies can effectively alter those structures which have so far been successful in maintaining raising levels of inequality and their societal acceptance. With regards to the choice for an employment scheme rather than other form of social policy interventions, this is grounded in a long institutional tradition of employment schemes. There is a historic-institutional legacy of employment schemes, which also supports the choice for this specific kind of intervention. Furthermore, in large parts of rural India, improvements of the income situation are only one possible answer to many pressing needs. There is a real need for rural infrastructure development – also of the kind that is offered in NREGA. And, many subsistence farmers cannot generate sufficient income from their land for their families for a year. The problems arising from the small size of many landholdings are aggravated by the fact that agriculture is seasonal and highly dependent on the monsoons in most parts of the subcontinent. (Temporary) labour migration of some or all members of the household is a widespread coping strategy. A rural employment guarantee for parts of the year fits also this economic structure in many ways. These may be reasons, why many important intellectual supporters of NREGA, such as Jayati Ghosh, Jean Drèze and Aruna Roy opposed purely cash based interventions. On an international level, in particular in the World Bank,

¹⁴³ During the international economic and financial crisis of 2009/2010 even the domestic opposition from the corporate sector joined those hailing MGNREGA, despite this sector's earlier sharp criticism (Khera, 2011c)

there were big debates favouring in particular conditional cash transfer schemes (Rawlings & Rubio, 2005; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Employment schemes enjoyed little prominence at the time, the idea of an employment guarantee was novel. Generally, in the whole process leading to NREGA there was hardly any reference to international developments or statements. This points again to the importance of domestic processes in welfare development, which I have highlighted in this book.

5.7 *Interim Conclusions: Drivers of the Indian welfare trajectory*

This chapter started with the premise that ideas are central in the formation of distinct welfare regimes and showed how various ideational traditions from pre-colonial and colonial eras; the independence movement and post-independence developments have influenced the thinking on and the organisation of welfare in India. Key characteristics of the different phases of welfare development in India are summarised below in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Overview of driving forces of India's welfare trajectory

Period	Ideas	Institutions	Actors	International
Pre-colonial and colonial	Difference and inequality	Division by caste and 'divide and rule'	Caste councils, colonial administration	Colonial rule
Independence (movement)	National unity	Preference for the industrial workforce, rights for marginalised groups	Mohandas Gandhi, J. Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar	Foreign trained political leaders
Early years of the Republic	Development	Rural welfare schemes, majority voting, Congress party structures	J. Nehru & Indira Gandhi	India's Third Way as path between the major powers US and USSR
Liberal turn	Economic growth	Targeted interventions for liberalisation losers	BJP, caste and regional parties	Decline of USSR, rise of liberalism
Recent turn	Inclusive Growth	Rights-based social programmes	UPA, left parties within the coalition, civil society organisations	Decline of importance of the Washington Consensus, targeted social policies

Source: own presentation

The historical review illustrates that there are strong legacies of inequality and difference as central normative principles. The fractured organisation of society and state has roots in both pre-colonial Hindu traditions of caste and British colonial rule, through 'divide and rule.' Also, in colonial India, social phenomena such as poverty were not yet perceived of as problems that required state action. It was only the independence movement that identified poverty and exploitation as social problems, with roots in both foreign rule and domestic cultural practices. The movement spearheaded the unity of India as its central political objective. But, political unity was not achieved. The partition from Pakistan rather brought to the fore a highly politicised religious divide. After external political unity had been lost, it was central to foster internal unity, which came at the cost of equality that was deemed to carry too much potential for social unrest. These traditions left their imprint on modern politics, too. Ghosh attests India's post independence order a

high level of social tolerance for high and growing asset inequality, persistent poverty and low levels of human development among vast sections of the population. ... Social policy which ensured the provision of basic needs to the entire population was never a priority. (Ghosh, 2004: 293; also see de Haan & Sabharwal, 2008)

The societal acceptance of inequality remained high, and schemes were typically targeted at certain groups, may these be ethnic (*Adivasi*) or social (BPL).

However, inequality and poverty, the extent to which they were to be addressed and how, were always disputed and contested. Ambedkar successfully portrayed untouchability (and indigenoussness) as forms of social exclusion that required state-led remedies, for which he presented clearly formulated and coherent policy solutions. He thereby, and also through his prominent position in drafting the constitution, succeeded in giving weight to this core concern. The abolition of untouchability, however, could also count on broader support in India and internationally. The abolition of the caste system, on the other hand, lacked such support and it was opposed to Gandhi's idea of class conciliation, which was later also taken up by Nehru and left leaning members of the INC. Nehru on the other hand, had strong influence in terms of institutional legacies. He shaped the post-independence order through his insistence

on a strong socialist oriented secular central state. But, the post-independence institutional order clearly inherited some burdens from its (pre-)colonial predecessors. Yet, as Hay (2011: 68) suggests, the outcome of the struggle on institutions, in this case India's colonial institutions, is not predictable.¹⁴⁴ For instance, the constitution removed some of the obstacles to greater equality that had been introduced under the British, the *zamindari*, while older inequalities in land-holding were not successfully challenged. The federal organisation of the country and the IAS carry colonial legacies. However, that they were preserved in the new regime was the outcome of the strength of contending groups in the Constitutional Assembly and the shared fear of social and political turmoil. The latter was very prominent after the experience of partition and led to a situation in which the larger ideational and institutional environment favoured stability of rule and the country's unity over far reaching social and economic reforms.

Similarly, family and communal organisation of welfare emerged as major traditions from pre-colonial times, but not as a functional legacy. They also remained powerful because employment-based social security never reached the majority of Indians.

Besides formal employment, categories of welfare governance such as below the poverty line, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes order the access to welfare programmes. All of these categories are contested and politicised on various levels.¹⁴⁵ However, as far as the statutory rights for historically disadvantaged groups are concerned, India must be seen as innovative. It introduced such reservation policies at a time when black

¹⁴⁴ This is what a more classical institutional school would have expected. One argument was that the type of political regime, would determine what kind of welfare arrangements are built. Till the early 2000s India had been a democracy for more than 50 years, but the high number of comparatively poor voters has not resulted in greater welfare provision. The discussions above also prove the functionalist argument that economic growth would trigger industrialisation and lead to the formation of more elaborate welfare states wrong. In India early industrialisation was coupled with low growth rates. Recent economic growth on the other hand is not necessarily coupled with industrialisation.

¹⁴⁵ Examples are the on-going debate about the poverty line, which is relevant for the eligibility for many programmes from food subsidies to RSBY, and the attempts of middle castes to be recognised as Other Backward Castes (OBC) in order to benefit from reservation policies. See i.e. Joseph (2011) for the debate.

Americans in the south of the United States of America still faced race segregation, and long before countries such as Australia and Canada started quotas for its indigenous groups. This aspect of Indian social policy is neither discussed by authors that deal specifically with the Indian welfare regime nor in comparative approaches. It thus is a new insight into the distinct development of welfare in India, which became possible through the particular focus on domestic ideas.

Overall, the lack of comprehensive social welfare provision led to the continued reliance on strong solidarity within groups, which acted as an obstacle to the formation of a common horizon of solidarity and citizenship-based social policies (see also Harriss, 2006: 21ff). Strong local and kinship ties and caste loyalties remained a motif in electoral politics, and led to coalitions with complex actor constellations in which unequal distribution remained unchallenged for a long time.

In terms of actors, the analysis above mainly focused on the dynamics within the governing coalitions or those challenging it. I did not study in more detail unions, employers or other civil society groups. This is justified by the fact that at least unions represent only a small segment of the Indian labour force and they have not played a central role in providing social security to unorganised labour for a long time. Only in the recent change to rights-based legislation were civil society organisations of various backgrounds together successful in putting social rights effectively on the (post-) election political agenda. Historically, the large electoral majority of predominantly poor Indians has seldom been successful in this regard.¹⁴⁶

Next to these domestic influences, the importance of international ties has also been highlighted. Yet, even were the influences of external events are big, as in the juncture around the liberalisation in 1991, this does not signify an abrupt change enforced by external events, but a gradual process in which problem definitions shifted. Only after the collapse of Soviet Union could the domestic opposition be broken. The event called the viability of a socialist development path into question

¹⁴⁶ When the UPA government was re-elected in 2009 some of its electoral success has been attributed to the success of MGNREGA (Kumbhar, 2009). This is doubted by Drèze (2011c), because in a survey the majority of the rural residents asked were unable to attribute the scheme to a party or a leading politician within the Congress Party.

and delegitimised the traditional path of state-led planning. This shift also shows that domestic welfare arrangements can be prone to international influences. Other external influences can be found in the colonial rule and its legacy. Also the Indian constitution has in many ways been influenced by other constitutions (Anderson, 2012). However, that does not mean that welfare developments in the South converge under international political economy pressure (see Rudra, 2007). As in the global North, where similar arguments were prominent for some time, such convergence is unlikely. Welfare developments are mediated by existing institutional arrangements, and also by prevailing societal ideas about what is just or at least tolerable, and by actor coalitions pushing for change, or not. This is also one reason why domestic and international political environments play different roles for ideational changes at different points in time for the history of Indian social policy.

And, whereas the earlier junctures did seem to confirm the assumption that changed ideas act as underlying forces that change policy, this seems to be less true in the case of MGNREGA and 'inclusive growth.' The connection between these two appears to be constructed at least partially ex-post. The programme was formulated before the inclusive growth debate had reached its full swing. Traditional policy analysis, as well as ideational institutionalism, typically think of the influence of ideas on policy, in a rather linear way. For example, Hay points out that "change in policy is often preceded by changes in ideas informing policy" (2002: 194). Interpretative approaches to policy analysis caution that

We see cause-and-effect relations after the fact, but in attributing intention to the causality, traditional analysis ascribes both instrumentality and intentionality before-the-fact to policy actors and events. We cannot know for certain, however, that the patterns we are seeing retrospectively in policy actions actually' resided in them. (Yanow, 1996: 23; also Zittoun, 2012).

Applying Yanow's argument to the point above – on the relationship between NREGA and inclusive growth – it may be that for the more recent events the complicated relationship is better visible, because it is recent and there is more literature on the precise debates surrounding it. In secondary literature about historical turning points that are further in the past these contestations may have already been smoothed out. It may have always been pretty complicated.

The latest possible juncture of ideational change towards 'inclusive growth' has already begun to alter the institutional landscape of welfare in India through the introduction of citizenship-based social policies legislated under the UPA government. De Haan and Sabharwal (2008: 71ff) ask whether the new paradigm will be able to break old barriers (mainly of caste) and reach a universalization of social protection. Seekings (2012) sees a chance for a change in increasingly competitive party politics in India. This could signify a shift in voting patterns from traditional ties to issue politics. Whether this can be the mechanism by which an ideational change succeeds in altering the cultural acceptance of inequalities and the institutions maintaining these until now, is still an open question. Hence, the question whether the marginalised will be able to reap the benefits of rights-based policies, or whether the new universal policies benefit the few who are privileged already, is still valid and empirically open. The real challenge is not the adoption of an act, but its implementation on the ground argues Drèze (2010: 511). This is to what I'll turn in the following chapter on implementation.

6 Multivocal Accounts of the Implementation of NREGA

Government has three sons. The first is government employees, the second is agriculture and the third is labourers. Labourers are given least protection. (55FGDMY)

This chapter addresses three research questions: first, the comparative question on how the performance of the scheme differs between locations, second, the question how the scheme is perceived by the (target) population, and third, who benefits from the politics of implementation. In addressing these, I aim to explore differences in NREGA implementation between locations as well as differential effects within location. This section generally follows Yanow's suggestion to investigate differences of "implementors and other relevant publics' interpretations of the policy culture and to analyse the effects of these interpretations and meanings on implementation efforts" (Yanow, 1990: 221). She hence assumes that the perceptions of the scheme are linked to implementation efforts. At the same time I incorporate the idea that implementation is a co-construction of knowledge together with participants, and that their perceptions' of policy are of central importance. They are the only actors that can inform us, whether the objective of subjective greater social security – with its three components of material improvement, agency, and reliability – have been achieved or not. Hence, these are central points of inquiry in the research locations and for the analysis. Yet, participants are not the only set of actors involved. Interpretative implementation studies also include "others' interpretations of and actions with respect to policy" (ibid.: 237). These others, in this case are primarily the administration, non-participants in NREGA and civil society organisations, their assessments' of the policy and its implementation contribute to "multivocal" (ibid.) accounts of NREGA in the research locations.

Before turning to the research locations themselves, the analytical framework of the effects of implementation is introduced alongside the findings from previous studies. Three dimensions of welfare gains will be examined in greater detail: material gains, reliability and agency. After they have been introduced and findings of earlier studies outlined, I turn to the discussion of the three dimensions in the four research locations. Herein, the focus will be on the bottom of the implementation pyramid, on local, Block and District level.

What the discussion below will show, is that assessment of the implementation of the scheme is most positive among the local, Block and District NREGA staff. Especially in AP the administration at State level is aware and open about of a number of shortcomings. The view of participants is in sum more critical than that of the administration. They mainly describe the effect as positive but limited – however with stark variation between the locations.

6.1 NREGA implementation and welfare gains in the literature

The stated objective of the NREG-Act is to “provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of wage employment in every financial year to every household.” Besides the provision of employment the Act also aims to improve livelihoods in rural India through the “creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihoods resource base of the rural poor” (ibid.). The indicators typically used to estimate whether the Act achieves its statutory objectives are the number of households that have found work in NREGA, the number of days worked per household, and the completion rate of NREGS works.

In an abductive process building on both prior theories and the themes that emerged from the interviews in the field, I developed an analytical framework of three dimensions of welfare gains, material gains, reliability and agency. Previous studies on NREGS do not explicitly work with the same three-dimensional concept of welfare. However, they investigate themes, which can and will serve as indicators for all three dimensions.

6.1.1 Previous findings on material welfare gains

The typical indicators for the success of the scheme, the number of households that have found work in NREGA, the number of days worked per household, and the completion rate of NREGS works, are weak proxies if we are to make any argument about real welfare gains and livelihood improvements for NREGA participants. They don't tell us whether more households would have liked to work, whether they would have liked to work for more days, and whether these households actually experience greater welfare through their participation in NREGA. Specifically, they only offer some information on material

gains, not on reliability and agency. But, even on material welfare gains they do have shortcomings, as mentioned above.

Previous studies on NREGA often take the most obvious indicator for changes in the material dimension increases in household income as a starting point. A number of studies concludes that household incomes have grown (Banerjee & Saha, 2010: 44f; MoRD, 2012: 6ff). According to one study NREGA income constitutes 20-30 per cent of the annual income of poor households, and is used for education, food consumption, health, repayment of debts and household consumer items (Pankaj, 2012b: 21f). Its impact on material improvement relies on the additional earning opportunity and the availability of jobs in the lean season (Pankaj, 2012a: 103). Others stress that the predictability of income has increased and thereby smoothed consumption (Jacob, 2008).

In terms of improved material conditions wage levels are central. Several studies state significant increases of wages for both women and men, not only within, but also outside NREGA in the rural economy, which they attribute to NREGA (Banerjee & Saha, 2010). At an all India level, there has indeed been a small increase of the daily wage rates paid in NREGA of 2.1 per cent between 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 (see Table 6.1 below). However, a look at the development of NREGA wage rates in India's largest States shows that the developments between the States have been uneven. Both Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh have seen real declines of NREGA wage rates in these years.

As Table 6.1 opposite shows, wage rate developments in NREGA have been uneven. One reason is seen in the Schedule of Rates (SoR), which specifies the quantity of works that need to be done in order to realise a certain wage. This is also acknowledged by the MoRD, which States that wage below the statutory rates are caused by an "inaccurate Schedule of Rates, and delays in payment due to inadequate staff and other institutional constraints" (MoRD, 2012: 60f). The SoR are State specific and many of them make it hard for workers to earn even the minimum wage (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008; CEC, 2008; Banerjee & Saha, 2010: 45; Gopal, 2014). Also, wage rates were originally for seven hours. In a later MoRD Circular of January 14 2008 the hours were raised to nine, a following circular (of May 28 2008) specified that this includes a one hour break.

Table 6.1 Development of NREGA wages in India's largest States

	Minimum daily wages for agricultural workers		Official NREGA daily wage rate				NREGA wage rate to Minimum wage rate after indexation ^b	Real wage growth 2006-07 to 2009-2010 ^c
	2005-2006 ^a	2010/2011 ^b	As of Jan 1st 2009 ^a	Revised 2009-2010 ^a	As of Jan 1st 2011 ^a	As of April 1st 2012 ^a		
Andhra Pradesh	80	112-119 / 118-261	80	100	121	137	Mixed	-7.8
Assam	62	100	79.6	100	130	136	Higher	-1.1
Bihar	68	109-151.34	89	100	120	122	Mixed	0.8
Gujarat	50	100	100	100	124	134	Identical	0.7
Jharkhand	76	144.43	92	99	120	122	Lower	NA
Karnataka	63	133.8	82	100	125	155	Lower	0.2
Kerala	125	150/200	125	100	150	164	Mixed	-7.6
Madhya Pradesh	59	114	91	100	122	132	Lower	2.1
Maharashtra	47	100-120	66-72	100	127	145	Higher	-14.4
Odisha	55	90	70	90	125	126	Higher	10.1
Punjab	101	148.06	93-105	100	153	166	Lower	-0.6
Rajasthan	73	135	100	100	119	133	Lower	10.6
Tamil Nadu	80	85-100	80	100	119	132	Higher	-12.7
Uttar Pradesh	58	100	100	100	120	125	Identical	8.5
West Bengal	67	112.5	75	100	130	136	Higher ?	-2.1
India				100	127	138		2.1

^a Official wage rates: nrega.nic.in/nrega_statewise.pdf

^b Average wage costs per day 2009-2010: <http://nrega.nic.in/CEGC/Wages.pdf>

^c Average wage costs per day 2010-2011: nrega.nic.in accessed in February 2012

^d Average wage costs per day 2012-2013:

http://164.100.129.6/netnrega/dash_brd.aspx?fin_year=2012-2013

^e Real wage growth of NREGA wage rates is based on deflating nominal NREGA wage rates with the all-India Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPIAL):

<http://nrega.nic.in/CEGC/Wages.pdf>

Another on-going debate concerns the payment of statutory minimum wages for agricultural workers in NREGA. In 2006-07 the central government initially set the national daily minimum wage in NREGS at INR 60. Where higher State minimum wages for agricultural labourers existed, these were paid. However, in 2009 the NREGA minimum wage was centrally fixed at INR 100. This corresponds to the national minimum

wage floor, which is no uniform national minimum wage level, but rather an instrument for the harmonisation of different State minimum wages. In that way NREGS wages were delinked from State minimum wages (Aruna Roy & Dey, 2011). The effect was that NREGS wages were lower than the State minimum wages in several States (MoRD, 2012: 9). The reason why the central government has been hesitant to pay agricultural minimum wages in NREGA, is that these are determined by the States and the Centre fears rapid increases in these wages once the Centre agrees to pay them (Working Group on Wages, 2010). Instead of agreeing to pay State minimum wages, after long discussions, in January 2011, the central government accepted the nominal wages of INR 100 a day for 2009 as baseline and an indexation to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPIAL). This move led to wages hikes of 17-30 per cent across the country (Balchand, 2011). However, in several States the wage rates fixed to the CPIAL are still lower than the respective State minimum wages. For the future determination of NREGA wages an expert committee has been set up, which had not presented its conclusions until March 2014.

And, the case whether the central government can decide to pay less than the State minimum wages for agricultural labourers was brought to India's Supreme Court. In its ruling of in January 2012 India's highest court States that non-payment of minimum wages qualifies as forced labour (see Working Group on Wages, 2010).¹⁴⁷ The MoRD argues that NREGA provides other benefits to workers, which are not included in minimum wages, which also have monetary value, such as provision of crèches etc. (SCRD, 2013: 36).

Opposing those voices that demand higher wages in NREGS, the counter argument – that wages are too high – has also regularly been made since the inception of the scheme. One argument is that higher MGNREGS wages have detrimental effects on agriculture because they push up the general agricultural wage levels. A key question is whether the NREGS wage rates at or above market rates keep people from seeking more productive employment elsewhere (controversially see Anklesaria,

¹⁴⁷ The continued failure of the central government to address this issue has also led to the resignation of the activists Aruna Roy from the NAC in May 2013.

2009). And, indeed the majority of studies does find an increase in market wages through NREGA (MoRD, 2012: 8ff). But, the assumption that

rising wages by themselves represent a problem is not credible since this is the only mechanism through which landless agricultural labour can benefit from economic growth. If rising wages squeeze farm profitability, the solution lies in raising farm productivity to accommodate higher wages. (GoI, 2013: 7)

And, agricultural wages grew on very low levels prior to the introduction of NREGA – despite the parallel general growth acceleration and higher productivity in agriculture – therefore the enhanced bargaining power of rural labourers through NREGS should be welcomed as “valid ground for optimism” (Jha, Gaiha & Shankar, 2010: 206). There is little evidence that MGNREGS drives up market wages, in particular where the unmet demand is high (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 14f). In sum, wage levels in NREGA and their adequacy do remain contested.

Other studies have looked for and found additional indicators for material welfare gains: In the design of NREGA there are a number of avenues through which material improvements and well-being can be reached for rural households. One theme is an increase in household income, through the availability of more regular employment and through the level of wage payments. But, also other aspects of NREGA than employment, can contribute to this dimension. For example heightened food security and reliability of food consumption may be generated through increases in agricultural production through the improvement of individual or collective rural infrastructure. Of the workers in India’s agricultural sector 35 per cent are casual workers and 65 per cent are self-employed farmers, out of the farmers 84 per cent are marginal or small farmers (NCEUS, 2009: 13). Overall, a majority of India’s rural population lives from subsistence farming, and more food production among them can also be expected to lead to higher consumption. Another frequently mentioned indicator for livelihood improvement would be the reduction of distress or forced migration.

In terms of heightened food security and reliability of food consumption therefore increases in agricultural production are relevant. Banerjee and Saha (2010: 44) note such increases and attribute them to the increased use of fertilizers, that became possible through NREGA wages. Howev-

er, so far no uniform effects of NREGS on agricultural production and productivity have been observed. What is highlighted in a number of studies is that “Districts and villages, which have performed better in the NREGA implementation, demonstrate a visible growth in agricultural production and productivity” (MoRD, 2012: 42ff).

Also the reduction of distress or forced migration is sometimes used as indicator for livelihood improvement.¹⁴⁸ The effect of NREGA on migration and its desirability is a highly controversial issue. On the one hand, keeping internal migration at bay is not a stated aim of the legislation, yet frequently treated as such. For example, in a study for the Planning Commission the IAMR (2008: i) argues, “the Act ... aims at arresting out-migration of rural households in search of employment” (also see MoRD, 2012: x). On the other hand, commenters such as Chowdary (2011), chairman of the BJP linked Pragna Bharati movement, question whether it is desirable at all to keep workers in the villages through NREGA. He argues that historically migration has led to many positive effects in individual countries and the world. According to him, “any scheme that is designed to contain India’s rural population in the village of their birth itself is a retrograde step” (ibid.).¹⁴⁹ He furthermore questions the availability of useful and sustainable work in every village year after year to satisfy demand.

Academically there is no coherent view on distress migration (MoRD, 2012: 46ff).¹⁵⁰ An early cross-state study on the effects of NREGA shows that outmigration remains frequent after the introduction of NREGA, and that 70 per cent of the migration is not for better wages, but for any paid employment and, hence, distress migration (IAMR 2008). Pankaj

¹⁴⁸ Breman (2010: 13f) discusses the disastrous effects of the over-supply of labour, which exceeds the structural demand for this factor in production. This turns workers into ‘footloose labour.’

¹⁴⁹ A similar position is adopted by the Prime Minister of India that followed Manmohan Singh, Narendra Modi. He won the 2013 national elections for the BJP and is a critic of the NREG scheme. Prior to the introduction of the budget for 2015-2016 he called NREGA “an epitome of your (Congress) failure. After so many years of being in power, all you were able to deliver is for a poor man to dig ditches a few days a month” (ANI, 2015; also see Sim, 2015).

¹⁵⁰ The effect on migration is also controversially discussed in the media. For example claims are made about the impact on farmers in Punjab – who look for migrant labour in vain (Ghuman & Dua, 2012).

(2012b: 22) observed a 12 per cent reduction in migration among NREGS worker households in Bihar between 2006 and 2008. A study on two Districts in Tamil Nadu on the other hand stresses that wage levels influence the effects of NREGA on migration at home and in migration (Jacob, 2008). These, as well as other incentives, may be different for women and men.¹⁵¹ Breman & Kannan (2013: 17) sum up, “the suggestion that rural labour has become less footloose because of NREGA would, in our view, overstate whatever the scheme has managed to accomplish.” Overall, there is no uniform evidence on the effect of NREGS on distress migration, in many cases it remains not quantified and on the level of anecdotal evidence.

Livelihood improvements could also be achieved by the types of work carried out, if useful and sustainable infrastructure is created and maintained. Studies indicate that well planned and executed NREGS works deliver high returns on investment. But, there are also many problems associated with the quality. Overall there is no coherent picture at an all India level (MoRD, 2012: 27ff). In this respect some authors caution that the types of works that can be funded “water conservation, land development, afforestation, provision of irrigation systems, construction of roads, or flood control – are prone to being taken over by wealthier sections of society” (Sjoblom & Farrington, 2008). This is the case i.e. when the poorest sections of society do neither own land, nor other assets, and therefore have little to gain from e.g. improved soil and water quality.¹⁵² One study revealed that about half of the interviewed NREGA beneficiaries possessed cultivable land before NREGA was implemented, and that “the increase in asset base with the impact of this scheme is negligible” (IAMR, 2008: 23).

Based on the pilot study I have argued elsewhere that for those rural households that do not possess assets, skill development may be a (more) viable option for sustainable livelihood improvement (Ehmke,

¹⁵¹ Most women in Jacob’s (2008) study discontinued migration after NREGA because the wages in NREGA are higher than wages paid at home earlier, but not much different from those they would get if they migrated for labour to coffee plantations. Men on the other hand can earn significantly more as migrant labour in i.e. construction and therefore had the intention to continue to migrate for work

¹⁵² This was what workers reported during my pilot study in Northern Maharashtra, Dhulia (Ehmke, 2011a).

2011a). The lack of such training options in NREGS has also been noted by Sjoblom & Farrington (2008) as well as Hirway (2012: 63).¹⁵³

Other studies criticise that even if all the provisions of the Act were met, NREGA would still be insufficient to considerably and sustainably increase the livelihood security of India's rural population, because NREGA cannot (even) lift people out of poverty (CEC, 2009: 7f; Mehta, 2011; Mehta, Shepherd, Bhide, Shah & Kumar, 2011). The main critique is that the number of days per household and the wages are too low to lift people permanently above the poverty line – or even if they cross the line, they still belong the vulnerable poor. Therefore (Mehta, 2011; Mehta *et al.*, 2011) calls NREGA a poverty amelioration programme.

The review of previous findings shows how little we actually know about the material welfare gains through NREGA. Most indicators – wage levels, increased agricultural production, reduction of distress migration, gains from the NREGA-built infrastructure – point to improvements in some regions as well as to shortcomings in others. It is particularly worrying that NREGA workers are partially paid below statutory minimum wages. Additionally, it is a matter of concern that there is so little information on the effect of the NREGS-built infrastructure for the rural population, as this is a key concern of the NREG-Act.

6.1.2 Previous findings on welfare gains in reliability

Besides material well-being, reliability has been developed as a central dimension of social security and welfare at the outset of this book. If the security of livelihoods is to be enhanced sustainably that is unlikely to be achieved by a one-time action. For people to achieve greater social security there needs to be a reliable and secure income source.

In that respect questions of the reliability of provision of work as well as the regularity and timing of payments are central. The Act entails the provisions that everyone upon application should get a dated receipt of application, and work within two weeks' time, or be paid and unemployment allowance. Whether these provisions for a demand-based

¹⁵³ Apart from the lack of skill development in NREGS there also is a fear among civil society and academic activists that NREGA might contribute to a loss of skills for rural artisans. Where the income from artisanal work is so low that they resort to the NREGS manual labour it might impact on their ability to use their skills in the long run.

provision of employment are being met, is central for reliability. A related question is, whether NREGA is equally accessible to all groups, or whether there are errors of exclusion to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable sections, such as women, SC and ST populations. In order to be reliable, work needs to be available and accessible to all those entitled. Especially the theme of delayed payments has featured large in previous studies. The GoI (2011: 61) acknowledges that late payments are the most frequent complaint under NREGS. Inadequacy of and late payment “cause great hardship to NREGA labourers ... they are forced to resort to lower-paid or exploitative employment, and even distress migration” (Khera, 2011b: 250). Khera thus expects that the failure to deliver adequate and timely payments could turn the majority of workers against the scheme.

In principle, the reliability of payments should have been tackled through the introduction of bank and post office payments, which de-links implementing agencies from payment agencies, and thereby reduces the opportunities to siphon off funds (*ibid.*). The decision to make payments via banks and post offices led to an unseen opening of accounts in rural areas, and yet their rapid introduction led to overload and bottlenecks (Adhikari & Bhatia, 2010). On the one hand, bank payments can be more easily tracked. But, on the other hand, workers – and in particular illiterate workers – face difficulties with the banking and post office system (also see Banerjee & Saha, 2010). Workers need to get familiar with the new modes of payment if embezzlement shall be avoided in the future (Adhikari & Bhatia, 2010). And, Khera (2011b: 252f) stresses that many sources of delay happen prior to the banking process in the overall administration of the scheme.

The other big question of reliability is the provision of employment on demand; this is the central guarantee in NREGA. The demand-based nature of the scheme is the angle for the realisation of many of the Act's core features such as eligibility of all rural households, but it is also important for community participation in the selection of works, as well as to ensure reliability. On a general level, it is difficult, to answer this question to because reliable data on demand for employment is so hard to come by, not the least because there are administrative disincentives to

report un-met demand for work such the costs of unemployment allowances and the need to justify why demand was not met.¹⁵⁴

One survey that asked whether households demanded and got employment is the 66th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) (National Sample Survey Office, NSSO, 2011). For the period July 2009 to June 2010, 24 per cent of rural households said that they got work in NREGS, whereas 19 per cent sought employment in MGNREGS, but could not avail it (NSSO, 2011: i). This study, hence, points to a large potential of unmet demand.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, such indicators for potential unmet demand have one more flaw: they can highlight whether a household did not get any work in NREGS, but not whether a participating household got as many days of employment as demanded (also see Dutta *et al.*, 2012). That this is significant is suggested also by the fact that demand for work was higher than employment provided among participants across all four research

¹⁵⁴ Earlier statistics on the official NREGA website www.nrega.nic.in, which offers a wide range of data on implementation in all Indian States, included a category of 'No. of households who have demanded employment' and the number for whom employment has been provided. According to official figures in the financial years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 – for which this data used to be available – employment was provided to roughly 99 per cent of households that had demanded such. However, this data has repeatedly been criticised by as unreliable and “deceptive” (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 5; NCEUS, 2009: 217; Hirway, 2012: 66; Drèze & Oldiges, 2011; Mihir Shah Committee, 2012; CAG, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2012). These figures rather illustrate ex-post notice of demand when employment is provided. Today the category of demand is no longer part of the national key figures on NREGA.

¹⁵⁵ For example, the comparison between the share of the rural population living below the poverty line (BPL) – which is assumed to have an interest in working in NREGA – and the share of households that have been provided employment, shows that there is a correlation only at an aggregate level. But in States such as Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh the participation rates in MGNREGS are lower than the respective share of rural poor (also see CAG, 2013: 6). This may be taken as indicator that employment is not provided to all those that seek such in all of rural India. Conversely, in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal the share of rural households that participated in NREGA is higher than the BPL population in rural areas. A participation rate above the poverty rate is within the logic of the scheme as it is open to all rural households and not only those that are officially counted as living in poverty. Additionally, the poverty line is – as discussed above highly contested and very sensitive.

locations. This phenomenon is called rationing of work (also see Pankaj, 2012a: 102; Ghuman & Dua, 2012: 190). A significant

part of the rationing could also be caused by a deliberate stopping of works during certain seasons by state governments. ... Local governments start and stop works throughout the year, with most works concentrated during the first two quarters of the year prior to the monsoon. ... Field reports also document government attempts to stop works during the rainy season so that they do not compete with the labour needs of farmers. (MoRD, 2012: 57f)

Also, the degree of rationing is higher for the poor sections of the population than the non-poor in all Indian States but Kerala and Rajasthan (Dutta *et al.*, 2012).

Even less can such statistics estimate the number of those who would like to work, but who have not officially expressed their demand. And, there is evidence that this is also the case. It is well captured in the reply of a village elder who – when told that hundred days of employment at minimum wages are now a right upon application – said “*darinder darkhast diya tho daftar band ho gaya*” (When the wretched, the poor, make a submission, the office is closed)” (CEC, 2009: 7; also see several contributions in Khera, 2011c).

This points to another shortcoming: typically neither are dated receipts of application given to wage seekers, nor are unemployment allowances paid in case work is not provided within two weeks after application. Dated receipts of applications were not given in 282 GPs across 21 States and unemployment allowance was not paid in 58 of the surveyed Blocks across 17 States according to a report by Comptroller and Auditor General (2008: 51f; on non-payment of unemployment allowances also see Hirway, 2012: 66; Pankaj, 2012a: 109; Raabe *et al.*, 2012). This finding was largely repeated in a later CAG report (2013: 10). Both CAG reports find that applications for work are hardly recorded. If they are recorded, they are typically neither dated, nor do workers receive receipts for their application. In consequence the eligibility for unemployment allowance was not verifiable (CAG, 2013). But one may also argue that putting the application in writing itself is an obstacle for many rural workers with

few years of schooling and high rates of illiteracy. Sharma and Gupta point out that

the state's emphasis on the written word immediately places poor, uneducated people, and particularly low-caste, non-literate women, in a position of disadvantage. Many state-implemented development and empowerment programs are purportedly intended to reduce economic and social inequality; yet it is ironic that the very procedures of state institutions perpetuate, rather than reduce, those inequalities. (ibid. 2006b: 13)

With regards to unemployment allowances, de facto there is close to zero payment of under NREGS (on non-payment of unemployment allowances see Hirway, 2012: 66; Pankaj, 2012a: 109; Raabe *et al.*, 2012). In 2010-2011 the actual payment of unemployment allowances stood at only INR 123,589 for all of India. In the two following years no unemployment allowances were paid at all (SCRD, 2013: 46ff).¹⁵⁶

Given the current lack of reliable figures on demand for employment “work provided is assumed to be by definition identical to work demanded” (MoRD, 2012: 60). Yet, it is widely acknowledged that de facto there is a shortage in the supply of NREGS employment in many States and regions therein (Khera, 2011c; Drèze, 2011b; Dutta *et al.*, 2012; Pankaj, 2012c). Even the MoRD itself admits that there is rationing of work (MoRD, 2012: 57f). And, both CAG (2013) and the Standing Committee on Rural Development, (2013) criticise the lack of reliable data on demand as key shortcoming, which seriously hampers the realisation of the potential of the Act.

A third theme related to reliability and certainty is accessibility. In this regard several authors critically discuss whether all the rural poor have equal access to NREGA works. The recent round of the NSS suggests that poorer households at an aggregate level are not disadvantaged in getting Job Cards (NSSO, 2011: i). But, with regards to the provision of employment and the number of days provided per household, better-off households are privileged (NSSO, 2011: 38f; also see Banerji, 2011; Dutta *et al.*, 2012). So-called ‘errors of exclusion’ to the disadvantage of the

¹⁵⁶ For an example of a Block where active worker organisations realised the payment of unemployment allowances see Khera (2008).

poorest seem to be the case in NREGA, as they have been in earlier public work schemes (Sjoblom & Farrington, 2008).

The NSSO did not ask for reasons why households did not get NREGS employment, and hence these cannot be quantified. But, one obstacle to participation in NREGS works is that some of the most deprived of India's rural society are not able to perform long days of manual labour in the scheme due to their weak physical condition and malnourishment (CEC, 2009: 7f). Access is also mitigated when households migrate elsewhere. Thereby they may lose the opportunity to get a Job Card, to decide on the works in the village – which could potentially be carried out in their own fields – and to avail employment (IAMR 2008).

The largest body of literature on access to NREGA deals with those groups that are disadvantaged on the labour market: women, as well as the SC and ST populations. NREG-Act also entails special provisions for these three particularly disadvantaged groups.

Starting with women, to encourage their participation in NREGA the following provisions have been made: there is mandatory one-third quota for women's participation, crèche facilities are to be provided at the worksite, work must be within proximity of the residence, and the payment of equal payment of wages is stipulated in the Act.¹⁵⁷ At an aggregate level NREGS has indeed a very good record of female participation. Female participation in the scheme rates quickly rose in the first

¹⁵⁷ Rural women in India are less than half as likely as their male counterparts to work. The labour force participation rate for rural areas was 84 per cent for males, and only 38 per cent for rural females among the working age population aged 15-59 years in 2011-2012 (NSSO, 2013 10). Women's chances to receive cash wages are lower than for men, and if wages are paid to women at all they are on average 20 per cent lower – for the same type of work in casual labour (Holmes *et al.*, 2010: 10f). Besides the general discrimination against women, there is discrimination among women too: In non-farm employment women from general castes could work for as much as 290 days per year, while for ST women got employment for 73 days and for ST females for a maximum of 148 days. Similarly NSSO data from 2001 revealed that roughly 57 per cent SC and 37 per cent of ST women worked as agricultural labourer in rural areas as compared with 29 per cent among non-SC/STs (cited in Holmes *et al.*, 2010: 10f). Despite constituting a strong share of the agricultural work force women own less than one-10th of agricultural lands (NAWO, 2008 cited in Holmes *et al.*, 2010: 11), hence, there is gross asset inequality to the disadvantage of women.

years after inception and have stabilised at 48 per cent. This is a significant achievement given the overall low labour force participation rates of women in rural areas. As in other fields, there also is high interstate variation with regards to female participation, especially the States of Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh fall behind the statutory requirement of providing one third of employment to women (SCRD, 2013: 87, also see Table 6.2 below).

Table 6.2 Female participation in NREGS

State	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Andhra Pradesh	55	58	58	58	57	58	58
Assam	32	31	27	28	27	25	25
Bihar	17	28	30	30	28	29	31
Jharkhand	39	27	29	34	33	31	32
Kerala	66	71	85	88	90	93	93
Madhya Pradesh	43	42	43	44	44	42	43
Maharashtra	37	40	46	40	46	46	45
Odisha	36	36	38	36	39	39	38
Rajasthan	67	69	67	67	68	69	69
Tamil Nadu	81	82	80	83	83	74	75
Uttar Pradesh	17	15	18	22	21	17	19
West Bengal	18	17	27	33	34	32	33
India	40	43	48	48	48	47	54

Source: Standing Committee on Rural Development, 2013: 14f. Data for 2011-2012 provisional. Data for 2012-2013 as on 02.11.2012

A crucial incentive for women to work in NREGS is the provision of equal wages (see Table 6.3 below and also Holmes *et al.*, 2010: 10f; MoRD, 2012: 18ff).¹⁵⁸ But despite this provision, according to recent NSSO data, wages of women in NREGS are about 10 per cent lower than those of men (also see Pankaj & Tankha, 2010: 53). In the research locations, differences in wages between men and women were in particular reported in Chikhaldara. The difference however is smaller than in private rural employment. In the past NREGS also were significantly higher for women than other rural wages, which also was a major incentive.

¹⁵⁸ For an overview of different arguments made about female participation see Pankaj and Tankha (2010: 48).

Table 6.3 Nominal rural daily wages in- and outside NREGS

	NSS 61 st round 2004-2005 in INR ¹	NSS 66 th round 2009-2010 in INR ¹	NSS 68 th round 2011- 2012 in INR ²
Rural casual daily wages outside public employment male	55.05	101.53	149.32
Wages in public works not MGNREGS male	65.33	98.33	127.39
Wages in MGNREGS male	–	90.93	112.46
Rural casual daily wages outside public employment female	34.94	68.94	103.28
Wages in public works not MGNREGS female	49.19	86.11	110.62
Wages in MGNREGS female	–	87.20	101.97

Source: ¹ National Sample Survey Office, 2011: 93, ² National Sample Survey Office, 2013: 24

NREGS is further valued by women because work is available close to their homes, it is offered by the government and thus “work is considered socially acceptable and ‘dignified’” (Khera & Nayak, 2009: 51). It offers employment to women who have hitherto not worked outside their homes or own fields. The wage earning opportunities in MGNREGA have in some cases led to greater autonomy of women in intra-household relations, higher income and consumption, as well as increased choice and capability, but for others it had the reverse effect of mounted pressure on the time allocated to household chores (Holmes *et al.*, 2010: 10f; Pankaj & Tankha, 2010: 48ff).

And, women still tend to work less days than man, ideas on a gendered division of labour restrain women from participating in certain types of work, a lack of crèche facilities excludes women with young children from participating (Sjoblom & Farrington, 2008; Narayanan, 2011b). Various studies have found that the crèches are not in place in many sites (CAG, 2008; Narayanan, 2011b). And, according to most studies women have been less involved in the decision-making on MGNREGA works than men (Holmes *et al.*, 2010: ix; Khera & Nayak, 2009). On the latter Pankaj & Tankha (2010: 51) write, “even in the case of the increased presence of women at the Gram Sabha, male participants dominate the

decision-making process. Entrenched gender relations are hard to dismantle.”¹⁵⁹

Two other major marginalised groups that face discrimination in the labour market are Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations (Thorat, 2008; Thorat & Newman, 2010).¹⁶⁰ In NREGA overall SC/ST participation is high. Since the inception of NREGS 28 per cent of the participants belonged to a SC community and 23 to an ST community, in all States their participation in NREGA is higher than their share in the respective population, except in Maharashtra (SCRD, 2013: 14ff). There has been a declining trend in SC and ST participation (CAG, 2013; also see Table 6.4 below and Table 6.5 opposite).

The high SC/ ST participation trends have been subject to competing interpretations, while the MoRD discusses this as a targeting success (2012: 13), other, more sceptical observers, point out that it is a sign that SC and ST are in the most dire need for decently paid employment and have few opportunities outside the agricultural sector.

Table 6.4 Rural SC households, NREGS employment in selected States

State	Rural SC HH in 100,000	SC person days employment provided in 10,000,000						
		2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	2010- 2011	2011- 2012	2012- 2013
Bihar	29.83	2.81	3.85	4.96	5.15	7.27	1.54	1.26
Maharashtra	17.77	0.25	0.34	0.69	0.70	0.44	0.38	0.39
Punjab	13.02	0.10	0.15	0.30	0.60	0.59	0.50	0.32
Uttar Pradesh	65.36	4.67	7.32	12.16	20.07	18.07	8.37	3.25
West Bengal	39.67	1.58	3.51	2.95	5.71	5.73	4.84	4.04

Source: Standing Committee on Rural Development, 2013: 16. Population data Census 2011. Data for 2011-2012 provisional. Data for 2012-2013 as on 30.01.2013.

¹⁵⁹ Making MGNREGS works and procedures more women friendly is thus part of the current 12th Five-Year-Plan (Government of India, 2013: 217 Vol. III).

¹⁶⁰ Another group that experiences labour market discrimination are Muslims, but there is no special reservation under MGNREGA. ST and SC are “generally employed in land- based industries like agriculture, mining and construction. Muslims were associated with trade apart from manufacturing and transport, storage and communication services. ... Those belonging to ‘Other’ communities maintain higher participation in the lucrative service industries like banking & finance and real estate & business services. Thus, social status of workers has a definite influence on the choice of employment.” (NCEUS, 2009: 60f).

Table 6.5 Rural ST households, NREGS employment in selected States

State	Rural ST HH in 100,000	ST person days employment provided in 10,000,000						
		2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	2010- 2011	2011- 2012	2012- 2013
Andhra Pra- desh	13.24	0.88	2.57	3.54	5.95	5.37	5.08	3.50
Assam	8.14	2.65	1.91	2.59	2.27	1.28	0.81	0.38
Gujarat	15.25	0.64	0.59	1.07	2.30	2.02	1.25	0.68
Jharkhand	15.42	2.09	3.11	2.99	3.62	3.49	2.35	1.44
Madhya Pradesh	29.69	9.59	13.42	13.80	11.90	9.55	4.32	2.24
Maharashtra	18.71	0.65	0.71	1.85	0.91	0.51	1.11	0.77
Rajasthan	17.03	6.43	7.79	11.22	10.11	7.04	5.17	3.84
West Bengal	22.16	0.81	1.33	1.16	2.23	2.08	1.47	1.14

Source: Standing Committee on Rural Development, 2013: 16f. Population data Census 2011. Data for 2011-2012 provisional. Data for 2012-2013 as on 30.01.2013

The review of previous studies on reliability reveal that irregularity of payments and the failure to provide work on demand are two central problems in the implementation of NREGA, albeit with regional differences. Rather positive trends can be seen in the high participation rates of women and other groups that are disadvantaged on the labour market, the SC and ST communities.

6.1.3 Previous findings on welfare gains in the field of agency

As discussed in the definitions of terms in chapter 2.1, both the definitions of welfare and social security are not only connected to material well-being and reliability, but also to agency. They are also about voice and capabilities to decide how one wants to lead his or her life. In this respect it is significant that NREGS does not only aim to contribute to the material betterment of the rural populations, but also delegates the decisions on what type of works should be carried out into their hands. Some observers therefore see the NREG Act as an opportunity to contribute to the development of agency of the participants, agency understood as “the capacity of actors to shape the environment in which they find themselves” (Hay, 2002: 253). The scheme is supposed to benefit some of the most vulnerable groups, landless labourers and marginal farmers. But, a relevant question is whether they are able to claim these benefits in the dynamics of the politics of implementation, or whether the scheme rather benefits other groups with more resources. In the field of agency, previous studies emphasise the awareness about the Act and its provi-

sions, participation in decision-making, and participation in monitoring the scheme.

For participation in the scheme, awareness about the scheme and its opportunities, as well as the right to take decisions is a primary condition. Sjoblom & Farrington (2008) argue that

the poor need to be empowered to demand their rights for any form of targeting to be effective. The 'right to work' embedded in NREGA makes it unique, and if efforts are made to help the poor in recognising and articulating this right, these may ultimately prove to be equally, or perhaps even more important, than the principle of self-targeting.

However, so far a number of studies conclude that there is "low awareness among potential beneficiaries about certain provisions of the NREGA. This limits their ability to fully benefit under the Act" (MoRD, 2012: 55). Hence, low awareness as a major impediment for the full realisation of the potential of the scheme (Pankaj, 2012b: 27; also see Banerjee & Saha, 2010). On the other side, where there are active worker organisations, the level of awareness of their rights and of the processes how to claim them tend to be higher: this can lead to a higher number of days worked, payment of minimum wages and even unemployment allowances (Khera, 2008).

Besides the lack of awareness there also is a clear lack of involvement in decision-making procedures as laid out in the Act. In many locations Gram Sabha meetings are either not taking place at all, or "meetings are attended by villagers with vested interests, the set of priority areas may favour only few people, and this, in turn, may reduce the commitment of villagers to programme implementation" (Raabe *et al.*, 2012: 318). Khera (2008) lists an exemplary case, where even with active worker organisations, the priorities of the Gram Sabha were overruled and other works than those prioritised were opened.

Besides participation in decision-making, which can be seen as an ex-ante involvement, NREGS also foresees the involvement of participants in the control of the scheme, so to say the ex-post involvement. The tool to increase the voice of participants in the scheme and its implementa-

tion has been the development of public social audits.¹⁶¹ The State with the broadest implementation of social audits at the time of writing was Andhra Pradesh, on which most studies on social audits also concentrate (Burra, 2010; Gopal, 2009).¹⁶² The idea of social audits is highly welcomed by activists and leftist academia alike. The main positive effect of social audits besides the recovery of the misappropriated sums is the raised awareness and confidence of villagers to approach local officials and not to accept arbitrary charges from post masters, contractors etc. (Burra, 2010: 12; Drèze, 2011a).

But, audits are not conducted regularly, and not in all locations. In 2011-12 social audits were held in 172,852 Panchayats out of a total of 248,204 Gram Panchayats. Additionally, participation rates in the meetings were low (SCRD, 2013: 55, 95; CAG, 2013). To improve the social audits, new rules were formulated in the revised Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Audit of Schemes Rules, 2011. These, besides others, call upon the States to identify or set up independent State-level social audits units to improve the facilitation and ensure the conduct of regular social audits. Central part of the regulations is the separation of the social audits from the implementing agencies. But, such dedicated social audit units have so far only been created in five States (Andhra Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) (SCRD, 2013: 56).

A major obstacle, according to Drèze (2011a: 242) is, that the very administration that tended to profit from 'leakages' and corruption earlier, is now supposed to implement mechanisms that are meant to reduce these.

¹⁶¹ A social audit essentially is a process in which the documents related to a government scheme – in the case of NREGA muster rolls, job cards, wage slips, sanctioned works etc. – are assembled and made public in a meeting of villagers. This gives everyone present the chance to validate the information or uncover fraud. Following the village level meetings assemblies at Block level are held and the culprits – corrupt officials – are sanctioned, often on the spot. They have to return the misappropriated sums and frequently they are suspended. A key for the social audit process is availability of all relevant documents. In NREGA they are by law to be maintained and made public on demand. These are the so-called transparency guarantees, which are also guaranteed by the Right to Information Act (RTI).

¹⁶² The origins of social audits lie in Rajasthan where they have been developed by the grassroots movement Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghthana (MKSS) to unveil large-scale corruption in earlier drought relief programmes.

The scrutiny of the social audits may also have the unintended effect to discourage local officials from NREGA implementation in fear of making mistakes and being punished for these (Burra, 2010). And, the State needs to ensure the safety of those who have testified in audit processes.¹⁶³

Despite its role as a forerunner in social audits, there also is critique towards the organisation of social audits in AP. In their current format social audits are said to fail in enabling villagers to access and assess NREGA data proactively; government led external auditors are brought in to do the process, reports are not adequately published, tracking and recovery of misappropriations discovered often is poor (Gopal, 2009). Others highlight that audits are faked by the Sarpanch, while other social audits have been auctioned through tenders to enterprises and “so-called NGOs” who promise to do audits for INR 27 per Gram Panchayat (GP) (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 45). Carried out in such a way, the most radical and critical tool of NREGA has been made blunt. Realising the full potential of audits would need “tremendous efforts at grass roots, mobilisation and preparation of the community to understand what the audit process means and how they can use it to ensure that they direct development interventions in their own villages” (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 45).

This review of previous studies on welfare gains through NREGA shows that there are a number of indicators for all three dimensions on welfare that have been previously used, although they have not necessarily been categorised in the same way (also see Table 6.17 for an overview of findings). This is because none of the studies cited above has explicitly investigated changes along all three dimensions of welfare gains. This is a strength of this study.

¹⁶³ This need is underpinned by the death of the social activist Lalit Mehta, who was found dead on 15 May 2008 in the woods of Palamu District in the North Eastern state of Jharkhand, “a mutilated body, eyes gouged out and face bruised. Village folk there termed the murder ‘an intimidation not to conduct an audit,’ which was scheduled on 26 May” (Jeelani, 2010). Mehta had helped the economics professor activist Jean Drèze to facilitate social audits in his home District Palamu. This shows how contested social audits can be and how disruptive they can be for local society.

Another feature that sets this study apart from others is that it analyses implementation mainly by engaging with the assessment of the scheme by participants. This is because the study is built on the conviction that “ultimately the success and failure of social security ... [has] to be judged in terms of what it does to the lives that people are able to lead” (Drèze & Sen, 1991: 31). Participants’ voices are complemented – and contrasted – by the accounts of the administration and civil society groups active in the research locations. Such a perspective acknowledges the interactive and dynamic character of implementation, in which citizens as active readers of policy contribute to implementation through their interpretation, “they are among the parties who have to be active toward implementation, through coproduction or in some other less direct fashion” (O’Toole, 2000: 266). Participants are no “passive targets to be hit by a policy missile” (Yanow, 1996: 26).

That I aim to understand the participants’ perspectives is one of the reasons for the focus on the Gram Panchayat or local level processes in this chapter. This is the central arena of the dynamics of implementation, where individual and collective claims are formulated, interests are represented, as well as conflicts between competing interests arise and need to be resolved. Much of the political contestation – that is typically attributed to the policy-making stage in Northern policy analysis – takes place at the implementation stage here (Scott, 1967; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 66f, 125). In encounters between administration and citizens they mutually create, sustain, adapt to and change ideas and expectations about their counterparts. It is *a* if not *the* focal point for interest articulation and participation. For many citizens the GP and to certain extent the Block level may not be the most attractive arena to make their claims and represent their interests, but it is more – if not the only – arena accessible. Participants’ knowledge on administrative structures and their role for implementation beyond Block level officials also tends to be low. Hence, the primary level of encounters for workers, and the realm in which their opinion of the scheme is formed, is their locality. However, the intermediate levels are also important because policy passes through an interpretation process at these levels before they reach the GPs. Thus local implementation is embedded in the administrative structures of the Intermediate Panchayat, the Blocks that are regionally also called *mandals*, *talukas* or *tahsils*. These together with the Districts

shape important parameters of the scheme's rollout. For example, most of the technical and financial sanctioning is done either on Block or on District level. The Districts and Block levels are also important for the politics of implementation, because this is where administrative processes are organised. The State level is important for the formulation of the more specific scheme guidelines and the overall administrative oversight. The national level will play a smaller role in this chapter.

The administration's view on the scheme also impacts on the implementation, because it shapes the image of the scheme for the participants. The latter is a key assumption of Yanow's argumentation, implementors – the staff charged with the implementation – read the policy actively and interpret it (1996: 229ff). The implementors, or “street-level bureaucrats are seen as actively interpreting agency rules and regulations, and these enacted interpretations are interpreted in turn by clients as constituting policy” (ibid.: 18).

The ‘clients’, the NREGS participants or generally rural citizen, presented with that reading are then not in contact with the original policy content. They react to an interpreted version of policy intent, focus and rules. The accounts of the scheme by the beneficiaries, their impressions and the perceived effects are, hence, mediated through their contacts with the respective scheme administration.

And, often the picture of the scheme painted by the local administration during an encounter with participants is the main source of information on the scheme for the latter. Participants in turn also create interpretations of the scheme, which are read by others, among them the administration.

6.2 *Adilabad District in Andhra Pradesh*

The first site of field research is the District of Adilabad, which is located in the northwest of Andhra Pradesh and borders the State of Maharashtra.¹⁶⁴ It is situated in an area that has historically been under the influ-

¹⁶⁴ As discussed above, in footnote 92, in 2014 the State of Andhra Pradesh was divided into two states. Adilabad District lies in the newly founded northern State of Telangana. Although today the southern State is called Andhra Pradesh, as mentioned earlier, I always refer to the former, larger state of Andhra Pradesh, which existed during my fieldwork in 2012.

ence of north as well as south Indian dynasties (Chief Planning Officer, CPO, 2009). Today, it is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic area. Dominant is the native Telugu language and culture, but also the neighbouring Marathi is present, as well as influxes of other languages and cultures.¹⁶⁵

Climatically three seasons are distinguished in Adilabad. *Rabi* (winter) lasts from October to January and is a dry and cooler season. It is followed by summer from February to May, which is hot – with temperatures up to 52°C – and dry. Lastly, from June to October it is *kharif*, the rainy season. The season starts with the south-west monsoon, which brings 85 per cent of the annual rainfall, and is followed by the north-east monsoon (Rao, 2008: 7f). The normal annual rainfall for the District for 2008-2009 was 1157 mms, the actual rainfall in the same year – a particular drought year – was only 881 mms (CPO, 2009: 8, 48).

A large share of 42.8 per cent of the District's surface is covered with tropical forests in 2008-2009 (*ibid.*).¹⁶⁶ About 35 per cent of the land is used for agriculture, and about 70 per cent of the workforce depends on agriculture, half of them as cultivators and half of them as agricultural labourers without own land. Agriculture is hence the most important

¹⁶⁵ Adilabad is also listed among the Districts of the 'Red Corridor', these are Districts of east and central India where so-called 'Naxalite' Maoist movements are active. According to an expert group appointed by the Indian Planning Commission in 2008, "the Naxalite (Maoist) movement has to be recognised as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and *adivasis*. Its emergence and growth need to be contextualised in the social conditions and experience of people who form a part of it. The huge gap between state policy and performance is a feature of these conditions. Though its professed long-term ideology is capturing state power by force, in its day-to-day manifestation, it is to be looked upon as basically a fight for social justice, equality, protection, security and local development" (cited in Roy, 2009). Starting in October 2009, the GoI has engaged in large-scale military action against the Naxalite movements in the so-called 'Operation Green Hunt', which has repeatedly been criticised by Indian and foreign observers (Roy, 2009; Jaoul & Desquesnes, 2011). For an early assessment on NREGA in the so-called 'Red Corridor' see (Banerjee & Saha, 2010). The presence of Maoists in Adilabad was never believed to be as strong as in other Districts, and they are not believed to be present throughout the whole District either. During fieldwork, there were no issues with alleged Naxalite activities in the research locations.

¹⁶⁶ The share of forestland has been as high as about 80 per cent in 1975. Over the past decade reforestation initiatives reversed the prior, long downward trend and the forests grow by 1-2 per cent per year (Rao, 2008).

source of income for people in the District. The most common crops grown in the District are cotton, rice, *jowar*, maize, and pulses (Rao, 2008; CPO, 2009). Of the crops 90 per cent are grown in the rainy season *kharif*, only 10 per cent in *rabi* (FN 03.03.2012).

According to the 2011 Census, Adilabad District has a population of 2,737,738 (Census Bureau, 2011a). Compared to the State average of 277 persons per square km, the population density of 154 persons per square km in Adilabad was low in the 2001 Census (CPS, 2009). In the same year about 19 per cent of the population belonged to Scheduled Castes and 17 per cent to Scheduled Tribes, which is high compared to State average ratios (16 per cent for SC and 7 per cent for ST). The main tribal groups are *Gonds* (52 per cent), *Lambadas* (22 per cent) and *Kolams* (8 per cent) (Rao, 2008). In 2011, the literacy rate stood at 61.55 per cent, which is lower than the State average of 67 per cent (Census Bureau, 2011a). The literacy rate among the tribal population is only a fourth of that of the overall population (Rao, 2008).

Administratively, the District comprises 1586 inhabited villages, as well as 15 towns, that form 866 Gram Panchayats, which are organised into 52 Blocks, also called *mandals* or *talukas* (CPO, 2009). The Blocks are administered in five clusters. Since 2006 Adilabad is listed among the country's 250 most backward Districts, out of a total of 640 Districts in India. In AP it is one of the thirteen Districts receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). Politically since the 1980s the District either elected candidates of the Congress or the regional Telugu Desam Party (TDF) for the national and State legislative assemblies.

6.2.1 A village in Utnur (site 1)

The first research location is a village in the Umri GP in the Utnur *mandal* of Adilabad District. At the time of my visit, most riverbeds in the area are completely dry.¹⁶⁷ Most bushes and trees do not carry leaves, the landscape is dominated by the reddish-brown of the dry soil. Only very

¹⁶⁷ Description of the village based on field notes from 04 To 05 March 2012 unless stated otherwise. Utnur has an extremely unfavourable sex ratio of only 750 females to 1000 males. It is the only GP among the 52 GPs of Adilabad with such a miserably low rate. The overall sex ratio for the District was 989 women to 100 men in 2001 (CPO, 2009: 21). Also Utnur has a relatively large share of forestland of about 57 per cent (42.8 on average for the whole District) (ibid.: 52).

few fields are irrigated and still carry maize, pulses and cereals. A main crop is cotton, which has already been harvested; the hard bushes stick out of the bare dry soil.

Just one ethnic group, members of the Kolam tribal group, inhabits the village. The village itself is made up single storey dwellings. Many of them are at least partly brick (*semi-pucca*) and roofs are tiled. None of the houses is significantly bigger than others, which speaks for relative economic equality within the village. Electricity is available and leads to many houses. Water has to be fetched from the village well. At the time of my visit in early March water is still available in the village. Neighbouring villages are supplied with water by tankers, because the local water sources have run dry. The rains, which are the source for new water, will not come before June or July.

Within its Mandal the field work location is a location that supposedly does well in NREGS implementation, according to regional officials and their statistics.¹⁶⁸ According to the local field assistants everyone household in the village participates in NREGS, there are no non-beneficiaries in the village.

Table 6.6 Key statistics on NREGS implementation in Utnur

Data for the research location (village)	Financial year 2011/2012
Population	896
No of HH	180
Data for the GP in which the village is located	
No of HH holding an NREGS Job Card	1,153
HH that worked in NREGS	261
Share of registered HH that worked (%)	22.64
Average No of days worked per HH	78
HH that availed 100 days	29
Share of working HH that availed 100 days (%)	11.11
Official daily wage rate in INR	117
Wage rate paid INR	104.4

Source: Population data from www.censusindia.gov.in Census 2011, NREGA data for financial year 2011/2012 from www.nrega.nic.in as on July 30 2015.

The official statistics for the GP in which the village is situated shows that especially the number of days per household, 78, is comparatively

¹⁶⁸ Neither for this village nor for the other fieldwork locations could I get the data for the village only. Official NREGA data is only provided down to GP level.

high. However, what the statistics also highlight is that the locally paid NREGS wages are lower than the stipulated wages (this is further discussed below).

As I outlined earlier, there are no reliable accounts of the demand for work from the villages, and the official data has limitations when it comes to the welfare effects for the population. Therefore, these were core themes of the interviews with NREGA participants. The gravity of deprivation that people experience and the crucial difference that income from NREGS can have, is vividly expressed in a focus group discussion “[we have] no water, ... [we have] this work only, no land, no agriculture, no cotton” (13FGDFY: 172, 316), in consequence this means “if no NREGS [we'd] die of hunger” (ibid. 115).¹⁶⁹ NREGS is so important because it offers a wage earning opportunity, when there is no other, as one respondent explains, “before we didn't have work, so we work [now in the scheme]” (2MY: 91). That the scheme does indeed make a difference in how people are able to lead their lives, can be seen in the fact that they report less borrowing from money lenders: “before [we] used to bring money on interest ... for household expenses” (13FGDVY: 100f).

But the scale of material welfare gains is limited. There may be “enough to eat, [but] nothing to save, not enough for sugar, tobacco, betel nuts, ... we want *jowar*, rice” (ibid.: 367ff). Many of the works in the village are works on the own fields of the participants, but this is not mentioned as a gain by the interviewees. A member of the local administration points to one more area in which material gains have been achieved through NREGA. Prior to NREGA agricultural wages were INR 60 to 80 per day. But NREGS allows workers to compare wages “so once they have got the comparison they are going to, they [the farmers] have to pay more than this wage payment, this NREGS wage payment. So the wages have been increased” (10ABM). Workers themselves report wages of about INR 100 to 120 (13FGDMFY).

Concerning the second dimension of social security – reliability – all respondents at this site said that generally work is available when needed, and that work is provided within a day after they demand it from their field assistant: “If we want work, we tell the field assistant. If we tell him, he sanctions work” (2FY: 124f). Hence, there seems to be actual-

¹⁶⁹ See Table 4.3 for the abbreviations in the interview references.

ly a demand from the workers. But, participants also point out that the field assistant knows whenever someone needs work. One local field assistant describes it as a proactive task

Actually, wage seekers should not come to the office. It is our duty, the field assistants' duty to go around the habitations and tell the wage seekers that you got work and ask them whether they are ready. And, when they are ready, within 15 days we have to give them work. (5ALM)

And, this attitude is also held by the field assistant's supervisors and colleagues at Block level, who point out that

He [the wage seeker] is in a position to question us to provide work. We have to provide few works as per the norms given by our NREGS system, we have to show the work to the poor people who are in need. ... We have to provide work when demanded. (8ABM: 163ff)

These quotes suggest that employment provision is demand-driven in this location. In this regard it seems, as if much hinges on the role of the field assistant and on whether he or she realistically is pro-active or at least approachable. In the previous year, the statistics for the first research site had been much lower than at the time when I was visiting. No one had claimed employment during much of the typical NREGA season. It was the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) at Block level, which realised that the village had no field assistant, and which took care that field assistant was installed (FN 5.3.2012). Hence, besides the active local officer, there also is staff at the Block level that monitor the data, seek to find reasons for low employment levels and change these were possible.

Another aspect of reliability concerns the payments, their level and timing. In this regard, participants expressed trust and certainty. One interviewee said that even though payment may be "late but [it is] getting correctly ... Government will pay" (17MY: 227ff). Hence, there is trust in the administration that they will pay.

At the same time among participants the knowledge about the scheme and its provisions is limited. The origin of NREGS is attributed to a Block level official, the Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO), other

decisions on works are attributed to the field assistant (2MY, 3MY, 4MY). In terms of participation in decision-making participants point out, “no-body asked what type of assets of infrastructure should be build. But whatever is build is fine. Whatever they say we shall do, we agree to do” (7FGDMFY). In half of the interviews people said that they did participate, in half they said they did not. That the citizens are not necessarily drawn into the discussions is also confirmed in interviews with administrators. A District official that is responsible for Utnur and the four other Districts with very high shares of ST population points out

The political leaders are separate. Just the *Gram* elder, the *Gram Patel*, we will [meet] usually, the ... village elder. He is interested to the village improvement and everything. Then when we visit the villages first we track the *Patels*. They, everyone, obey the village *Patel* orders. ... *Patel* is more powerful than the *Sarpanch*. *Sarpanch* also, if he want anything, he will first discuss with *Patel* and request, I want this work, please do this. ... [The *Patel* is] not elected. He’s an elder. And he is a heredity, it is a heredity. One, no other will be there, *Patel*. (11ADM: 69f)

Conversely, the same official says, “the *Gram Sabha* will decide which works it is they require. ... Because [it is] their programme, they need [to attend]. If he attends he gets the benefit then. That’s why definitely he will attend” (ibid.: 249ff). Both the accounts of administration and participants suggest that not all citizens do participate in the discussions on NREGS.

Another field in which there may be differential effects within the village relates to the effects on farmers versus those that do not have land.

Among the participants in the village all say that that the works executed benefit them, and that they did not benefit anyone else more than them.

A Block level official expresses the priorities in the following way:

We are taking up works in the farms of poorest of poor farmers. ... Poorest families, farmers who are not in a position to get their fields ploughed and who will not get bore wells on their own, we are making them as Blocks and we are erecting bore wells. Thereby, they will be in a position to cultivate their lands. (8ABM: 55ff)

According to him this does not lead to conflicts with other groups that do not get certain benefits. “They [the other farmers] will not complain. ... Since poor farmers, we are giving benefit to the poorest of the poor” (ibid.: 65ff). Other officials point out that both farmers and wage seekers benefit “farmers will be benefited by taking up works in their fields. They will be carried out by the wage seekers. Thereby the farmer will also be benefited” (ibid.: 48f). Other officers, however, highlight that farmers complain about higher wages and in particular if the work is done during agricultural season, “they [the farmers] are complaining to the NREGS ‘why you are doing in this season, agriculture seasons, harvesting season, now?’ So they are not willing” (10ABM). This statement indicates that those who need additional labour to work on their lands are less satisfied than the participants interviewed. This suggests that indeed rather the poorer groups benefit from the implementation in this location.

The administration of Utnur Block deems the scheme “100% useful” (8ABM: 3), and “one of the finest programmes of Government of India” (10ABM: 465f). At District level in Adilabad the overwhelming majority of the administration also recounts a very positive picture of the scheme. “[NREGS] it’ll reach to the people. ... This is [a] very good scheme. ... Since the last 50 years ... hundreds of schemes have come, but no scheme has reached. But this is very good,” says one interviewee (1ADM: 264ff, 295ff). Others deem NREGS “a very very excellent, excellent programme” (11ADM: 90ff), “a very wonderful programme. It is really a boon to the people who are unemployed, rural population here” (21ADM: 69ff). It is seen as successful because “every Mandal, every poor person, most of the poor people are benefited. There is no other scheme like NREGA” (15ADM: 389ff). Hence, there overall a very positive picture of the scheme prevails among the administration.

A summarised account of NREGS implementation with regards to welfare gains in Utnur is summarised in 0 below.

The contextual and multivocal approach to implementation in Utnur shows that the need for scheme in the location is high, both in the perception of the participants and the administration. Generally, the accounts of the administration and the participants are quite similar.

Table 6.7 Perceptions of welfare gains and implementation in Utnur

Research site 1 Utnur		
Characteristics	Participants perspectives	Administration and other's perspectives
Need for the scheme	++	++
Material improvements		
- in income	+	+
- in assets	+	+
Reliability		
- in wages	+	++
- in employment provision	+	+
Participation		
- in decision-making	+	?
Welfare gains overall	+	++
Rather homogeneous community	Good relations with this field assistant, previously no work offered without field assistant	Support and pressure from higher level staff Variety of works carried out

Source: Author's presentation. Strong positive effect: ++ / Positive effect: + / Negative effect: - / Strong negative effect: - - / Both positive and negative effects: - +

The contacts between participants and the field assistant, who belongs to the same tribal community, appeared to be relaxed and close. The village is characterised by its relative homogeneity in terms of the population group, the *kolam* tribe, as well as most visible assets such as the quality and size of their houses. This is significant feature of this location.

Participants report crucial positive changes in material welfare gains, such as less dependency on money-lenders and higher wages, but also point out that they still cannot afford to save or buy non-essential items. In terms of reliability work appears to be provided on demand say both, the participants and the local staff. Payments maybe late, but participants trust in the payment's arrival, which is crucial for reliability. The aspects related to agency where less discussed at this site and therefore the picture is somewhat unclear from the participants' side. Participants said they participated in the Gram Sabha. Yet, if it is not the Gram Sabha but the Patel who decides, as interviewee 11ADM said, it could be a token participation, while decisions are made elsewhere. However, with regards to the benefits of the scheme, in this location the participants who all belong to a vulnerable group, stated that no one benefitted from the works more than they did themselves. Overall, this is a location

where a number of welfare gains across the three dimensions have been realised for the participants.

6.2.2 A village in Talamadugu (site 2)

Talamadugu Block is in the same District of Adilabad and situated about 30 km to the West of Utnur. Although the geographical distance is not large, Talamadugu has significantly more water resources and many fields are irrigated.¹⁷⁰ Talamadugu has a lower share of forestland of just one third (compared to the 43 per cent in the District as a whole) and a relative high share of cultivated lands 60 per cent (compared to 43 per cent District average) (CPO, 2009). Also, there are more other brick kilns and other small-scale industries than in Utnur. In the whole *mandal* only 37 people are working at the first day of my visit, hence participation is lower than at the previously visited site. At this second research site there are visibly more status differences among the population, some houses have more than one floor, are made of brick and larger than others, there also is a large Hindu temple in the village. In this location I interview participants as well as non-participants to the scheme.

Table 6.8 Key statistics on NREGS implementation in Talamadugu

Data for the research location (village)	Financial year 2011/2012
Population in the village (Census 2011)	1,478
No of HH in the village (Census 2011)	335
Data for the GP in which the village is located	
No of HH holding an NREGS Job Card	396
HH that worked in NREGS	112
Share of registered HH that worked (%)	28.28
Average No of days worked per HH	48
HH that availed 100 days	16
Share of working HH that availed 100 days (%)	14.29
Official daily wage rate in INR	117
Wage rate paid INR	97.46

Source: Population data from www.censusindia.gov.in Census 2011, NREGA data for financial year 2011/2012 from www.nrega.nic.in as on July 30 2015.

Compared the GP in which the other research location in Adilabad is located, it can be seen that the average number of days per household is significantly lower (48 in Talamadugu versus 78 in Utnur). However, the share of those actually working among those registered in NREGS is

¹⁷⁰ Based on field notes of 7 to 9 March 2012 unless stated otherwise.

slightly higher; this is also true for the share of households that reached 100 days. The wages paid in this location are again reported to be lower than stipulated wage rate and even lower than in Utnur (see Table 6.6).

In terms of material needs and gains, those respondents in Talamadugu that had access to NREGS stated a lower dependence on the scheme than in other locations. In years without drought they did not need the programme in the past, whereas in all other locations interviewees said the scheme was needed irrespective of annual rainfalls. One respondent refers to NREGS work as an activity for his “free-time” (17MY). Being “free” is used also by another respondent (25MN) for the time in which he could do NREGS work. At this location agricultural wages are reportedly higher than NREGS wages (17MY), in particular for men in certain seasonal works (18FGDMFY). Both NREGS and agricultural wages increased significantly since NREGS was introduced. Before NREGS daily wages in agriculture were INR 50-80 a day, since they have increased to about INR 100 for women and up to INR 200 for men (17MY, field notes 07.03.2012). Nonetheless, there is much dissatisfaction with the NREGS wage levels. The complaint is that “the doctor gets as much money for taking the pulse as we get for a day’s labour” (FN 07.03.2012). Overall, participants report that they work in NREGA when there is no agricultural work available. In sum, the change brought by NREGS is described as not that big, but positive by the participants. For example, less need for money lending is mentioned (23FGDFY, 18FGDMFY), but it is not enough to cope with shocks (FN 07.03.2012)

In terms of reliability in Talamadugu, the picture concerning the availability and accessibility of work is mixed. Some say that work is available when needed and that the field assistant is central for the provision of work (17MY&Iv23FMY). However, some also say that they would generally like to work more. Or, work at all: it is here that I encounter the only case of denial of access to NREGS of my fieldwork. The interviewee says about himself that he was bonded labour (25MN), and that he wanted to work, but that there were obstacles put in front of him:¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Much of what the respondent said, was only translated after the interview situation. Therefore I could neither react to issue of bonded labour nor the fact that he had been denied access.

Res TE: I didn't have a small book to work.

Trans TE: Even if you didn't, you can have work.

Res TE: Because the people who have small book on their name, they will only get the wages, when I used to ask them they used to deny it.

Trans TE: Which book?

Other person TE: Account book.

Trans TE: Job card.

Res TE: All will have job cards, those who work have account book. ...

Res TE: If they give the card, I will go and dig the land. (25MN: 96ff)

This dialogue suggests that there can be barriers to participate in the scheme, such as those of not having a bank account or not receiving a job card. It might even not be the NREGS field staff, who denied the account book to the participant, but the consequence was that he could not work. Additionally, exclusion from work also happens in other, more subtle ways. In this location it is the women who are excluded because they are not recruited for certain works: NREGS works often require digging work that is traditionally done by men. For men, however, NREGS wages are not always attractive; they are only INR 125, while they can get up to INR 200 in other works (20ABM, 23FGDFY). When women do not have a male family member who does the digging work, they are not employed in such works. It is not clear, whether women are not supposed to do the digging work either by custom, on own wish, or by denial through the administration. But, the consequence is that without a man there are few other works for them. Single women have this problem generally (23FGDFY: 35ff). The only works offered specifically to single women are nursery works (20ABM).

The mode by which work is provided is presented in a contested way. As far as the provision of work is concerned, the answer of the participants of a female group discussion are translated as "any work they get, they'll do" (23FGDFY). Which suggests that there is not a lot of involvement in the decision-making. Also another focus group says that the field assistants meet and decide about the works, they are merely informed (FN 07.03.2012 on discussion 18FGDMFY). The administration,

however, insists that there is a lot of scope for participation. According to a Block official there are more Gram Sabha meetings since NREGS, about 4-5 per year. One of these is for work identification. Then the local staff comes as a team and asks “What do you want? Which works is sufficient? What you need? ... They will ... we will be proposing” (20ABM: 307ff). A colleague at GP level adds that a “beneficiary wise action plan [is] prepared” (27AGPM: 190), which suggests involvement of the beneficiaries in selecting the types of work. On the timings of the works, the local Additional Project Officer says in a discussion with participants (19FGDMN) that NREGS work is stopped when there is agricultural work in the region. On the one hand, this may seem pragmatic and could even be the result of a lack of real demand. However, on the other hand, as long as the scheme does not really work according to a demand driven logic, it may also be a sign that the administration sticks to old habits of ‘work as supplied’ rather than implementing the new logic of ‘work on demand’.

Compared to the village in Utnur, at this second site participants talk more about their knowledge on the scheme, about the fact that it is a government scheme “for the poor people as employment opportunity to work” (17MY), about the mandatory provision of shade and first aid kits, about which they know, and which are not met at their work site (18FGDMFY). Thus, with regards to the dimension of agency, there seems to be more knowledge on certain provisions, but the degree to which this also leads to more decisions being made by and for participants is unclear.

In this village there seem to be more differential effects of the scheme than in Utnur. At the worksite visited in Talamadugu the bay of a dam was de-silted and richer farmers were paid to deliver the silt, which is a rich fertiliser to the lands of SC and ST farmers. However, at this site, in a village with more caste and status differences, this was accompanied by envy for the SC/ST populations by other, higher caste, farmers. An elected representative complains that “wages increased a lot ... farmers are getting trouble” (24AGPM: 156ff). The richer farmers want to get the same benefits of “mud-works”, the trenching and silt application (24AGPM). They also complain to the administration that SC and ST receive preferential access (20ABM). The local Technical Assistant agrees that silt application would also be beneficial for other farmers

(27AGPM), but he points out that SC/ST have priority. The local Additional Programme Officer tells that the tractor owners, who are farmers with 10-20 acres of irrigated land, find ways to claim benefits that are meant for the small and marginal farmers (FN 07.03.2012). Small and marginal farmers are defined as those having 5 acres or less. In order to benefit from de-silting, bush clearing and bunding works, the larger farmers officially cut up their land and distribute ownership, so that no family member holds more than 5 acres. Then they all participate for a day – because in AP the rule that in order for works to take place on your land you need to participate – and wait for the real wage seekers to do the remaining work. With regards to benefits of implementation, a substantial part of the benefits appear to accrue to the SC and ST, and poorer farmers, this focus is contested by the better-off farmers.

The administration at the Block level is less enthusiastic than in Utnur, but overall positive towards the scheme. In terms of the prime of objectives of the scheme, interestingly in the Talamadugu Block the majority of the local administration names the prevention and control of migration as first objective, followed by providing wages after the agricultural season, land development and fair wages (26ALM: 47ff 27AGPM: 53ff). One of their colleagues sees improvement of agriculture as main aim and is dissatisfied with the results of NREGS in this respect (24AGPM). At District level the provision of employment and wages clearly is the No.1 priority of the administration, followed by the creation of useful assets and infrastructure, as well as arresting migration (1ADM: 142f; 16ADM: 144; 21ADM: 69ff). One leading member of staff at the District level points out that the “intention behind the scheme is safety” (15ADM: 155). In Talamadugu one of the participants points out that “government brought this programme, for the poor people as employment opportunity to work” (17MY: 61).

NREGS implementation with regards to welfare gains in Talamadugu may be summarised as in Table 6.9 below. The multivocal exploration of implementation in Talamadugu shows that this is a location where the participation rates are partially lower because there is less demand in certain seasons and in some years. But, at the same time this is a location with exclusionary processes. This impacts particularly on the dimension of reliability.

Table 6.9 Perceptions of welfare and implementation in Talamadugu

Research site 2 Talamadugu		
Characteristics	Participants perspectives	Administration and other's perspectives
Need for the scheme	- +	- +
Material improvements		
- in income	- +	+
- in assets	+	?
Reliability		
- in wages	- +	- +
- in employment provision	- +	?
Participation		
- in decision-making	- +	+
Welfare gains overall	- +	++
Need lowest in sample, mixed community, most demand for NREGS is seasonal and dependent on weather, exclusionary processes	Change through NREGS is deemed small but important, aware of provision of the Act, but these are not met, higher female participation in decision-making	Criticise higher wages through NREGS as bad for farmers, reduced migration

Source: Author's presentation. Strong positive effect: ++ / Positive effect: + / Negative effect: - / Strong negative effect: - - / Both positive and negative effects: - +

Also the provision of work does not appear to be organised really by demand. Participants reported small but positive changes with regards to the material dimension of welfare. Concerning the dimension of agency, participants rather report a lack of involvement, and that despite their knowledge key provisions of the Act are not realised. Additionally, in this more heterogeneous setting there is envy by the richer farmers for the support that NREGS extends to the poor, which they thus seek to access too. The overall picture of the realisation of welfare gains at the Talamadugu site thus remains mixed.

6.2.3 Views from Adilabad District and Andhra Pradesh State

The administration in the District and the State also has its opinions on welfare gains in localities such as those visited in Adilabad. With regards to the change from a supply- to a demand-driven logic the attentive attitude from Utnur is also present among the District level staff concerned (1ADM, 11ADM, 15ADM). One interviewee points out that the reason for this commitment to providing work is that, "it is an Act, if everybody, if anybody wants to work, we have to provide" (15ADM: 343ff). Another member of the NREGA District staff points out that they

identify works, which will be useful to the village community, and that have to be approved by the Gram Sabha (16ADM). At the same time, he also point to the restrictions of the works sanctioned, for example “we are not allowing them to go for big works because there will be a lot of involvement of machinery and technical people” (ibid.: 302ff). Hence, on the one side there is room for decision-making by the Gram Sabha, on the other side, this room is limited by the technical advice by the administration.

According to a State level CSO in Andhra Pradesh, there also is a difference on the side of the participants with regards to the demand and provision of work.

Earlier whenever officials gave the work, then only they [the wage seekers] go to the work. But now, nowadays they are demanding for work. And, they also demand work site facilities like *aaya*, water, first-aid kit, all those things. ... Earlier it was not a right for them ... If the contractor or the landlord provide some kind of first aid or work site facilities then only they would get. But now it’s a right and they are demanding for that. (29CSOF: 126ff)

Despite the fact that workers nowadays demand work and work-site facilities, there is a gap in providing work and provisions as demanded. This was for example mentioned in Talamadugu. According to the CSO neither is “the government ... able to meet that demand ... generated at field level” (ibid.: 386ff), nor are “works ... available throughout the year” (ibid: 201ff). And, the CSO points out that “accepting the application itself is a question” (ibid: 412ff).

They [the field assistants] don’t take the application at all ... Generally they would respond saying that the shelf of works is completed. The works are not open now. When we open the works again, we show you the work. ... They would outright reject. There are no works now. So you don’t need to give the application also. Whenever there is work opened, you will be informed, then you come for work was the answer they would get. (ibid.: 271ff)

According to the interviewed CSO, which is active in all Districts of the State, there are still many cases in which participants are denied access to

the scheme. Even in a pilot project of this CSO, in which wage seekers sent their application for employment through registered mail, there was no compensation given anywhere. This contradicts the accounts of administration in the field, who claimed to provide work when needed. At State level in AP, however, the scepticism expressed by the CSO with regards to the provision of work as per demand, is shared. Where a leading official differs from the CSO, is the question whether people really demand work. He argues,

it is not really that people are demanding work. ... We know better that they cannot really submit applications, the poor really can't. And even if they can the functionaries, these fellows, the staff, they will never respond. This is all humbug. (30ASM: 443ff)

He hence questions the functionality of the work on demand principle for the most deprived groups, the poorest of the poor, both from the side of the poor and from the local administration. But, he points out, in AP the State level administration is at least open about the fact that this application procedure does not work. It is not only, in Andhra, but in

99 per cent of the states. What they do – because it is mandatory – they start their work and then they bring the applications. It is not that they get the application, and respond to the demand for employment. No. They start the work out of their grace, their charity. Then parallel they do the applications and put it into the file. ... Till today there is no form No. IV and no one gives No. V, no receipt of the work, they never give. ... Nobody does it. Not even one per cent. (ibid.: 153f)

And in case of unemployment allowances, which could be seen as a further proof, that the demand-based logic has really been put in place, the same leading official from State level, reports that he

begged people to please create some examples of paying unemployment allowance. Not even a single officer out of 1098 Blocks, not even one BDO [Block Development Officer] proactively promoted the concept of application, work upon employment and unemployment allowance in case work is not provided. (ibid.: 454ff)

This official reports an interest in paying unemployment allowances, which he claims is not shared or at least not executed by staff at the Block and GP levels. Hence, there are considerable differences between the views on the provision of work on demand at Block, District and State level concerning the provision of employment.

The case of Talamadugu above showed that there are outright and subtler exclusionary processes at village level. For these there is little awareness on District level.

Also on the question of continued errors of exclusion the State administration adopts a critical stance. According to one interviewee there are too many people participating in the scheme, and too many of them belong to the non-poor, this in turn creates problems for delivery for the poorer sections (ibid.: 200ff). In AP he has

identified more than 5000 GP in which the employment provided to SC/ST is not even 50 per cent of the work provided to non-SC/ST. ... This literally means that discrimination is going on. If I correlate the caste composition of the functionaries, 95 per cent of the functionaries belong to a non- SC/ST community. (ibid.: 628ff)

Thus at State level, there is awareness for the exclusion that happens on village level. The interviewee explains, “naturally the less poor, they have voice and they have the capacities to access the programme. The poorest and poorer they stay away from the programme,” (ibid.: 104ff). Another reason why it is difficult to include the “ultra poor” is that they live in the remotest regions. In consequence, he is “not satisfied” with the implementation of NREGS in his state, because “everyday I can tell where I am losing” (ibid.: 222ff).

6.3 Amravati District in Maharashtra

The second and third research sites are both in the District Amravati. It is located in the peripheral northeast of Maharashtra and borders the State of Madhya Pradesh. Amravati also is one of the least densely populated Districts, with just 237 inhabitants per square km, compared to 365 for the State of Maharashtra, in the 2011 Census (Census Bureau, 2011b). According to same data set, the total population was 2,887,826 and the literacy rate stood at 88.23, which is higher than the State average of

82.91, and significantly higher than in Adilabad. SC population was around 17 per cent according to the 2001 census and ST close to 14 per cent. The biggest ST groups are *Korku*, *Gond* and *Pardhi* (Census Bureau, 2001).

The District comprises a total of 1679 inhabited villages according to Census 2001 data (Census Bureau, 2001). These are organised into fourteen Blocks also called *tahsil*, *tehsil* or *taluka*. The Blocks are further organised into six clusters. Amravati, like Adilabad, is listed among India's 250 most backward Districts. In Maharashtra it is one among twelve Districts receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). Meteorologically, Amravati largely follows the same patterns as Adilabad (also see section 4.5).

6.3.1 A village in Chikhaldara (site 3)

Chikhaldara belongs to the most deprived Blocks not only in the District, but of the whole State of Maharashtra. Together with the Dharni Block it forms the *Melghat* region that received sad attention in the 1990s for numerous starvation deaths in particular of tribal children (Datta, 2013). The majority of the population of this hilly region covered with jungle belongs to the *korku* tribe. Parts of the Block are a nature reserve for tigers. However, the infrastructure for tourism in the region is limited. According to a local CSO, 75 per cent of the population of the *taluka* is tribal, most of them are marginal farmers whose crop yield lasts them no more than 3 months (FN 19.03.2012).

The third research site is the most remote village visited.¹⁷² The village is located at a hilltop in the jungle. At the time of my visit the jungle is dry. The last gravel road ends several kilometres ahead of the village. The village is not connected to electricity services. Some houses have solar panels on their roof, which were distributed as part of an earlier government scheme. The only source of water is a good 100 meters in height lower than the village itself, or 350 steep steps away. Water needs to be pumped up from the source and then carried uphill. The women and girls of the village mostly do this work. Most buildings have mud walls, partly tiled partly tin roofs and low entrances (*khacca*). During the time of my fieldwork several brick walls are being built, because people got

¹⁷² All information about the village is based on the field notes from 20.-24.03.2012 unless stated otherwise.

bricks from a housing scheme of the central government.¹⁷³ Old and new houses alike do not have more than one level. There are literally no irrigated fields in the area; all fields have already been harvested. Most plots of land are small; much land cannot be used because the elevation is so strong. Rather than cash crops, such as cotton, produce for consumption such as cereals and pulses are grown. An additional income opportunity at the time of my visit is the collection of dried cow-dung that is sold as heating material to a person that comes with a truck once per week. Also, *mohua* fruits are collected. These are mainly for own consumption and less for sale. Stark status or income differentials are not visible in the village.

The inhabitants of the village belong to the same *korku* tribal community. There are 35 households and twice as many families. According to the 2001 Census (Census Bureau, 2001) a total of 191 inhabitants lived in the village, all of whom were listed as ST. Only 15 people were registered as literate at the time. 99 people were economically active workers, among them the 49 men were listed as main workers and cultivators, whereas the 50 women were listed as marginal workers and agricultural labour.

Table 6.10 Key statistics on NREGS implementation in Chikhaldara

Data for the research location (village)	Financial year 2011/2012
Population in the village (Census 2011)	191
No of HH in the village (Census 2011)	32
Data for the GP in which the village is located	
No of HH holding an NREGS Job Card	590
HH that worked in NREGS	422
Share of registered HH that worked (%)	71.53
Average No of days worked per HH	32
HH that availed 100 days	6
Share of working HH that availed 100 days (%)	1.42
Official daily wage rate in INR	127
Wage rate paid INR	225

Source: Population data from www.censusindia.gov.in Census 2011, NREGA data for financial year 2011/2012 from www.nrega.nic.in as on July 30 2015. NREGS only down to GP level.

The Block Chikhaldara belongs to those with the highest participation rates in the District. Table 6.10 shows for the GP, in which the research

¹⁷³ In the “home sweet home” or “no more huts” scheme, households get three instalments of 25,000 INR each for the construction of a *pucca* house. Vernacularly people call the scheme “*ghar khul* – my little slum house” (FN 22.03.2012).

took place, a very high rate of wages paid, which is reported to be nearly twice as high as the official rate. It also reveals that a very high share of those possessing a Job Card also worked in the scheme in the year of field work – more than 70 per cent. This also corresponds with the high need for the scheme reported from this remote research site, “there is no work apart from NREGA here ... we have to work for it. Let’s say if there is no NREGA, then nobody else care if we have work or not” (42MFY: 255ff). And, the respondents continue that before NREGA “we would be starving, sometimes there was no *chapatti*, wouldn’t have grain, sometimes *dal* and sometime no *chatni* ... after NREGA the problems are a bit less ... earlier the life was tougher” (42FY: 315ff, 339). Another interviewee from Chikhaldara points out:

For us it is important to work for full year. ... Importance is that there is no agriculture, without doing labour job you do not get enough to eat. So for that it is very important. If we do not work, how will we get to eat? (32MY: 506ff)

Even for those who have agriculture, the produce is not sufficient to live on it for a year. The need for additional income sources is very high and NREGS is seen to make a crucial impact. However, it is also obvious that the effect is perceived to be limited: the problems have become a little smaller, and life somewhat less tough. But, it does remain tough and problems persist. Also inflation “is there, eating the man, 12 to 14 rupees kg is wheat, 15 rupees is wheat. Now, we are making the cart of life run like this only” (35MY: 160ff). Or as one participant of a group discussion says “we work and we get money, but after everything we can’t see the money... We need to take grain, we need to take salt and spices, so we can’t see the money” (41FGDFY: 453ff, also see 40FY: 63f).

Other ways of expressing that there have been changes, with regards to the material conditions faced, concern the income level. One respondent in Chikhaldara said that she has “50 per cent more for daily expenditure ... it is beneficial. We do not have to migrate” (40FY: 234, 66).¹⁷⁴ According to one of the participants in Chikhaldara the scheme has been created

¹⁷⁴ In this case the respondent was content, that he and his family did not need to migrate anymore. However, accounts of migration have also been reported with great pride. E.g. one man told that his son had migrated to Mumbai for work, where he would see the great city. Hence, perceptions of migration vary starkly.

“because if people will migrate then they will have problems, so if in village we have work then children can live well, they can study” (42MFY: 484ff). And he adds that access to NREGS has been easier compared to other schemes (such as livestock schemes or business loans). For the other schemes “we need to run behind that, and we don’t have that money” (42MFY: 368). Another important change, which had also been mentioned in the previous two locations, is that they are less dependent on borrowing

Like now [since the scheme], we do not have to ask for anything from others. Like we earn ourselves so we can eat peacefully. ... The only change is that we need not ask money from other. If there is some market, then there is no need to go to anyone. (32MY: 438ff)

This decreased dependence on the moneylender for regular consumption certainly is an achievement. However, in case of a shock, the same respondent would still (need to) go to the moneylender, because NREGA wages are not enough so save (*ibid.*). This is a typical account for the village visited in Chikhaldara.

Material impact could also be achieved through the creation of common infrastructure and individual assets. Farm ponds belong to the latter category. They are interesting because sensibly they are only built if the patch of land has a certain size; otherwise they take up too much of the surface (FN 27.3.2012). In that sense, benefitting from certain NREGS works requires an input that many of the poorest don’t have. In the Chikhaldara village a small pond was dug at the premises of one female participant. She asks, “we dug but what is the use of it? There is no water” (40FY: 380). However, according to other participants the assets build are durable and have not been washed away by the rains (41FGDFY: 340ff).

Another example of works that can be used for individual benefit is de-silting work, or more accurately, the application of the silt as fertilizers on private fields after a water reservoir has been de-silted. In the Chikhaldara village, one work had been the de-silting of a check dam closed to a road. But, instead of being used the silt was laying piled up next to the tank. Asked why the silt was unused, a member of the local administration replied

we were told that we can use that soil in someone's farm, but nobody took it. They say *bandi* [waggon, transport] is not there ... People like the soil, but *bandi* is not available in the right time, we need to rent it, that is why. (50ALM: 149ff)

The location of the check dam was a few kilometres from the village and its fields. Of the village's farmers, who are few, none possessed a tractor or a car. Few, owned a two-wheeler or an oxen-waggon. Given the unavailability of transport the silt remains unused.

The examples of the farm pond and the (lack of) silt application show that – even though the works should benefit all farmers – these works are more useful to farmers who already have a bit more than others i.e. a waggon, or larger lands. According to NREGA participants, the main benefit is seen to go to “those who have land, they get benefits ... the farm owner gets benefitted. ... It is beneficial for the people who own farms, to stop the water, and to stop the water from going into the fields” (41FGDFY: 26ff, 321). But, the needs of those without land, who are probably the poorest, may be different. Actually, the workers make a distinction between benefitting from the scheme and working in the scheme:

Trans: Those who don't have lands, how do they get benefit?

Res B: Nothing...

Res C: We just work, we just need to take care of our stomach.

Res A: Farm owners are benefitted, what are us, poor, we are just feeding ourselves. (41FGDFY: 403ff)

Work is not seen as a benefit, and NREGA is not perceived as something that does make a change, it merely helps to keep up.

Also in terms of work on the commons the Chikhaldara site was plagued by problems. As pointed out, accessibility of the site was a key problem. Road construction is possible under NREGS, but it was not carried out in this location because of interdepartmental conflicts between the Block Panchayat Samiti and the Forest Department (FN 24.3.2012).

The types of work also have an impact through the nature of the activities carried out that may exclude women or other groups. In the Chikhaldara location people pointed out that there were difficulties at the worksite due to the fact that “The place is a jungle. ... The problem is

that it is a jungle. Nothing is there. No water is there. We have to carry water on our head and make all the arrangements ourselves” (32MY: 197ff).

Generally, in this location it appeared difficult to identify suitable works because there was limited private land and public land was not made available for NREGA works.¹⁷⁵ Also the elected representative for the GP admits that there is not always enough work for everyone: “we cannot give it to everybody. Like they also say that we need a dam, and these people also say that we need dam, we need to choose one. ... The demand is more, right” (46ERGPM: 460ff). This leads to conflicts in the GP assembly in which every village claims work for itself, and all GP members can do is “to make them understand” (ibid.: 209ff) that one village will get work after another. Wherever less work than demanded is provided, there are issues of exclusion. A local NREGA official in the Chikhaldara village says that in such a case the decision, who is getting work, is taken by the Gram Sewak (50ALM: 149f).

Hence, work is not necessarily provided on demand. Participants point out that this is the biggest problem for them “whenever we want work, we do not get work” (32MY: 118). Not only that: “when there is need, there is no work. [But], when we are going for some other work then this work comes. Means we do not get work on time” (ibid.: 248ff, also see 40FY: 281ff, 42MFY: 100ff, 201f). Only “if [work] is available we get it” (40FY: 124f). Asked why they did not work more, another couple of participants replies “there is no work” (42MFY: 202). The unavailability of work in the village leads to migration:

Res B: If there is no work in village then it’s compulsion to go out.

Trans: And now, since you got job card?

Res B: If there is no work we go, if there is work then we don’t.

Res C: We should have had work for two more months, but there is no work, we are useless in the village. (41FGDFY: 145ff)

In absence of work in their village, there is “compulsion” to look for work outside, hence, to migrate. “We get work for two months, then we

¹⁷⁵ Another problem in the Melghat region is that many farmers do not have proof of their landownership, which regularly leads to disputes with the Forest Department (Centre for Science and Environment, 2008: 18).

need to run to look for work because suddenly there is no work, then we have run. If we get work then it is fine else we don't earn, then we need to go outside" (42MFY: 100ff). Hence, they never know when there will be work available and when not. They expect there to be work now, but there is none. The local elected representative partially admits that there is less work offered than demanded, "but still we are looking for work, because we have to work more and more, we need to give the work." (46ERGPM: 316f). It keeps happening that there is not enough work for everyone in the GP, and then

sometimes there is fight, like someone tells that the work is in our village so just us should work...so the next village says that we too want the same work. ... We need to make them understand that this time it is [village A], next time it will be [village B]. ... We cannot give it to everybody. (46ERGPM: 209ff, 460ff).

But, the GP administration claims, "there is always work available. Work is always available. Contractors and farmers have more mechanised, because labour is less available" (47AGPM). According to him people can easily demand work from Gram (Rozgar) Sewak. "It is up to the people to use the scheme or not. It is really their control to use" (ibid.). He says people call him when there is no work, and he considers it a good sign for the scheme that people call him. Demand, he says, is there from August or September to May, and only in the rainy season there is work on farmland. "If there is work, they will not start all the work at the same time. Always make sure that there will be some work in the future. They spread the work schedule throughout the year." (ibid,) The only condition he sees for the availability of works is that "there needs to be some land where the work can be done. Not the forest land" (ibid.).

The administration of Chikhaldara Block provision of employment is mentioned as an important objective of the scheme, but "asset creation is the main objective of this scheme so that on the basis of that asset, in future the villagers will ... not require the job. They will be self-sufficient" (38ABM: 87ff). A colleague at Block level points to the reduction of malnutrition and migration as primary objectives of the scheme (36ABM). But, there is no mentioning of rights or demand-based employment in the Block except by one GP staff of village that I could not visit, which is said to have much better results than the others in the

Block (48AGPM).¹⁷⁶ At District level one interviewee (51ADM) points out that work for those who demand is his first priority, then comes soil and water conservation, and third is the creation of sustainable rural assets.

Yet, the workers in Chikhaldara use drastic words to argue that the shortage of employment is their major concern. They demand employment, first at the Gram Panchayat and the Gram Sewak, and if he does not respond from the BDO (42MFY: 104ff), but still they do not have as much employment as needed (also see FN 19.03.2012 on discussions with KHOJ). The workers from this third research site also point out that they indeed have to apply to the Gram Panchayat, but that it does not happen using form No IV. The local Gram Sewak in turn admits that the people from the village have the form, after the local CSO KHOJ distributed them during an IEC. However, filling the forms is not really necessary in Chikhaldara according to him (50ALM). He claims work is offered without the need to fill a form.

The local CSOs have another explanation. Rather than not being necessary, they point out that since the IECs people do demand work, but officers see it as extra burden to put labour in place, and they do not accept the form (FN 20.03, discussions with KHOJ). "Demand is very high but they [the administration] do not fulfil it," states another CSO (39CSOBM: 107ff). The administration and the local CSOs, hence, give contradictory accounts, on the provision of work on demand.

But, the administration at the Block level claims that action plans and sufficient shelf of work exists for every village (FN 21.03.2012). According to a Block official, the administration can always provide work within two weeks, form No IV is available at GP level, and they never had to pay an unemployment allowance. But, he also admits that form No IV is filled at the work site when work has started to avoid paying unemployment allowances.

Also regarding wages there is a lack of reliability at this site. People are waiting for their wages "sometimes they say 6 days, and it takes 2 to 3 months" (41FGDFY: 287f). Another interviewee says that money comes "after long time. ... After doing the work, they say after a week, but it

¹⁷⁶ This GP staff states that "NREGS as a right means that it is mandatory to give work. No one can say there is no work when people apply. Neither can the government say there is no money. It is a law to provide the work" (48AGPM).

does not happen for a week or 15 days or $\frac{3}{4}$ of a month. We do not find it okay, we want to get it in the same week” (32MY: 357ff). Also the workers need to actively demand their payment:

Trans: Now the work you do for NREGA, do you know when you will get paid for that?

Res: That is not sure, like we worked, then Gram Sewak keep the process on, but then we need to tell them ... ‘The work is finished, Sir, when will we get paid?’ we need to say like that. (42MFY: 287ff)

Another interviewee says they have asked the *Sarpanch* and the GP members, they have complained to the *Tahsildar*, and yet “nothing happens” (40FY: 191). Hence, the delay in payments is a source of discontent and people in the village are active to try and improve the situation. The GP staff from Chikhaldara explains the delays in payment with the extra burden on the post office staff who already had a full-time job before NREGS (47AGPM). There are no incentives for the post office staff to make the payments quickly, he argues.

In this – as in all other locations – wages were generally regarded to be too low. Men reported NREGS wages of INR 100-105 per day, and most women reported wages of only INR 50-85. This by itself would be a violation of the Act by, because those wages are below the stipulated minimum wage rate for Maharashtra of INR 127, and because women and men are supposed to receive the same wages. A local CSO sees one reason for the low wages in the fact that the instructions are not given properly for the works, consequently, “the people work more and got less money” (39CSOBM: 51f). That participants answered that they would like higher wages when asked what they would want to change in the scheme was common across locations. In Chikhaldara others accepted whatever the government pays (40FY: 147), without distrust that the workers would not be paid the agreed rate. One interviewee asked, “why would they not pay proper?” (32MY: 390ff).

Hence, none of the participants interviewed expressed distrust in the level of payments. However, there is a significant gap between the wages reported by participants and the wages allegedly paid. The official average wage rate for the GP (including the research site and two other villages of the about the same size) as per NREGA data on the official

website was as high as 236.6 INR (sic!) for the financial year 2011/2012, compared to INR 50-105 reported by the workers.¹⁷⁷ In all other locations wages allegedly paid and wages reported by participants were about the same. In Chikhaldara participants continued to report much lower wages, whereas the administration continuously, across GP and Block level, claimed that the workers *de facto* realised such wages because they had been working so hard (36ABM, 38ABM, 47AGPM). This remained the same when I specifically inquired this gap of more than 100 INR per day with the officials. I was unable to resolve this matter during fieldwork. If we assume that the data on the NREGS website more or less adequately captures the spending, and participants stated the real incomes received, somebody must be making a huge gain on every daily wage paid in that Chikhaldara GP.

In terms of knowledge on NREGS Chikhaldara fared much better than the other locations. A year before the local CSO 'KHOJ' had run an awareness campaign on the scheme. In the Chikhaldara village I meet the only interviewee who lines out what rights mean to him, and that something follows from the right to work (which however they do not get).

Right means the next person should give us 100 days' work ... else 15 rupees allowance. If they don't give us 100 days' work then they will pay us 15 rupees each day. ... It is said, but nothing like that has happened yet. (42MFYCH: 378f)

Also, this is the only site where each respondent said that they had participated in the Gram Sabha, where they also talk and have a say in what type of infrastructure they want to be build. Even an older single woman, who lives with her son could realise that works were carried out on her land. The young local elected representative points to regular meetings in the village, where decisions on works are taken, which they forward to the *Panchayat Samiti* at Block level for approval (46ERGPM: 78ff). He stresses that they need to demand work from Block level for it to happen (ibid.: 150f). Another participant at this site points out, "now that we have experience, we go to Gram Panchayat and talk to Gram Sewak

¹⁷⁷ Data from the official website NREGA, last accessed on July 10 2013, http://164.100.128.68/netnrega/writereaddata/state_out/display_pan1824011_local_4_1112.html.

and if he says no, then directly to BDO, it goes on like that” (42MFY: 104ff). Some statements also suggest that villagers do demand work “We had to apply there ... In Gram Panchayat ... Not formally ... but before we apply Gram Sewak gives us work” (ibid.: 144ff). However, they also pointed out that upon demand, it took a long time until anything happened: “If we applied today then we don’t get it before next month” (ibid.: 164). Despite this knowledge Chikhaldara participants seemed to concede to the fact, that they have very little influence on issues that are crucial to them, such as delayed payments “it’s not right, but we the public cannot do anything” (40FY: 191f). Local CSOs support the view that there is little local influence on the works carried out, “they prepare the shelf in the office. Decisions are made in the office. ... They prepare it here and take Gram Sabhas later” (39CSOBM: 75ff). Another local CSO points that non-feasible works have been planned by the water and forest departments without actually being in the field (FN 19.03.2012). What would be needed, says one of them, would be to prepare the shelf of works “with the community, I am not saying the Sarpanch, with the community, the Gram Sabha” (39CSOBM: 107ff).

The decision-making is not the only process that remains intransparent in this location, it also concerns the NREGS related documentation. The local Gram Sewak is not keen on keeping records. He argues,

it is not really necessary to fill the forms. But people have given us records so it is good to fill the forms. The *Gram Rozgar Sewak* (GRS) is there especially for NREGS only. He will know all the people, their names, their needs etc. Where a GRS is there, there is less need for documentation. (47AGPM)

Indeed the Chikhaldara site was rather an exception in the Block for it had special NREGS staff, a field assistant called the *Gram Rozgar Sewak* here. However, a GRS cannot replace record keeping in job cards and taking note of demand. The registration of demand would enable participants to claim unemployment allowances, the registration of their salaries, would allow them to check them with the banks and the spending levels at the GP level. Given that there is such a gap in the wages reported as paid by participants and by the website, this could be a crucial instrument to uncover where the remaining funds go to.

The role of the GRS was not highlighted in any of the interviews. The GRS himself reported that he had no training for this job, and was not too knowledgeable about the scheme (50ALM). The impact of this additional field staff was not reported to be high, and also from the reports of the participants it seems that the GRS here was unable to provide (more) work to the villagers or give them the security that there would be work, as it was in Andhra. But, he agrees with the villagers about the high need for the scheme, “there is nothing to eat, that’s why they started it” (ibid.: 1). He also highlights a number of things that the village would need such as road access, electricity, and water pond (ibid.: 22ff). But these needed things, they “can’t happen” (ibid.) through NREGA.

Table 6.11 Perceptions of welfare and implementation in Chikhaldara

Research site 3 Chikhaldara		
Characteristics	Participants perspectives	Administration and other’s perspectives
Need for the scheme	++	++
Material improvements		
- in income	- +	++
- in assets	- +	+
Reliability		
- in wages	- +	- +
- in employment provision	-	+
Participation		
- in decision-making	++	+
Welfare gains overall	- +	++
Rather homogenous community, remote location, previous IEC campaign Large discrepancy between wages reported by participants and administration / MIS	Abstract knowledge on rights, little claim of rights, wages are deemed to be paid regularly, but need about 1 month, there is less migration, NREGS does not help cope with shocks, but dependency on money-lender has decreased	Disagreement between involved departments, some overburdened staff, only some acknowledge late payments, claim that work is provided on demand

Source: Author’s presentation. Strong positive effect: ++ / Positive effect: + / Negative effect: - / Strong negative effect: - - / Both positive and negative effects: - +

In short the contextual picture in Table 6.11 of Chikhaldara highlights that the need for NREGS is very high in this location, and that the scheme brings some –albeit limited – relief, which is expressed in less need for borrowing and less migration. But neither are the material changes sufficient to save or cope with shocks, nor do the assets contrib-

ute much to material well-being, and those with land benefit more than the landless. The local administration attributes the limited impact of asset creation to interdepartmental disputes, the population to partially unsatisfactory works. According to the participants work is not provided on demand and rationing of work leads to exclusionary processes. The lack of reliability in the provision of employment is seen as a reason that could trigger the return to higher migration rates. Parts of the administration deny that there is rationing. They also deem record keeping on Job Cards superficial. Additionally, the administration consistently reports much higher wages than those mentioned by the workers. The workers report significant wage disparities between men and women, and payments below NREGA minimum wage rates. Additionally payments are unreliable. Yet, this is a location where the knowledge on the scheme and its provisions among the participants is generally high. Also the participation in Gram Sabha meetings seems to have increased a lot. Nonetheless, the workers seem not to be able to use their knowledge and participation to reach the decisions and changes they want. Hence, along all three dimensions of welfare there have only been partial improvements for the participants. The administration paints a much more positive picture of the implementation in this location.

6.3.2 A village in Bhatkuli (site 4)

The fourth research location is in Bhatkuli Block, which is situated in close proximity to the District capital Amravati. Here, the terrain is flat. Black top roads connect most villages. The area would be fertile if the ground water was not saline. Irrigating the fields with the saline water would ruin the soil within few years. Therefore, irrigation is only available in certain spots where the ground water is not saline.

This fourth research site is the largest in the sample, it even has a copying facility and an ATM. Electricity, water from the tap and canalisation are available to some but not all. Some streets even have electrical street lights, but others have open sewers. The houses in this Bhatkuli village range from very simple low earthen huts to two-storey brick buildings with balconies and delicate woodwork. The larger houses have satellite dishes on the roof and fridges inside. Tractors and other agricultural machinery are moving in and around the village during my fieldwork. Clearly, in this village income levels vary widely (FN 27.03.2012).

Table 6.12 Key statistics on NREGS implementation in Bhatkuli

Data for the research location (village)	Financial year 2011/2012
Population in the village	2289
No of HH in the village	524
Data for the GP in which the village is located	
No of HH holding an NREGS Job Card	1,281
HH that worked in NREGS	7
Share of registered HH that worked (%)	0.55
Average No of days worked per HH	40
HH that availed 100 days	0
Share of working HH that availed 100 days (%)	0
Official daily wage rate in INR	127
Wage rate paid INR	129.9

Source: Population data from www.censusindia.gov.in Census 2011, NREGA data for financial year 2011/2012 from www.nrega.nic.in as on July 30 2015.

The official picture of NREGS in Bhatkuli looks bleak. The share of workers that actually worked in NREGS, compared to those registered is below 1 per cent for the year of fieldwork. Additionally, there are hardly any on-going works, and there has been very little work over the past year too.

Although one might think that the demand in such a location is lower than elsewhere, because there are other income opportunities in the close-by District capitol, the NREGA workers interviewed in this location repudiate such as statement. According to them the main source of income for people in the village is agriculture. And the need for NREGS reported throughout the interviews is high. Agricultural work is seasonal, and for nine months the workers from the village do not have work (55FGDMY). They continue, NREGA does not help much, because it is irregular and only for few months per year. The effect of NREGS in this location is low according to all interviewees. For example the dependency on moneylenders has not decreased. Some respondents say that they want to marry their children, but they cannot clear the marriage loans with the moneylenders (*ibid.*). Another respondent tells how moneylenders claim his full harvest to clear only the interest not the loan.¹⁷⁸ This has not changed since he started working in NREGS (*ibid.*).

¹⁷⁸ This is a widespread phenomenon: People borrow money from lenders and promise him the harvest or a share of the harvest in return. When harvest time comes, so does the moneylender to claim his due. However, at this time there is much i.e.

However, the GP staff explains that there is low demand for NREGS, because wages in agriculture are as high as 200-300 INR for just 4-5 hours of work, which makes NREGS unattractive (FN 27.03.2012). The works available in NREGS are digging jobs in road construction, which many people do not want to do. Overall, 75 per cent of the people in the village have a Job Card, but of those only 10 per cent work. According to the local official, the remaining 65 per cent have land and do not depend on NREGA.¹⁷⁹

Differences also prevail with regards to the effects of the works. The administration regularly argues that improvements in the fields of farmers would also benefit the landless agricultural labourers. The latter are sceptical in Bhatkuli. They point out that agricultural work in the village has been mechanised. There has been a change in crop patterns from cotton to soybean. Machines can harvest soy, whereas the cotton needs to be picked manually (57FGDFMY).¹⁸⁰ Thus, less labour is needed in the village and the labourers do not profit from improvements of the farmers situation. In the opposite, the need for wage earning opportunities outside agriculture is higher than ever.

cotton on the market and the farmer has to sell it at the low current market rate. For example in Adilabad at the time of my field visit the selling price of 100kg cotton stood at INR 3200. Two months later it would have been around INR 4500 per 100 kg. But, the moneylender does not allow the indebted farmers to wait. The lender buys at the low rate and sells it later at a better price himself, thereby he gains additional profit. In Adilabad District I could see the wealthier farmers hoarding their cotton in their houses and court yards, and those with just one oxen waggon of harvest queuing at the cotton mill (FN Adilabad 09.03.2012).

¹⁷⁹ An interesting account on low demand comes from the neighbouring village, where I also had an opportunity to speak with Gram Panchayat members (FN 27.03.2012). There I was told that the demand for the scheme is limited, because there is a mismatch between the works called for by the labourers and the works offered by the government. According to the interviewees, the District decides how the money is spent, not the locals. In consequence, non-useful works are carried out. Therefore, the labourers in this neighbouring location do not demand works, despite the fact there would be sufficient funds to carry out works. Additionally, at the time of my field visit, the GP had been showered with funds just one month before the end of the fiscal year, but the GP members deem it impossible to spend them purposefully now (FN 27.03.2012).

¹⁸⁰ This is, however, not necessarily a general trend. In Utnur I was told the opposite that mechanisation had stopped due to the availability of manual labour (3ALM).

Additionally, the major form of works on private lands in Bhatkuli are farm ponds. These are mainly happening on the land of bigger farmers. The elected representatives from the village point out that only farmers with 2-5 acres of land want to have a well on their farm, smaller farmers do not want it (60ERGPMF). Workers claim, the work on farm ponds has been done by contractors using machinery (57FGDFMY). Hence, it is no surprise when local workers say the benefits of farm ponds accrue only to the owner of the farm. As opposed to AP the owner of the farm pond must not participate in NREGS himself in order to get works carried out on his field (56FGDMN). These bigger farmers also do not want to do the work, because they consider it too hard (ibid.).

NREGS workers from Bhatkuli point out that farm roads and plantation, the other major NREGS work in this location, are useful to everyone, but some workers also deem the work too hard (57FGDFMY). They point out that many people do not come forward for NREGS because of the hard work. In their work sunstrokes are a common problem, but no shade is provided (ibid.). Another respondent points out that he is happy about NREGS work because there is no compulsion at the work site and he can take rest when needed (61MY).

Also with regards to reliability the participants in Bhatkuli have not seen much change. At this site the provision of work appeared to be particularly erratic. Interviewees complained that a guarantee for 100 days falls short of the number of days needed anyways and that the works should start much earlier in October or November (57FGDMYBH, 55FGDMY). However, it only started in February. Also, in the previous year work had not been available to most of the respondents from the focus group because machinery was used for most of the works (57FGDMYBH). “NREGA is irregular and only for few months per year”, the workers complained (55FGDMY). The local elected representatives do not know that when the workers need work, and assume that people will need work for 90 days before the rain starts (60ERGPFM), which means in February. When asked how they come to know whether the labourers want and need work, they reply that it is the custom to start the work when the fields are empty (ibid.). These elected Gram Panchayat members were not aware of the fact that the labourers could claim to start the work earlier, and according to them this has also not yet happened.

Another issue that also concerns reliability is the amount and time of payment of work under NREGA. In Bhatkuli the respondents experienced extreme delays in payment. At the time of fieldwork (end of March 2012), workers had not been paid since the works started in February (55FGDMY,57FGDFMY). The work of the past two weeks had not even been measured, which is a condition for the later payment. According to the workers the date of payment is uncertain. The delay causes them problems even in purchasing bread. Despite their NREGS work, they still cannot manage their family (ibid.), and cannot keep the promises made to the kids (57FGDFMY). To cope with the delayed payments they have taken loans and purchased groceries on credit (55FGDFMY). Every day they are told that the wages will be paid and they hope that eventually they will get their money (57FGDFMY).¹⁸¹ Notwithstanding these extreme delays, the interviewees seem confident that one day they will be paid full. On what they build this confidence is not clear.

However, they also report that non-payment of wages has been the reason for about thirty families from their village to drop out from NREGS (ibid.). They worked in NREGA in the year before, but stopped coming because no work was made available and wages have not been paid. Now they are migrating for work with private employers. Hence, for the people in Bhatkuli uncertainty – on when there will be work and when there will be payment for the work done – is a major concern and a potential reason to drop out from the scheme and to fall back on coping strategies such as (distress) migration. Thus, from participant's side the provision of labour is key to the image of the whole scheme. However, the workers here feel that they do not have any influence on when the work starts.

Although this is not brought up as a theme by the participants, there is an additional danger in the extreme delays in payments, in particular in connection with insufficient maintenance of records: Such create more chances for fraud at the cost of the workers. When the days worked are not noted on the individual job card – as was not the case at both Maha-

¹⁸¹ The day that I come to the village for the second time, I am told that an instalment on their delayed wages has been paid. But, the government still owes wages of INR 6-7000 per person to the labourers. The workers report that the money disbursed today is not from NREGS, but from the *Sarpanch*, who gave them an advance from other funds, which he will claim from NREGS later (55FGDMY).

rashtrian sites – workers have little proof about their work in their own hands. Records on measurements and attendance are not kept by themselves but by the administration. “We are not allowed to look into the books”, says one participant in a group discussion in Bhatkuli (55FGDMY), “the employees fill them out at their own sake.”

Besides being not informed, the workers at this site apparently also receive wrong information from the administration. Workers unanimously said that the local Block Development Officer (BDO) had informed them that in NREGS wages are always 127 INR per day, no matter how hard the work is and how much they worked. The BDO told them not to work too hard, because they would not be paid for excess work (57FGDFMY). Therefore workers could not realise higher wages, even if they worked more. On the positive side, the participants stated that they got the official minimum wage of INR 127. This nearly matches the wages for the GP as stated on the website, which reports INR 129.91 per day in 2011/2012.¹⁸² Some participants mentioned that they would prefer food over cash payments (*ibid.*).¹⁸³ However, there is no consensus among participants which type of payment they prefer.

In Bhatkuli, worse than in all previous sites, literally no NREGS worker says that they ever participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Neither do the young richer men, whom I interviewed in a group of non-workers (56FGDMN). Actually, these younger men state, that they do not even know that the Gram Sabha decides about the works. This fact is known to at least some of the workers, however, these don't take part in the meetings either. Different accounts of when and where these meetings are held exist, some say they are held outside the village (*ibid.*), another says Gram Sabhas are conducted in the office (61MY). The decisions, they agree, are taken by so few people that the meetings can easily be held inside (*ibid.*, 57FGDMY), it is only the Sarpanch and the GP members that hold meetings and make decisions, there is no gathering of people in an open place (56FGDMN, 57FGDMY). Although the meetings

¹⁸² Data from official NREGS website, last accessed July 10 2013, http://164.100.128.68/netnrega/writereaddata/state_out/display_pan1824007_local_4_1112.html.

¹⁸³ Some of the earlier employment schemes delivered grains in exchange for labour. Also during the pilot study in Dhule in late 2010, a time when inflation of food prices was particularly high in India, people preferred food over cash payments.

are announced by drum beatings (*tom-tom*), the people working in NREGS do not go because their issues are not discussed there and they have never been asked (57FGDMY). The lack of involvement in decision-making is mirrored in a much more limited knowledge about the types of work that can be carried out and knowledge about the scheme's provision more generally. In this location people also most clearly stated that NREGS works have partly been carried out using machines, and women tend not to find work in the scheme.

Conversely, the GP members claim that they make information about the NREGS works – that they know can be undertaken, this is farm ponds, roads, canals, wells, and plantation – known (60ERGPMF). Afterwards those who need a farm pond approached the GP members, but these were only farmers with land between 2 and 5 acres. The GP members do not mention the *Gram Sabha* until they are specifically asked for it (*ibid.*). Then they say that people do not attend the *Gram Sabha*, they complain that people are not coming.

In one of the group discussions (55FGDMY), participants pointed out that they are not given respect because they are the poor, and because they are poor, they do not have the right to participate. When they met employees of the GP to demand labour, the employees say that they cannot make demands from their superior and nothing happens, same when they complain with the BDO. The BDO told them that his superiors do not allow him to draw the wages regularly, and that he does not have authority to pay more than 127 INR wages per day (*ibid.*). He himself has to follow the orders of the superiors and hence, cannot do anything about the problems that the villagers put in front of him. At the end of the interview, one of them cites the proverb that also served as starting citation for this chapter, “government has three sons. The first is government employees, the second is agricultural and the third is labourers. Labourers are given least protection” (55FGDMY). This rather bleak account is also visible in the table below. Only one interviewee in Bhatkuli is adamant that “the right to work means every hand has a claim for work and the right to be fed” (61MY). To him NREGS has been easier accessible than other schemes, in this case a pension scheme, for which he needed two years to get his mother access.

Table 6.13 Perceptions of welfare gains and implementation in Bhatkuli

Research site 4 Bhatkuli		
Characteristics	Participants perspectives	Administration and other's perspectives
Need for the scheme	++	- +
Material improvements		
- in income	-	+
- in assets	-	+
Reliability		
- in wages	--	?
- in employment provision	--	?
Participation		
- in decision-making	--	+
Social protection overall	--	+
Mixed community, with little awareness among both participants and administration	Expectations towards the government are not met, NREGS does not help with shocks, no enough money for daily needs with NREGS, migration has not reduced, no participation in decision-making, perception of powerlessness	Limited knowledge on the possibilities of the scheme, neglect of the scheme

Source: Author's presentation. Strong positive effect or relationship: ++ / Positive effect or relationship: + / Negative effect or relationship: - / Strong negative effect or relationship: -- / Both positive and negative effects: - +

The multivocal account of NREGS implementation in Bhatkuli unveils significant differences in the statements of workers and administration. At this location there was no special field staff for NREGA and the response from the administration at Block level was particularly problematic.¹⁸⁴ Whereas workers state high need and very low impact in terms of material gains, reliability and agency, the administration either sees improvements or is evasive on these themes. Villagers already started migrating again due to unreliability of employment and wages. Potential income gains are devalued by their stark unreliability. Knowledge on the scheme is low both among participants, administration and elected representatives. In this highly stratified village exclusionary processes take

¹⁸⁴ In Bhatkuli Block I tried to meet the responsible Block Development Officer, who never picked up his phone and had others tell me that he was not in the office either. Finally, I received a message from him in which he said that I had already talked to all relevant people and that he would not say anything new (FN 31.03.2012). In other words, he said that he was not ready to give an interview.

place in decision-making and the gains of some NREGS works accrue to the better off farmers. The simultaneous mechanisation of agriculture makes the workers even more dependent on NREGS employment opportunities, which were not realised.

6.3.3 Views from Amravati District and Maharashtra State

On material gains for participants I did not discuss much with the District administration, but the change in the provision of employment to a demand-based logic was a major topic. However, the administration at District level, lives in denial “work for those who demand – this is my job. Providing work is 1st priority”, he says (51ADM). And, he claims that he can always provide as much work as demanded, even when demand is high.¹⁸⁵ According to this account

the [administrative] machinery is asked not to sit idle and wait for the demand to come. At least awake the demand by drum beatings and shout loud that work can be done and demand can be put. Otherwise it happens that people want to, but the time goes on skipping, they don't realise the time has come. This happens. (ibid.)

While this District official puts the blame for low demand on workers, who spend their time ‘skipping’ the interview is interrupted by the arrival of an elected representative of the *Zilla Parishad* of Morshi. He enters and immediately dictates the names of villages to the interviewee where there is demand for work, but no work or not enough work, and also Form No. is not given. According to this elected representative at the time there are more than 1000 workers who want to work but do not get work in the Cluster of Morshi (FN 26.03.2012). This interruption illustrates once again that the problem is that employment is not provided as demanded. At the same time the interviewee from the administration exemplifies that work is not offered when demanded, but only at certain times when it is announced by drum beatings.

With regards to the question of demand, a discussion at the District's Gram Sewak Training Centre (FN 26.03.2012) brings up another interesting argument, the demand for work, to initialise works and to realise the

¹⁸⁵ At this point of the interview the interpreter suggests that it is rather a problem to get the demand for all the work offered (FN on Iv51ADM).

100 days, comes rather from above than from the workers. In this discussion it is also pointed out that NREGS works are not offered in the rainy season due to government policy that NREGS works should not compete with agricultural works. According to the participants of the discussion, workers prefer agricultural work to NREGA work anyways. Therefore there is no problem with unavailability of labour.

This justification that there actually rather is a lack of demand than a lack of provision of employment is also the story told at State level:

This is a demand driven scheme, we cannot push people. If somebody wants employment, we have to create awareness that the government is giving it to you. If you wish to come to work, there is shelf of works, you can work. (63ASF)

In this statement suggests an outright rejection of the responsibility of the State's administration for the low participation rates in NREGS in the State.

Members of the Block and District staff see one problem for implementation processes generally in the lack of NREGS staff. GP level staff from Chikhaldara complains that he cannot supervise all the work sites (FN 24.03.2012). There are up to 15-20 worksites in his GP alone, up to 5 per village. If he cannot be there and there is no dedicated NREGS staff on village level, he assigns another trusted person to take the measurements. His job consists 90 per cent in work on NREGS, but he also has to look after other schemes. Staff members of the District administration explain that Melghat has asked for more staff before, but this is not sanctioned at the State level (FN 31.03.2012). In the State plan for NREGS in 2012-2013 there is no new permanent staff foreseen, instead more computer operators, office assistants, programme officers and more people from other departments will be pulled into the work on NREGS. Additionally, foreseen staff is not appointed says one translator (FN 27.03.2012). Recently, a scam on the appointment of Gram Sewaks in the District was revealed with the help of the Right to Information Act. Apparently, the leading District staff took bribes and then employed people who had fared less well in qualifying exams. After this case had been uncovered, no new recruitment procedures had taken place yet.

6.4 Interim conclusion on the contested views on implementation

This chapter examined the performance of the scheme in four villages, and to smaller extent also in their respective Blocks, Districts and States. The first concern of this chapter was to investigate the performance of the scheme. Each section started with the official picture of the scheme in the respective location and was complemented and contrasted with the accounts of participants and administration on the three dimensions of welfare gains. To understand participants' perspectives on the scheme and its benefits was one main question pursued. A further question concerned differential effects within the locations. In sum, the accounts from my fieldwork, contrasted with official statistics and earlier findings, highlight three main thematic areas that are different than previous literature had expected. These are a) the distribution of welfare gains within the villages and the exclusionary processes around these, b) the mechanisms by which employment is provided on demand or not, and c) the contribution of awareness in a self-selecting scheme. These three themes will be further explored using the approach of the politics of implementation in the following seventh chapter.

Table 6.14 shows that on the level of the official statistics there are many differences between the four villages and variation within the Districts and States; it offers a comparative view on the first question on the performance of the scheme from official data. Table 6.14 visualises that Maharashtra performs less well than Andhra Pradesh. In particular, Maharashtra has a much smaller number of participants, despite the fact that its rural population is larger. The only indicator that is consistently better according to the official data are the wages in Maharashtra, which are above the stipulated rate. For the remaining indicators listed here no coherent picture emerges. However, this typical snapshot on NREGS implementation mainly captures indicators that are important for material gains, not for the other dimensions.

Table 6.14 NREGA Data for 2011/2012 in the research locations

	Andhra Pradesh State	Adilabad District	Utnur Block	Panchayat Location 1	Talamadugu Block	Panchayat Location 2
Total HH applied for job card	12,046,902	463,219	21,48	1,153	7834	396
Total job cards issued	12,046,902	463,219	21,48	1,153	7834	396
Total households worked	4,998,185	212,281	5,861	261	2,687	112
Total persons worked	9,124,906	426,594	13,378	622	5,644	219
Share of HH reached 100 days	19	19	25	29	19	16
Average person days per household - all HH	59	60	73	78	60	48
Non SC/ST	54	53	51	70	48	67
ST	80	71	78	96	72	14
SC	60	59	71	70	51	45
Share within working HH from ST	14	35	67	30	46	16
Share within working HH from Sc	26	25	17	34	25	49
Stipulated State NREGS wage rate		117				
Wages paid according to NREGS website				104 INR		97 INR

Blocks, Districts and States, and for India

						INDIA
Maharash- trha State	Amravati District	Chikhal- dara Block	Panchayat Location 3	Bhatkuli Block	Panchayat Location 4	
6,905,886	277,712	34,343	698	17,511	1,281	125,737,939
6,797,949	272,793	30,508	590	17,444	1,281	125,075,528
1,504,521	5,987	21,657	422	1,113	3	50,642,949
2,872,762	121,329	50,211	941	1,712	7	81,994,861
13	71	9	6	6	0	8
51	36	40	32	35	40	43
50	36	41	33	35	40	42
56	29	28	14	31	0	51
53	41	61	0	32	0	42
18	52	6	8	2	0	16
8	43	1	0	17	0	23
	127					
			225 INR			130 INR

Source: www.nic.nrega.in. Own calculations. The data on NREGS is not always available per village, therefore, Gram Panchayats are used. Only in Bhatkuli the research site is a village that is a GP by itself, all other locations are clubbed together with other villages into a GP.

As I pointed out earlier, overall these statistics alone cannot provide an adequate understanding of the extension of social security. Whether the indicators are read as good or bad is subject to more knowledge on the locations, their needs and the effects that a number of days of employment can make there.

Therefore, this study uses an approach, which allows for a broad contextual picture of NREGS implementation on the ground through its analytically encompassing framework of the three dimensions of welfare gains, and the methodological reliance on interviews with various stakeholders, among them participants and administration, as well as – to a lesser extent – civil society.

The analytical framework of the three dimension of welfare makes explicit links between indicators on statutory provisions and a broad concept of welfare gains. This analytical connection allows to identify links between the different dimensions of welfare, that would otherwise remain correlations.

Methodologically there were two innovations, first, the explicit multivocal view including a variety of policy actors, and second, the privileged position given to participants and their perspectives'. In interpretative analysis implementation is understood as an interactive process, in which the definition of success and failure of implementation activities is negotiated among a variety of actors including the policy target groups (Yanow, 1990: 222), they have been in the centre of attention of this sixth chapter. The accounts of the administration with regards to the performance of the scheme are shortly discussed below; they will receive special emphasis in the following seventh chapter.

Starting the multivocal picture with the accounts of the administration, we can see that the local and Block administration overall attest the scheme a positive effect, this is also captured in Table 6.15 opposite.

In Talamadugu and Chikhaldara the administration deems the welfare gains to be particularly big. In the former the administration claims it is the development of assets, which have created the change. In this case, it would have been surprising if they assumed it was through wages, because wages are particularly low in this location.

Table 6.15 View of the administration on welfare and implementation

District – State	Amravati – Maharashtra		Adilabad – Andhra Pradesh	
Research site	Utnur	Talamadugu	Chikhaldara	Bhatkuli
Need for the scheme	++	- +	++	- +
Material improvements				
- in income	+	+	++	+
- in assets	+	?	+	+
Reliability				
- in wages	+	- +	- +	?
- in employment provision	+	?	+	?
Participation				
- in decision-making	+	+	+	+
Welfare gains overall	+	++	++	+

Source: Author's presentation. Strong positive effect or relationship: ++ / Positive effect or relationship: + / Negative effect or relationship: - / Strong negative effect or relationship: - - / Both positive and negative effects: - +

In Chikhaldara the administration deems the income gains high. This corresponds with the high wage rates, but is somehow contradicted by the low number of average days per household. Across locations, the administration attests a positive change in terms of participation in decision-making.

But, the accounts by participants show that their impression of success and failure can be quite different than those of the administration. The image that emerges from the interviews with participants (and few non-participants) of NREGS shows that in their own assessment most of them stated that NREGS brought change to the positive, which they describe as crucial but also as limited. In Utnur people reported the greatest change and are most content with the scheme. This was the only location in which participants stated that their demand for work was met. The site also showed high participation and good relations with an active field assistant. Utnur is followed by Talamadugu. Yet, participation at this second site is not as high and there clearly were exclusionary processes. On a similar level of perceived positive changes we find Chikhaldara, where in particular the degree of participation in decision-making stands out. The smallest positive impact is reported in Bhatkuli. At this

site, the effect in terms of lowered dependence on i.e. moneylenders was stated to be very small. At this site also the availability of work was particularly random. Table 6.16 below captures the different accounts on the scheme by participants across locations.

Table 6.16 Workers' views on welfare gains and implementation

District – State	Amravati – Maharashtra		Adilabad – Andhra Pradesh	
Research site	Utnur	Talamadugu	Chikhaldara	Bhatkuli
Need for the scheme	++	- +	++	++
Material improvements	+	- +	- +	-
- in income	+	+	- +	-
- in assets				
Reliability				
- in wages	++	- +	- +	--
- in employment provision	+	- +	-	--
Participation				
- in decision-making	?	- +	++	--
Welfare gains overall	++	- +	- +	--

Source: Author's presentation. Strong positive effect or relationship: ++ / Positive effect or relationship: + / Negative effect or relationship: - / Strong negative effect or relationship: -- / Both positive and negative effects: - + / Insufficient data: ?

Following the methodological account chosen, which attributes special importance to the views of participants, I compare their accounts along the three dimensions of welfare gains across the four locations.

I start with material well-being. As one would hope for a policy that has the stated aim to improve livelihoods of the rural poor, many interviewees considered NREGA to be an important or very important source of income. In sum, the majority of people that I talked to in villages, who could be considered rather poor in terms of their living conditions and income, and who had worked in NREGA, perceived the impact of NREGA to be crucial and limited at the same time: for many of them things may be better, but they are not good. A central obstacle also to material well-being is the lack of reliable work and income, which will be discussed in more detail below. Another important aspect why the impact of NREGA was seen as limited, is that it cannot solve certain

needs that people have, in the case of Chikhaldara it is a road, in Utnur – in a neighbouring village to the first research site – it is drinking water. In terms of material changes another big theme are wages. Across locations about half of the interviewees complained about low wage levels. In Utnur and in Chikhaldara the wages reported by workers were below the stipulated State NREGS minimum wages – however in Talamadugu where the statistical data above suggested particularly low payment, this was not confirmed by workers. Improvement of the material conditions could further be achieved through the NREGS works executed. The accounts of the impact of the works vary between the locations. In the rather homogenous Utnur participants said that they benefitted equally. In Talamadugu there was envy because the gain from the works was seen to go primarily to the poor. In Chikhaldara and Bhatkuli workers said that those with farmland benefit more from the scheme than labourers. The effects of the scheme are, hence, not only different between locations, but also therein. This also answers the third question posed at the beginning of this chapter: there is no coherent pattern who benefits from implementation.

An earlier discussed indicator for material well-being is migration. The theme played a much smaller role for participants at the sites in Andhra than in Maharashtra. In Maharashtra workers at both sites stated that they either migrated personally, or other people in the village had left due to the unavailability of labour. In Chikhaldara participants said that migration had come down, but would go up again if NREGA work would not become available more reliably. In Bhatkuli I was told that some workers had already left the village, because they did not know how much work they would get and when they would get their wages.

It thus seems that migration is linked to reliability, the second dimension of welfare gains – which emerged strongly from the interviews with NREGA participants. Reliability came to the fore in discussions on the provision of work, as well as with regards to payments and their timing. Overall, across locations the opportunity of (paid) employment, and in proximity to their home, is the main reason for people to seek access to NREGA, and people in all locations would like more work to be available. The level of (dis-) satisfaction with the provision of work varies

between the four sites in the two States. Non- or random provision of labour was more common to the Maharashtra sites than those in AP.

Late payments are another prime concern of workers at the Maharashtra sites. In Bhatkuli some households had dropped out of the scheme and migrated, and could therefore not be interviewed, supposedly because of the unreliability of employment and payment in the scheme. However, interestingly another large group of workers stayed in the village despite broken promises of swift payment. The delayed payments cause them trouble in managing their day-to-day living, yet these workers retained the trust that the state will eventually pay. At the sites in Andhra most participants mention that payment is regular and within less than two weeks, something unheard at the Maharashtra sites.

The third theme is agency. The interviews suggest that across research locations the introduction of NREGA has not led to a change that is perceived by villagers as a greater capacity to shape their environment, or making informed choices. Most interviewed NREGS participants do not know who takes decisions on the works to be done in the scheme, that they themselves can demand work and decide about the types of work, that they have a right to 100 days of employment and to an unemployment allowance in case no work is provided. Awareness on the scheme is particularly low in Utnur and Bhatkuli. This is interesting because these are the two outliers, both positive and negative, in the sample. And, in Chikhaldara where the workers are better informed than in the other locations, they have not been able to claim their entitlements despite their knowledge. With regards to participation in decision-making none of the locations has really good results. Both in AP and in Maharashtra there are a number of findings, which suggest that decisions are to a large extent either taken by the administration or only by some of the villagers.

With regards to the first question posed in this chapter, on the overall performance of the scheme, official statistics, members of the administration and participants thus tell quite different stories. There is no coherent view on the performance of the scheme. Each of the different sources contributes to multivocal accounts, which highlight the differences in the perceptions of the implementation. Divergence exists between admin-

istration and participants, between the locations and also within the locations.

Among the different accounts, participants have been in the focus of this sixth chapter. The participant's perspective clearly showed that people in the villages partially have other objectives than the administration. They want their livelihood to be improved through works that are not possible in the scheme (water, road). Also, they do not necessarily share the administrations focus.

For example in Chikhaldara the reduction of migration was a major theme for the administration. However, among the villagers not all deemed migration to be bad. Some participants preferred to stay in their home village, if work was available. This was either because they had younger children, or unmarried daughters who deemed to be more secure at home. However, in the same family migration is deemed to be a chance for the son, for whom migration is an opportunity to see the city and how people live there (35MY).

Another stark contrast between participants' and administrations' views can be seen in the assumption that low or declining participation rates can be interpreted as signs of success for the scheme. What the administration (reference) promotes, the participants deny. This is most obvious in the case of Bhatkuli: participation was low, despite the high unfulfilled need expressed by workers. It is also partially true for Talamadugu. Participants explain some degree of lower demand with varying need for the scheme, depending on local weather conditions. Yet, at this site women were excluded from works, which would have been well paid for them, because their husbands were not interested, or they did not have a male family member to bring. Hence, assuming that NREGA is successful when demand declines or is low, is a way of defining success of the scheme that is only possible when participants' views are not taken into account. Including the participants' views thus offers a much needed corrective!

Participants' and non-participants' perspectives were also crucial in finding differences in (mainly material) implementation gains within locations. The perspective of different groups of participants shows that even in Talamadugu, a location with exclusionary processes, benefits are

seen to accrue to poorer farmers rather than the rich. This is an interesting finding, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Overall, the differences in the accounts of administration and participants appear to be bigger when there is less interaction between them. This was most visible in Bhatkuli. In the cases in which citizens and administration engage with each other the accounts were not as far apart, this could be seen in Utnur.

In a next step I will compare these findings to the results from previous studies on NREGS (see 0 below), before I engage with their explanatory logics.

The table above shows various indicators that have been used in previous studies on NREGA. In the table above I have grouped them along the three dimensions of welfare that I have developed as analytical categories. The studies themselves frequently state that the evidence on a certain aspect is different across locations, on other aspects the studies have contradictory findings. In detail the arguments from previous studies can be found in Section 6.1, here they are compared to the findings from the four locations.

In the field of material gains the table shows that my findings correspond the results of earlier studies, with regards to increased household income and wages. As for the payment of minimum wages, participants' accounts from Utnur and Chikhaldara reported wages below the State minimum wages. This is interesting because they are generally the two sites that fare better in their respective States. Another interesting finding concerns the use of the infrastructure constructed in NREGS, or the question who benefits (more) from the scheme. In Andhra the benefits are either seen to go to all – in the relatively egalitarian setting of Utnur – or rather to the poor, in Talamadugu. At the Maharashtrian sites the benefits are seen to accrue more to those that own land. What is surprising is that in a location like Talamadugu, with exclusionary processes, benefits are seen to accrue to poorer farmers rather than the rich. This is an interesting finding, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Additionally, one can highlight that the often made argument, that gains for the richer farmers would also be to the benefit of the labourers, because they would get more employment (reference), is denied by the workers in Bhatkuli.

Table 6.17 Findings from the field compared to earlier studies

Themes	Other studies	Andhra Pradesh		Maharashtra	
		UTN	TAL	CHI	BHA
Material gains					
Increase in household income	Rather positive, regional variation	+	+	+	-
Increase in wages	Rather positive, regional variation	+	+	+	+
Payment of NREGS wage rate	Mixed evidence	-	+	-	+
Increased agricultural production	Mixed evidence	?	+	?	?
Reduction of migration	Mixed evidence	+	?	+	+-
Useful & sustainable infrastructure	Mixed evidence, regional variation	+	+ (poor)	-	+ (rich)
Reliability and certainty					
Provision of work on demand	Rather negative	+	- +	-	-
Dated receipts and unemployment allowances	Rather negative	-	-	-	-
Payment of wages in time	Rather negative	+	- +	-	-
Access of women	Regional variation, aggregate positive	+	-	+	-
Access of SC/ST	Regional variation, aggregate positive	+	?	+	?
Agency					
Awareness levels	Mixed evidence, rather low	-	+	+	-
Involvement in decision making	Mixed evidence, rather low	- +	-	+	-
Participation in monitoring	Mixed evidence, rather low	+	+	?	-

Source: Author's presentation. Positive effect: + / Negative effect: - / Both positive and negative effects: - + / Insufficient data: ?

They point out that with a simultaneous mechanisation of agriculture and a change in crops – from the manually harvested cotton to the mechanically harvested soy bean – the need for their labour has actually been reduced. With regards to reliability the table shows that NREGS in Andhra is seen to work much more reliably than in Maharashtra. This concerns both the provision of employment and timely payments. Generally, the pattern that the locations in AP do better than those in MH is

not too surprising given that MH is deemed a laggard State and AP a forerunner in NREGS implementation. But, AP also fails when it comes to the registration of demand and the acknowledgment with receipts. In this regard all locations confirm the findings from earlier studies on the lack of dated receipts of application, as well as the failure to pay unemployment allowances. Interestingly, also in AP the procedure officially foreseen to register demand is not used. This raises the question whether and how employment can be provided on demand without registering it. Therefore, I will have a closer look at the mechanisms behind the provision of employment on demand in the following chapter.

With regards to the dimension of agency earlier studies on NREGS pointed out that NREGS suffers from a lack of awareness by (potential) participants. My fieldwork does at large not contradict this earlier finding. Awareness levels tended to be low across the locations, with the exception of Chikhaldara. In Talamadugu participants rather mentioned other statutory provisions. In both cases, interestingly, the awareness did not lead to the realisation of entitlements. Thus, the role of awareness for implementation will be taken up in the following chapter. As far as the involvement in decision-making is concerned there are variations between the locations, which largely correspond with earlier findings. The aspect of monitoring has not been a focus of this research; therefore there are no detailed findings for the locations. In the research locations in AP, the participants mentioned that social audits had taken place, but no issues came up (7FGDMFY). Generally with regards to monitoring AP is deemed to be particularly strong by other authors (Burra, 2010; Jha *et al.*, 2010), and during fieldwork auditing structures proved to be generally in place. In Maharashtra audit structures were under construction.

In sum, the accounts from my fieldwork, contrasted with official statistics and earlier findings, highlight three main thematic areas that are different than previous literature had expected. These are a) the distribution of welfare gains within the villages and the exclusionary processes around these, b) the mechanisms by which employment is provided on demand or not, and c) the contribution of awareness in a self-selecting scheme. These three themes will be further explored using the approach of the politics of implementation in the following chapter.

7 The Politics of Implementation in NREGA

Sometimes this scheme depends on persons.
(39CSOBM: 228f)

This chapter seeks to disclose what contributes to the differences in implementation, which can be found in a) distribution and exclusion, b) employment on demand, and c) awareness. These three themes emerged from the multivocal account on NREGA in the previous sixth chapter as empirical and so far inadequately explained phenomena.

Before I present my own analysis, I quickly review previous arguments that deal with these three implementation problems. I will show that most of the approaches – that hitherto engaged with these problems – primarily looked for bureaucratic solutions to essentially political problems. This chapter thus uses the framework of the politics of implementation, developed earlier in this book, to explain what contributes to the gap between policy intent and implementation, and to differences in implementation.

Foundations of the politics of implementation are that implementation is not an administrative, technical process of the simple execution of singular policy intent. Policies always carry multiple meanings, are subject to various interpretations and re-interpretations. Conflicts about implementation are legitimate and to be expected. What is of interest is how this gap between intent and implementation has been formed and what contributes to differences in implementation.

Two core explanatory logics of the politics of implementation structure the chapter: First, the politics of implementation attribute a key role to perceptions, interpretation and ideas of both policy actors and ‘targets’ of policy. Ideas and perceptions – about the scheme and the participants – held by administrators play a large role for all questions related to access to the scheme and its assets. Ideas also matter greatly for the question whether or not the administration seizes the policy space and claim room for manoeuvre, or whether they leave that room to others. Whether or not the NREG Act is actively interpreted and the space claimed, impacts on the distribution of the benefits of the scheme, as I will discuss below. At the same time such a view gives centrality to actors and their

interpretation. Interpretation crucially shapes the room to manoeuvre of other policy actors and participants.

Second, interpretations and perception of policies are formed in a context where other policies have been implemented before. Prior institutional practices act as legacies. Previous encounters between citizens and the state as well as the implicit logics that govern them continue to be of relevance. This provides an explanation why new ideas on state-citizen-relationships in demand- and rights-based schemes have not yet taken hold. Legacies and embeddedness in a given context also contribute to explain why awareness does not play the central role in reversing earlier patterns – as prior studies assumed. These two arguments will be introduced and discussed separately, but they are interwoven empirically, as the examples will show.

7.1 Earlier explanations for NREGS implementation problems

The gap between intent and implementation in Indian welfare programmes is well-documented.¹⁸⁶ Many studies primarily present implementation failures, which they found through either statistical analysis or surveys. Some of them also provide suggestions on how the problems can be tackled, but typically this is not embedded in an explicitly stated theoretical approach to implementation. The arguments used roughly follow three different schools of implementation studies. First: most studies build on bureaucratic or structural arguments, which typically seek to resolve the problems through “professional training, or clearer rules, and organizational design” (Yanow, 1996: 226). A second set of studies builds on another conventional approach to implementation, which seeks to resolve problems through improved communication flows. A third group of studies looks for answers to implementation problems in local politics rather than bureaucratic changes.

The arguments, which these different schools provide, have been discussed above. Of relevance here is what the three approaches have to say on the three thematic areas that emerged from the previous chapter, a) the distribution of welfare gains within the villages and the exclusionary

¹⁸⁶ See the literature review on implementation in Indian welfare schemes generally, and on NREGS in particular in section 3.3. An overview on implementation studies can be found in the first section of Chapter 3.

processes around these, b) the mechanisms by which employment is provided on demand or not, and c) the role of awareness. Some themes have been touched upon, but have not been resolved, others have been off the radar of previous inquiries. Overall, the aim of this section is to identify valid explanations that have already been advanced, and which serve as stepping-stones for the analysis provided here. At the same time gaps in the argumentation are highlighted as agenda for this research.

Starting with a) problems around exclusion and potentially unintended distribution of welfare gains, the bureaucratic school seeks to address these mainly through better targeting (World Bank, 2011b: xxii; Working Group on Social Security, 2012: 20). The bureaucratic school seeks remedies for implementation problems in changes at the central level, primarily in policy design. As far as issues of exclusion are concerned, the NREG Act has reacted to bureaucratic arguments and adopted new, more open targeting criteria. Officially, NREGA is a self-selecting and in principal universal scheme for the rural population. The only official mechanism of selection is that households have to be willing to perform manual labour and have to notify the local officer of their demand for work. Earlier problems associated with targeting to the population below the poverty line (BPL), which often resulted in the exclusion of poor and inclusion of the non-poor should in principle be fixed through self-selection. On a structural or bureaucratic level the targeting problem could thus deemed to be resolved.

However, as other studies as well as my own research show, although the programme is not tied to BPL status exclusionary processes still take place. For example, this form of targeting quite explicitly excludes those groups of the population that are unable to work.¹⁸⁷ Several observers have criticised that NREGS thereby excludes some of the most deprived people from NREGS, those that are physically too weak to perform hard manual labour for many hours a day and two weeks at a stretch (CEC, 2009: 8). Overall, it is obvious that the change of the target group definition at a policy design level does not lead to the end of exclusion; it rather shifts the problem to other exclusionary processes. Hence, there

¹⁸⁷ This has been acknowledged by the Mihir Shah Committee (2012), which formulated a draft for revised Operational Guidelines of the scheme. States are asked to offer more works in which physically challenged workers can also participate.

seems to be no bureaucratic quick fix at a central level to exclusionary processes.

Another bureaucratic explanation for policy failure is the lack of administrative capacity. This is widely shared to be a problem in NREGS (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 47; NCEUS, 2009: 221; Raabe *et al.*, 2012). Both AP and MH do not belong to the poorer States for which this argument is deemed to be particularly relevant (Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 6). Yet, in this regard the differences between the two States are considerable. AP has employed large numbers of dedicated NREGA staff and trained them; the District of Adilabad alone has 1500 NREGS staff (FN 05.03.2012). In the District of Amravati the number of unfilled vacancies was high with the result of more work for the remaining employees. Pankaj (2012a: 113) and Hirway (2012: 66) point out that trained staff is particularly important for the implementation of NREGS at local level. And indeed in Maharashtra, where some of the NREGS staff said that they had little or no training, the implementation results fall short of those in AP. Thus, the bureaucratic argument helps to explain how administrative capacities may contribute to the differences in implementation. Yet, even when locations are equally well-equipped with trained staff, differences in the implementation remain, as could be seen at the two sites in Andhra. The bureaucratic argument only partially explains exclusionary processes in the scheme.

The perspective on implementation of communication-based implementation studies is not typically used to discuss the issue of exclusion and unequal gains. If it would, these phenomena would probably be attributed to inadequate knowledge of the field level staff and be explained as problems of ambiguous, or unclear policy messages on the intended beneficiaries of the scheme. To some degree such an argument seems valid. Given that the NREG Act is universally open to the whole rural population, it is not per se a problem if the richer farmers benefit from the scheme. However, the scheme is also supposed to “provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas” (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005). This opens room for interpretation whether households with currently less security should be favoured over others. The Act itself does not resolve this question. A communication-based approach might suggest a clearer message for whom the scheme is

intended as a solution. However, more targeting has been criticised for other reasons (see above).

A third group of studies look for answers to implementation problems in local politics rather than bureaucratic changes explicitly because of issues of exclusion and unequal gains from welfare schemes. Such studies build on the insight that decentralisation alone – thus a change at the policy level from top-down to bottom-up governance of a scheme, essentially another bureaucratic change – is insufficient to make a scheme accessible for the poorest (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005). Village and Block level politics are beset with patronage, corruption, abuse and humiliation (Ginneken, 2004: 194; Pellissery, 2005; Pankaj, 2012b: 11), often to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable groups, such as SC, ST communities, and women (Dev *et al.*, 2007: 3565). In such an understanding targeting errors are no technical or administrative issues of changing eligibility criteria. At the core of errors of exclusion is the politicisation of accessibility in implementation at the local level. Other authors have noted that in NREGS – despite officially greater involvement in decision-making – denial of entitlements by officials, sabotage through the administration, elite capture, targeting failure and corruption remain (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 44; NCEUS, 2009: 225; Niehaus & Sukhtankar, 2009: 5ff; Hirway, 2012: 65; Raabe *et al.*, 2012: 318). Some of this could also be seen during my fieldwork. Exclusion was most visible in Talamadugu, where at least one potential participant was fully excluded and women were not easily admitted to the scheme. Elite capture appeared to be an issue in Bhatkulli, where the benefits of a relevant part of the works accrued to the richer farmers.

Given that questions of access and welfare gains seem to be politicised, and I agree with this notion, the solution to these implementation problems is no longer sought in bureaucratic changes. Instead political participation, ownership and collective organisation of participants at local level are deemed to curb clientelism, and thereby positively influence access and coverage rates (Khanna, 2010; Khera, 2011c; Raabe *et al.*, 2012: 330). For this research, the selection of sites did not happen based on the degree of organisation of participants. Therefore, this theme does neither feature strongly in the interviews nor in the findings. However, what is interesting with regards to the research locations is, that in Talamadugu where there were exclusionary processes, nonetheless, the works carried

out were deemed to benefit the poorer rather than the richer farmers. It seems paradox that works are pro-poor, while at the same time parts of the poor are excluded. Thus, it will be important to understand the political mechanisms, which made it possible to give priority to the development of the land of the poorer farmers.

In sum – on the theme of exclusion and unequal gains from welfare – structural or bureaucratic arguments have already been included at a policy-making level, without the envisaged success. The argument of varied administrative capacity may contribute to explain differences at a larger scale, but fails to explain the differences between equally equipped locations. A communication-based approach might argue that a clearer policy message on whom the scheme is meant to benefit is needed, e.g. in the form of targeting. However, an approach that sees politics at the core of exclusion processes, points to the fact that both official targeting rules and better communication on intended beneficiaries have little impact as long as the locally powerful decide on access and exclusion anyways. This is a strong argument, which I also partially found to be true during my fieldwork and on which I build below. Yet, this last approach insufficiently explains why in a location with exclusionary practices pro-poor works are favoured.

This brings us to the theme of awareness. For the bureaucratic school awareness is not a central theme. Problems of implementation are sought much more within the implementation apparatus than outside. However, if a lack of awareness should be identified as an obstacle to implementation, one bureaucratic response could be more information for participants. This is why for the issue of awareness, mostly communication-based arguments are made (NCEUS, 2009: 220f; World Bank, 2011b; Working Group on Social Security, 2012; Dutta *et al.*, 2012: 6). The central argument is: In a demand-based scheme the participants need to know about the Act and its provisions in order to be able to claim their entitlements.¹⁸⁸ More specifically, “the realisation of low number of person days and other entitlements are happening because of the low level of quality awareness among the poor households” (Pankaj, 2012b: 27). The

¹⁸⁸ Another way of looking at this theme could be the approach of Stoker (1991) and Cline (2000), who seek to find solutions to implementation problems in mechanisms that improve cooperation of all policy actors including participants.

general argument that knowledge about a demand-based scheme is a condition to actually voice a demand can hardly be denied. My field-work as well as previous studies have pointed out that indeed many potential participants are not well informed about their entitlements. However, what this argument on information flows fails to explain is why even in locations with knowledge on the scheme i.e. Chikhaldara – and Talamadugu for some of the statutory provisions – the implementation remains so incomplete.

Lastly, approaches that see local politics as a reason for implementation problems, could – as above – point to the fact that awareness might not help in an environment in which participants are excluded from decisions. However, this argument is rarely made. As my approach also looks at the politics of implementation, I will engage with this argument in more detail below.

Finally, we come to the third theme: employment on demand. In most of the early studies on NREGS the issue of demand did not feature prominently. Despite the fact that this is so crucial in the whole conception of the Act as a rights-and demand-based instrument, it has received little attention until 2012 and the time of this field research. Since, it has become an increasingly important theme (CAG, 2013; Chopra, 2014; ESID, 2014). In the new Operational Guidelines (OG) (Mihir Shah Committee, 2012: 14ff), the issue of work on demand is supposed to be resolved through a mixture of better administrative procedures and better information for both the administration and the workers. As far as the administrative procedures are concerned, they are not new, but essentially better explained, hence the fact that registration of work on demand is not taking place, appears to be largely a communication problem too. Also on the side of participants the lack of information on the scheme, hence, the lack of awareness is deemed to be the source of problems. The underlying assumption of the new OG seems to be that if the participants would be aware of their right to employment, they could and would demand it and the better-informed officers would deliver. But, as I have pointed out above, awareness is not equal to the ability to claim an entitlement. In Chikhaldara a location with high awareness work is not delivered on demand. In Utnur, a site in AP with low awareness, participants perceived the work to be available on demand despite the fact that demand was not registered there either. These are reasons to

look in more detail into the dynamics of the provision of work on demand.

Hence, the three schools of implementation studies offer a number of useful arguments that help to understand and explore a wide range of implementation problems in NREGS. They can also contribute to explaining the three issues that have been identified above. However, as the discussion in this section also showed, there are still gaps concerning first, targeting and exclusionary processes, and in particular how they can be coupled with a pro-poor focus of the works; second, the role of awareness for implementation and in particular for demand; third the dynamics of the provision of work on demand more generally. These are not only empirically relevant, but also theoretically unresolved issues of the three approaches to varying degrees.

Overall, a general problem of bureaucratic and structural arguments is that they seek to resolve implementation problems mainly at a central level. But, as I have argued before and will discuss below, the central government cannot control how implementation happens on the ground. That these structural and bureaucratic approaches cannot provide answers to implementation problems on the ground does not come as a surprise. As I have argued in Section 3.1, studies that look only at internal dynamics of the administration as explanatory logic have long been discarded for the North and actually also for the South (see Myrdal, 1968; Evans, 1989; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991). Yet, for welfare schemes in India we still find many of these arguments as the discussion above shows. Communication-based approaches identify a problem in a lack of clarity of the policy message, and a lack of knowledge on certain central processes or entitlements of the Act. However, as the empirical cases showed awareness only has limited influence on realising rights. Therefore, the third set of studies that explained in particular exclusionary processes on local level with politics provided the most useful arguments for the phenomena, which this chapter will further explore. However, while the bureaucratic view overemphasises the importance of policy design, structure and the central level, the political approaches above tend to do the opposite. They vividly illustrate the indeed problematic decision-making and administrative structures at local level. What is missing is the link between the different levels of administration. In the case of Andhra in a village with exclusionary

practices, decisions are made in favour of the poor. As I will argue with the approach of politics of implementation below, this has to do with linkages between different layers of implementation of central, State, District and local level.

7.2 *The contribution of the politics of implementation*

An approach of *politics of implementation* builds on interpretative policy analysis where it acknowledges the ambiguity of meanings and conflicts over the societal values that the policy is deemed to achieve (see e.g. Brodtkin, 1990; Yanow, 1996; Fischer, 2003; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). It centrally investigates the perceptions and meanings that policy-makers, -administrators and -'targets' attach to a certain policy to understand different readings of policy outcomes. The importance of perceptions and interpretations in the policy processes is emphasised, and seen as a core factor that contributes to understand gaps between policy intent and implementation. Such a view on the implementation on NREGS has so far been absent. Only one early study by the (NCEUS, 2009: 225) argues, "inflexibility or inability in implementation stems from *interpretation (or lack of it)* of the guidelines, rules and amendments which are passed down to the cutting edge staff" (ibid.: 225, my emphasis). However the theme of interpretation is not taken up thereafter.

In the recognition of policy actors and the importance of their ideas, the *politics of implementation* also draws on the insights of previous theories on implementation in Southern contexts, which stressed that policy actors' room to manoeuvre is larger in the South and that therefore their ideas, perceptions and interpretation weigh heavily for policy formulation (Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991). Whereas these earlier approaches focused on formulation, in this book this insight is extended to recognise the particular importance of policy implementors' perceptions and interpretations for implementation.

The focus on actors and their ideas forms a bridge to welfare regime and ideational approaches (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hay, 2011, 2002). But the *politics of implementation* goes beyond welfare regime approaches in its explicit inclusion of citizens as active readers of policy, in taking up their perspectives to understand what have been actual welfare gains. That these gains have to be investigated is a starting point, given that we cannot expect certainty of implementation due its contested character.

Additionally, the approach of the *politics of implementation* rests on the insight that new policies are always embedded in the context of prior policies and general history. This argument has been made by Yanow (1990: 219) and Zittoun (2012), but can also be found in Pierson (1996).

Historical-materialist policy analysis by Brand (2013) engages with the importance of context as condensations of social structures. In another form the argument also runs strongly in the welfare regime theories, which see institutional legacies and to a varying degree the external environment, as strong explanatory factors why change does or does not take place. Moreover, earlier theories on implementation in the South have emphasised the importance of the policy context (Myrdal, 1968; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991).

The spatial focus of the *politics of implementation* is in local processes, which in the South are focal points for interest articulation and political participation (Scott, 1967; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 66f, 125). But the local is not understood as a fixed spatial entity. The local is a socio-spatial scale that is connected to other spatial entities that are all contested (Swyngedouw, 1997). Implementation and the politics thereof are by no means limited to the local realm. As the international environment can influence policy-making at the nation State level, local level implementation is embedded in a wider web of administrative structures that shape important parameters of the rollout (also see Figure 3.1).

Therein, the politics of implementation goes beyond earlier political explanations of implementation problems in NREGS, which focus purely on the local level. This approach looks at the links between the various levels to understand how the administration at federal State level acts as enabler or obstacle to local implementation.¹⁸⁹ The *politics of implementation* highlights that we need a disaggregated view of 'the state', in which we can see how different bodies of the administration contribute to implementation. This implies the need to look beyond formalised institutions and regulated procedures and study the encounters between the

¹⁸⁹ In my fieldwork the impact of the federal states appeared to be much stronger than that of the Districts. However, the states were also selected as seemingly different examples, whereas the chosen Districts were deemed average performers (see Section 4.5 on sampling). In a different set of locations, the role played by Districts in the implementation may appear to be stronger than it does here.

representatives of the state and its citizens, in which perceptions of the respective other are formed. Such a perspective is also promoted by approaches on the anthropology of the state, which focuses on the representation of the state in everyday practices (Sharma & Gupta, 2006b).

The remaining chapter is structured along the two core explanatory logics of the politics of implementation. First the role of interpretation is highlighted in particular for processes of exclusion and distribution of welfare gains. Theoretical arguments are embedded in scenarios from the empirical work. Second, the importance of context and legacies (also legacies of perceptions) contributes to understand why awareness does not have the impact that many observers hope it would have. Legacies are also central to explain why the reversal of the provision of work to a demand-driven logic has not yet taken place.

7.3 The power of interpretation and perceptions

This section engages with the first explanatory logic of the core role of perceptions, interpretation and ideas. They prove to be of particular relevance to contribute to explanations of exclusion processes both at local and at State level and shows that and how they are linked. Within the argument on the importance of ideas I turn first to perceptions of the participants and the administration respectively. Ideas of eligibility hold by the local administration influence access to the scheme and its assets.

The second argument discussed within this section is primarily concerned with State level dynamics of interpretation of the scheme, its core objectives and beneficiaries, to show that these indeed influence, and potentially override local dynamics of exclusion.

7.3.1 Seeing the other – seeing oneself

The encounters between administration and participants contribute to the construction of perceptions of the self and the other. The ideas about the participants hold by the administration, and the ideas about the administration hold by the participants influence the implementation. Moreover, these perceptions of the self and the other are not only – or not even primarily – shaped by the policy text itself. They are the product of a series of interpretations of the original text that happen in different layers of the administration, the media, CSOs and the broader public. These interpretations in turn, become again translated in an interactive

process between the implementing organisation, its leaders and staff, and the participants and other policy relevant audiences.

Policy and organizational actors and policy-relevant publics are both interpreters of meanings and creators of meaning, both interpreters of 'texts' and creators of 'texts' that others interpret. Policy implementation in this view is both interpretation and text: the initial interpretations of legislative texts in the form of agency actions themselves become 'texts' that are then interpreted and reinterpreted, in an on-going cycle. ... Administrators' acts, language, and objects created during implementation may play as central a role in communicating policy meanings to clients, implementors, and others as does the language of the enabling policy document. (Yanow, 1996: 230)

Continuous re-interpretation plays a crucial role in implementation. This "process of meaning-making through interpretation," is a fundamental part of policy implementation and "the social construction of a reality" (ibid.: 222). The reality is not only the policy text, but also its many interpretations according to which administration and participants structure their actions. Actually the definition of the participants is part of this process: "the target populations that policies are designed to deal with are socially constructed" (Fischer, 2003: 66). Additionally, in the making of the policy and its subsequent interpretation simultaneously their counterparts in the administration are created. Fischer argues, "citizens and politicians are constituted as subjects with particular sorts of self-conceptions, self-aspirations, fears, and beliefs" (ibid.). Moreover, the same is true for the administration. For example Corbridge *et al.*, (2005: 9) discuss how "a new technology of rule [such as participatory development] has pushed a named agent to widen his or her previous circles of engagement."

Besides interpretative policy analysis this argument about continuous interpretation is also found in studies of the anthropology of the state (ibid.: 15ff; Sharma & Gupta, 2006b). Corbridge *et al.* (2005: 8) point out, "the sightings of the state that poorer people make are never straightforward or unitary. None of us sees the state (or the government, the market, even public culture) in a direct and unmediated fashion". Policies and their interpretations are re-shaped along the lines of implemen-

tation, and potentially also by a more general public. They in turn form the conceptions of the self and the other, which henceforth establish contours of the interaction between programme participants and administration, and set the stage for processes of ex- and inclusion. Thus, these perceptions inform the ways in which the actors behave.¹⁹⁰ Perceptions of the scheme are thus linked to implementation efforts (Yanow, 1990: 221). At the same time, the perceptions are not uncontested. Actors advocate their perceptions with different levels of power and persuasiveness.

7.3.1.1 Drawing distinctions in Adilabad

These arguments about interpretation and re-interpretation are of relevance for the implementation of NREGA in the four research locations, when the administration defines, or interprets, who is deemed eligible to access the scheme. Thus we need to examine the images of beneficiaries and vice versa the administration to see in what way the construction of target groups influences implementation, particularly access to and exclusion from the scheme.

In Adilabad District and the two Blocks visited therein, the administration describes the majority of participants as ‘deserving’ the scheme. The participants are portrayed as “ready to work” (15ADM: 94), as “those who don’t have agriculture ... they will work in this ... the ‘poorest of the poor’” (1ADM: 255ff). In particular the Adivasi population is seen as both needy and deserving, the “Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Caste, naturally they are poor people” (8ABM: 76ff), in the “tribal area everyone wants to work, because here is no other sources. The crops are very, very low” (11ADM: 290).

But, not everyone is deserving and needy, the administration points out. One interviewee in the District highlights that the non-poor would be participating if the scheme would not demand them to work, and if it would not be based on self-selection:

If we start calculating, estimating the poor people, all issues will come. Then original poor people will go out of the list and

¹⁹⁰ Similarly, see Hay, who argues “it is the ideas actors hold about the context in which they find themselves rather than the context itself, which ultimately informs the way in which they behave” (Hay, 2002: 258).

rich people will come because ... they want money. If it is directly transferred to them, they will try to come into that list, [the] poor people's list. But if we force them to work at the field level, this manual work, then they will not come. (15ADM: 367ff).

The interviewee refers here to targeting with Below Poverty Line (BPL) lists, to which he adopts a critical stance. He trusts the self-selection targeting mechanisms in NREGS to work better. At the same time, for the theoretically universal scheme many of the administration have a specific perception of the target group, which is both needy and deserving. Rarely officials point to the universal character of the scheme, as the leading official at District level below (also see 11ADM on access for everyone). He argues NREGS

includes everybody and does not exclude anybody. It's an all-inclusive programme ... Individuals are drawn from all shades of cultural background, political background and particularly [the] poorest of the poor. So it is the need that propels them to come to this regardless of the regional, linguistic, political or any cultural affiliations. It transcends the political barriers or cultural barriers and it brings them – all of them – under one canvas. (21ADM: 178, 335ff)

He stresses that the scheme is universal and inclusive, but also states that the participants come because they are, or should be needy. Despite this mentioning of principally universal access, Adilabad was the District where I encountered the clearest case of someone being denied access to NREGA, in the village of Talamadugu.

The participants – in the other location in Adilabad District – in turn predominantly describe the administration as trustworthy. At the site in Utnur the importance of a contact person in the village has been highlighted by participants, the field assistant is repeatedly named as the crucial difference between NREGS and other schemes (7FGDFMY, 13FGDMFY, 23FGDFY). He has made the difference from no work to 'work on demand'. He is *a* if not *the* major change. In this particular case, the new field assistant also belongs to their tribal community and speaks their language.

Moreover, the view of the own role of the administration matters. Not only in this case, also many others of the NREGS staff interviewed in the District of Adilabad, show a personal interest in the scheme and motivation to work in it. One of them says the personal experience of having grown up in a poor household makes him feel the scheme, “I know NREGA from grass-root level ... I can feel it. Rather than managing here, I can feel it. I know the importance of NREGA” (1ADM: 596ff). The interviewee hopes to be able to stay with the scheme and in the region (ibid: 608f). Others say they enjoy working with the wage seekers, and give that as reason for their involvement (8ABM, 11ADM). The Block level staff is aware of the many problems and hurdles that “are there to implementation the programme. So to sort out the problems ... every day, every month, every year we are going to construct the success of the programme” (10ABM: 568ff). At District level in turn their work is acknowledged:

The field level staff, ... the field assistant and the technical assistant, their job is more important. I am only ...coordinating with them. If any problem face there, I will be there, otherwise my job is not better than them. They who are working in the field, they are the great jobbers. (11ADM: 84ff)

There even is occasional mentioning of employment to be provided on demand. “We have to provide work when demanded,” says one interviewee (8ABM: 166, also see 1ADM: 87ff). A colleague at District level describes the scheme as rights-based and citizen-centric, to him it makes a difference that NREGA is a right “because it is an act, if everybody, if anybody wants to work, we have to provide” (15ADM: 343ff, 144ff).

In sum in Adilabad the image of the participant hold by the administration is predominantly shaped by ideas on being needy and deserving. The works in this region – compared to the other District surveyed – are more specifically geared towards this target group. Yet, at local level in one location for which I have less information on how the administration is viewed by participants, there is exclusion of someone that seems to belong to this group. Yet, at the same time, even this location where the exclusion of at least one poorer person took place, the benefits of the works are generally seen to accrue more to the poorer sections. Therefore, the better off farmers complained (see section 6.2.2 above). In the

other village in Adilabad both field assistant and the participants describe the relationship as trustful. In this location with the most positive perception of and attitude towards each other, the implementation is evaluated best by the participants (see above).

7.3.1.2 Deserving Adivasi in Chikhaldara, idle workers in Bhatkuli

During fieldwork in the Chikhaldara Block in Maharashtra the perceptions of the self and other that are expressed in the interviews are overall rather different. The exception is the image of Adivasi workers in Chikhaldara Block, which is similar to the ideas held about Adivasi in Utnur; they are seen as both, needy and deserving. As one interviewee points out, “the people are much poor, they need employment” (38ABM: 311f). Additionally, the Adivasi of Melghat are described as particularly hard working, which reportedly allows them to realise above average wages. With all the money from NREGS, according to two leading Block level officials, wage seekers have been able to buy “luxury items like cycles, ... CD and DVD players” (36ABM), “some people have purchased motor bikes and TVs on NREGA payment only, ... many of landless labourers also purchased motor bikes and jewellery” (38ABM: 298f, 348f). Both base these statements on the same article in a local newspaper, not in their personal experience with wage-seekers.

But, as highlighted above, the NREGS participants interviewed at this site in Chikhaldara reported much lower wages than those allegedly paid according to the NREGS website.¹⁹¹ Moreover, the idea of wage-seekers buying ‘luxury items’ is curious at the minimum. ‘Luxury items’ in the context of poverty easily has connotation of conspicuous consumption, of people taking unwise decisions to buy CD players when they should have bought rice. It also entails an image of wages being higher than needed: if workers can afford luxurious products, the

¹⁹¹ The image of the hard-working Adivasi may serve as a sort of cover for certain parts of the administration, which make inflated wage claims and pocket the difference to the wages actually paid to the participants. If this should be the case, it had not been verified at the time of my field visit. Hitherto no social audits had taken place and verification was made difficult by the fact that workers did not hold their job cards. Moreover, I did not survey all the villages in the GP. But, if the wages in the GP should have been as high as reported, that would have meant that workers in the other settlements of the GP would have needed to earn three times the set wage rate.

scheme is seen to give them even more than they need. This is part of the perception of workers in this location.

On the relationship between the administration and the participants in Chikhaldara one elected representative argues “now ... the people are more close with the administration. There has been a dialogue” (47AGPM). But this is neither confirmed in the participants’ accounts, nor by the local CSOs. One representative of the latter points out, “this schemes is very good if proper implementation is done. Due to improper implementation this scheme is failing. People do not believe in them [the administration]” (39CSOBM: 107ff). The interviewee, hence, states a direct link between the poor implementation (efforts) and the trust in the administration.

The picture that the administration conveys about itself does is not particularly positive. They neither seem motivated to do their jobs nor to interact with wage seekers. Of the leading Block level officials one complains, “I have to extra work of NREGA” (38ABM: 64), another puts it into the drastic words: “this is a punishment post” (36ABM).¹⁹² The exception in this Block is an interviewee who works in a village that I have not visited, but where reportedly the NREGS implementation is much better. This GP staff member interviewed points out that he “really want[s] to bring change. Other Gram Sewaks are not in the village as much as I am. I am there 4-5 days a week. ... I will hear when there are problems and inform the authorities” (48AGPM). During the week of fieldwork in the Chikhaldara village, the local Gram Sewak did not visit the village more than twice. Also the teacher was only there for one day in the week. Both the school and the *anganwadi* remained closed for nearly the entire week. The children of the village either helped their parents or played on the street.

The second site in Amravati District, Bhatkuli Block, is the research location with the most openly problematic relationship between the administration and the NREGS participants. A member of the engineering staff of the Block tells drastically that people are ‘shy’ and too idle to work (FN 27.03.2012). The GP staff, that is present during the same interview

¹⁹² In the office of this member of the Block administration was a board showing his name, alongside the names of his predecessors and the duration of their tenure in the job. Some of his predecessors only held their positions for as little as two weeks.

later argues that this is not true for this particular village, “people do any kind of work available. Labourers in our village are not lazy. I cannot say about other villages, but ours are not lazy” (54AGPF). Yet, she continues, “in some villages labourers are not ready to go for work. We ask them, do you want to come for work and they say ‘no’” (ibid.). Similarly, at District level one interviewee points out that “they [the labourers] get grains and all at very low rates, they become idle. They don’t feel the need to work” (51ADM).¹⁹³ The picture of the idle worker is at large not contested, only concrete cases are exempted from this picture. Besides the idleness of the workers, another complaint of a member of staff of the District administration is that the works suggested or called for by the villagers are inadequate (FN 31.03.2012). Asked why there is little demand for types of work that would be useful to poorer farmers, the same interviewee suggests, it could be because they are not interested, the other option mentioned is that the farmers are not informed (ibid.).

Overall, the perception of the participants is rather negative. The concept of ‘idleness’ attributes the fault of unemployment to the worker and discharges the administration from misconduct. The idea that the farmers are not interested or unknowing about other opportunities puts the blame on the potential participants, and does not reflect the administration’s role in providing employment. Opposing this view of idleness, the NREGS participants in Bhatkuli Block point out that many of them neither have land, nor do they have ration cards, which entitle them to subsidised grains (57FGDFMY).

¹⁹³ This interview is partly held in English, and partly in Marathi. The translator from Marathi to Hindi herself has in a number of discussions shown to have this reservation of idleness against the NREGS workers. She argued that people in the villages do not want to work or feel the need to work because cheap food is available through the public distribution system and people are therefore getting idle (FN 26.03.2012). Therefore the question is how strong the interviewee made this argument, and how much she interpreted it. However, the interviewee did understand a lot of English and also interrupted the discussion when needed. In this case he did not, which may be interpreted as a sign that he has been content with the translation. Also, when the translator stated her opinion on idle workers it was during a discussion at a training institution for Gram Sewaks in the District capitol, where she was not challenged by her colleagues or superiors, who partially spoke English very well.

The above discussion shows that the perceptions of NREGA participants by the local administration is often not that of a rights-holding citizens with clear entitlements, as which they are conceptualised in the Act; NREGA does not have targeting criteria other than rural households that are (able and) willing to perform manual labour. The perceptions of the participants are not only – not even primarily – shaped by the policy text itself. In Andhra the majority of the participants are seen as poor, needy and deserving. This is particularly true for ST groups. The same pattern of the deserving and hard-working poor is also found in Chikhaldara Block. In Andhra a significant part of the participants is seen as undeserving because they are seen as insufficiently poor to legitimately benefit from the scheme. This narrative is strong despite the fact that NREGA is not officially targeted towards the poor. In Maharashtra interestingly the question of NREGS participants being, too rich is not raised once on the part of administration. But the participants at the fourth research site in Bhatkuli, Maharashtra, point out that the majority of the works performed are to the benefit of the wealthier sections in the village, a point that I will discuss further below.

As outlined at the beginning of this section, not only the participants are constituted through the policy, it is also the co-constitution of the administration. With regards to self-conceptions of the administration, more conventional approaches to policy implementation, such as e.g. Grindle (1997: 489) point out that more effective implementation can partially be explained by instances in which personal motivation and the organisational motivation sync; when “employees not only believed that their organization was contributing some ‘good’ to the country, but also that as individuals they were assisting their organizations in making such an important contribution.” This could be seen in many cases of the administration in Andhra, where staff at various levels explained their personal reasons to be working for the scheme, as well as they stated goals that they hoped to achieve. In the context of Maharashtra the majority of interviewees from the administration shows little enthusiasm for the scheme (with the notable exception of 48AGPM), despite the fact that they claim to deem the scheme important. Grindle’s argument thus contributes to explaining the differences between the administration in Maharashtra and Andhra. But, it does not explain the interstate variance

within Maharashtra, where some members of the administration are very engaged, while others deem their work a 'punishment post'.

And, there are further differences in the self-conception. Among the administration in Andhra there is some mentioning of the own role as a provider for the needs of the NREGS participants. Moreover, the District level staff recognises the importance of the field staff and acknowledges their work. In Maharashtra the majority of the administration report that they are burdened with the work, and often have little good to say on staff on other levels.

This may admittedly at least partially be due to another, so to say more conventional and material, difference between AP and MH. Andhra has put a much larger focus on hiring new staff for the scheme. For the administration of NREGA, in the District of Adilabad alone, there are more than 1500 staff members working exclusively or pre-dominantly working on the implementation of the scheme (FN 05.03.2012).¹⁹⁴ In Maharashtra the failure to fill vacancies and to create new positions such as Gram Rozgar Sewaks in the villages is a major concern voiced both by the administration and CSOs.

Moreover, the picture of the self and the other is influenced by the way in which the space for interpretation is shaped and claimed through the interpretations at the various administrative levels. To these mechanisms I am turning below.

7.3.2 Shaping and claiming room to manoeuvre

Perceptions matter greatly not only with regards to the conceptions of the self and the other, but also for the perceived space for action. The arena, which an actor claims for his or her activities, is not fixed but

¹⁹⁴ These are 940 Field Assistants (roughly one per village, or two in GPs with several villages), 300 Technical Assistants (roughly one per GP), 120 Computer Operators (roughly 2 per *mandal*), each 52 Engineering Consultants, Additional Programme Officers, and Mandal Parishad Development Officers (MPDO) (one per *mandal*), 10 Assistant Project Officers (one for 5 *mandals*), and at District level one each Additional Assistant Project Director, Project Director, District Collector (DC), Joint Collector, and an Additional Joint Collector. However, not all of the staff or the functions are new. Some staff has worked primarily on other schemes before, and especially the leading positions at Block and District level such as the MPDO or the DC have been in place before. For them NREGS is one scheme among several that they administer.

crucially depends on knowledge, imagination, motivation, and perception. Such arenas can be understood as spatial scales that are produced, negotiable, contested and the importance of which is never given but assigned (also see e.g. Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2008). Swyngedouw argues that scale is both an arena and a moment

where sociospatial power relations are contested and compromises are negotiated and regulated. Scale, therefore, is both the result and the outcome of social struggle for power and control. ... Spatial scales are never fixed, but are perpetually redefined, contested and restructured in terms of their extent, content, relative importance, and interrelations. (Swyngedouw, 1997: 140f)

The argument pursued around arenas, therefore, essentially is not about structure but about actors, agency and power. On the part of the participants I pointed out that even with higher knowledge on the scheme, they have not necessarily been able to realise their rights-claims (also see section 7.4.2 below). For participants the local realm of their village, GP and maybe the Block level are the arenas in which they can voice their opinions, claim their rights and realise their entitlements. The access to other spatial scales is limited for most of them.

The interviews with administration conversely showed how perceptions of the scheme, of the own role and the structures in which both are embedded make a crucial difference for the perceived and thus claimed room to manoeuvre. While some of the administration does claim this room to manoeuvre, they potentially also open up room for others to use that space, or narrow others' chances to use it. Some administrative actors' decisions and interpretations carry importance across different layers of the administrative structure. The images of the scheme, which they portray, function as "institutionalized authority to construct reality" (Hitzler, Honer & Mader 1994 cited in Meuser & Nagel, 2009: 18). This highlights that struggles around the politics of implementation may seem to take place primarily on local level, where administration and participants directly confront each other, but they are not. Additionally, the interpretations from administrators and policy makers, which primarily seem to operate on other spatial scales, matter.

Andhra is a case where the space for implementation for the local administration is rather limited through the active and authoritative inter-

pretation on State level. This simultaneously demarks the space that lower-rank staff members have for their implementation. In Maharashtra the State administration does not claim the same policy space available to them at State level. The effect is that struggles on local level have greater effect on implementation and non-implementation.

7.3.2.1 Focus on the “poorest of the poor” in and extended room to manoeuvre in Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra is apparent how the interpretation of the scheme at State level frames the interpretations at lower levels. The scheme has a clear focus, which the local administration is expected to follow: it is to benefit the poorest of poor. Leading State level staff has a pronounced reading of the policy, “the background of the programme is to help the poorest of the poor, [although] this is not very clearly in the policy.” (30ASM: 157ff). The interviewee is adamant that the Department of Rural Development (DoRD) in AP does not “want to strengthen the livelihoods of the less poor, or non-poor, or rich. We want to improve the livelihoods of the poorest of the poor who are suffering for employment, for nutrition, for a lack of livelihoods. That is the issue” (ibid.: 115ff). Targeting the poorest sections of the society in Adilabad District – as discussed in the previous section – is thus not a District specific interpretation. It is actively and successfully promoted by the DoRD in AP. This image and rhetoric of the scheme as only being meant for the ‘poorest of the poor’, is repeated in nearly every interview with administration in the field. Leading officials in Adilabad point out that NREGA “is directly serving the poor, rural poor, poorest of the poor in providing wage employment” (21ADM: 190ff), and his colleague says “we have to give employment to the poorest of the poor people. That is the main objective” (1ADM: 142f). The targeting towards this poorest section of the society runs from the State to District, Block and local level.

The interviewee from the State level emphasises his reading of the policy again,

NREGA is supposed to really take care of the food security of the poorest of the poor and who are forced to go to distress migration, and who are suffering from malnutrition, who do not have employment more than six month, nine months sometimes. So to them the scheme should be helpful. When they de-

signed this programme, they had these people in mind. But only to avoid exclusion, they universalised it, and they think that only these [poor] people will try to access. But this is not the case. (30ASM: 90ff)

Hence, this interviewee does not share the Central Government's and often repeated claim about universal accessibility. He would like to restrict the scheme "to the poorest of the poor. Not to universalise" (ibid.: 56ff). And, he is outspoken about his reasons too, "naturally when you do this universalization it always means that the poorest of the poor are left out" (ibid.: 120ff). Hence, he is not against universalization on the grounds that the targeting is better as such. According to him the problem with targeting is that the poorer benefit less from the scheme. The interviewee points out, the less poor sections of society are not only "less poor, they [also] have voice and they have the capacities to access the programme. The poorest and poorer they stay away from the programme" (ibid.).¹⁹⁵ Therefore, he stresses that an image often voiced by policy makers in Delhi is wrong.

Some households they don't need this, but still they want to get it. That is the thing. ... People they don't want to work but they want to get money. That is why the less poor are coming. ... The policy makers in Delhi, they see every rural household is poor. That is their assumption. ... What they often say is 'if they are not poor, why should they access the scheme?' Big landlord with five hectare of land, they mean to say that he is also poor? He is an exploiter. (ibid.: 70ff, 157ff)

And, because the administration in the State is determined not to give the benefits of the scheme to such 'exploiters' or better off sections of the society, they have found ways of less direct ways of targeting. These are employed despite the fact that, "the policy asks for universalization" and the State level interviewee says "I cannot do targeting" (ibid.: 157ff). One form of indirect targeting is the priority given to the development of land of SC/ST and land redistribution beneficiaries. The share of such

¹⁹⁵ His main concern with the participation of these richer sections of the rural society in the scheme is, that they create capacity deficits for delivery, "the issue is not money; the issue is capacity, ... when unexpected targets, unexpected sections of society depend on this programme." (30ASM: 104ff).

works among all works is one of the 'parameters for measuring performance of MGNREGS' of the regular performance reports. Another example from my fieldwork is the fact that the silt from de-silting activities is brought to the fields of the poorer farmers with the tractors of the better-off farmers.

By giving priority to certain policies the DoRD in Andhra effectively limits the discretion that District and local officials have in their interpretations and actions.

At the same time the nodal DoRD of Andhra Pradesh also actively claims room to manoeuvre from the Centre. One example is the fact that the administrative costs in AP regularly exceeded the ceiling of 6 per cent that was in the Operational Guidelines. Although Andhra could be seen to violate the funding rules, it was granted larger sums for NREGS implementation for several years successively. When asked about this fact a leading member of the scheme's administration defends that he spends more:

This kind of administrative costs is very artificial. So when you say that it is a mandate ... to provide wage employment to the poor, when they demand it. So what is the proportion to which you can restrict administrative costs? You cannot create assets, you cannot prepare the estimates, you cannot fill the musters, you cannot really arrange cash for disbursements unless you have money, unless you have people. In that sense we do not care whether it is 2, 4, or 6 per cent. We want people to work in their position, to do their work well. So right now we are spending 12 per cent. (ibid.: 374ff)

Neither the State nor the Central government, "nobody, is asking about it" (ibid.: 384). Because he explains to them, as he explains to me, that if

you spend INR 100 in the programme, which is better, you tell me: Spending INR 10 on administration, but only 10 per cent go to corruption, so the people get INR 80. That is better, or spending INR 4 [on administration] and losing 40 per cent on corruption. Which is better? That's what we are doing. More money means better monitoring, less corruption and better assets. There is a better trust base. (ibid.: 387f)

Hence, the administration in Andhra claims more administrative costs than foreseen in the funding rules and justify it by saying that they rather have higher administrative costs than higher leakages. This strategy apparently works with the central government, which continues to release money despite the excess spending.¹⁹⁶ It is a case in which the administration bends the rules and creates the fiscal space needed for projects and expenses that they deem useful. It shows how an idea of what is essential to the scheme and the motivation to realise this essence, can be used to expand the room to manoeuvre, and make the scheme work beyond its rules, even in a field as critical as financial outlays.

7.3.2.2 A claim not made in Bhatkuli and Chikhaldara

The struggles around the arenas for implementation are very different in Maharashtra. Both research locations in Amravati District were shaped by the fact that neither on State level, nor in the District, or at the research sites of Bhatkuli and Chikhaldara was the space for implementation explicitly claimed by the administration.

From the State level in Maharashtra comes little guidance on what the scheme could be used for apart from the official guidelines. In an interview with leadings official of the nodal department for NREGS implementation in Maharashtra, when asked for the objective of NREGS, the interviewee gives a long list of administrative procedures that have to be followed: work has to be registered, job card has to be given, muster rolls have to be filled, wages have to paid through bank and post office, no contractors can be used, 60/40 is the ratio of unskilled and skilled labour (63ASF). Only after asking for the objectives of the scheme for a third time is the provision of employment mentioned as common objective between EGS and NREGS (*ibid.*). On State level, no claims are made in terms of what it should achieve. The effect is that there is much greater leeway for the lower levels of administration to develop their own idea of the scheme and implement it accordingly.

Datar (2007: 3455) argues that the lack of interest is due to the fact that the administration has less discretion compared to earlier schemes, EGS and other schemes that NREGS replaced in Maharashtra. Each level and position has its own reasons for rejecting the scheme, the

¹⁹⁶ The excess spending is criticised by the CAG (2013).

Tahsildar at the Block level had lost control over the line departments and had withdrawn from this work. In the new scheme, he does not want to shoulder the responsibility of monitoring. The development stream under the CEO and District Rural Development Agency is unhappy because the Swarna Jayanthi Rozgar Yojana has closed down without any new avenue to bestow favours to a few individuals close to them. Politicians were looking at the scheme as a populist measure for last minute support to prove their concern for drought affected farmers and landless labourers and thus, get some work sanctioned in an arbitrary manner. (ibid.: 3457)

Moreover, Maharashtra's Chief Minister and the minister responsible for employment schemes are reluctant "to own the new scheme under the NREGA guidelines" (ibid.: 3455). Datar argues, "it appears that there is no enthusiasm among the political class as well as bureaucracy to accept the new scheme, which is more decentralised and hence likely to be more transparent and accountable to those who need work" (ibid.: 3457).

Another obstacle mentioned for the implementation are the complex inter-agency interactions in NREGS and the shared implementation responsibility between different government agencies (Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1287). In consequence "none of them [the government agencies] really feels a strong sense of ownership of the Scheme" (ibid.: 1287). Furthermore Moore & Jadhav (2006: 1288) argue that EGS had been "the product of a particular political conjuncture and political coalition." The group of Maratha politicians that once successfully pressed for EGS were "rural in orientation – electorally, symbolically and in terms of their own assets and material interests" (ibid.) The EGS helped them sustain their electoral base in western Maharashtra. But, they have long been challenged by the more urban-based parties such as the "Mumbai-based Shiv Sena that have fewer commitments to or interest in the EGS, and, when in power, have created different mechanisms for the distribution of political patronage" (ibid.). In sum, there are various factors at play that lead to a relative neglect of the scheme on State level.

But, also on the lower tiers of administration the thereby even larger room to manoeuvre – compared to Andhra – is not used by the administration at the research sites. In Bhatkuli there was little knowledge and

even less ideas on how the scheme could be used. When the local administrative staff started to work in the village in 2009, she realised that people do not have work (54AGPF). But, when “people came to ask for work ... I did not know how to give. I was not aware. I did not know about this scheme. I was fully blank” (ibid.). Despite the fact that the local administration claims to know about the scheme now, the variation in works carried out is very low. The scheme is mainly used as a rural connectivity scheme for the construction of roads. According to the interviewee other works, such as private land development and well constructions, are hardly demanded because these are “very ... small projects” (54AGPF), whereas on a road of 5 km 25-30 people could work for one month. On the new road 75-80 people are working. The single other on-going work is the planting, and watering of 600 trees in and around the village. Three women workers are engaged in this activity.

Overall, in Bhatkuli roads seem to be favoured because they appear to be the easiest solution to put many people to work with little effort. However, they are neither necessarily the most useful type of works, nor the one that workers would pick if they knew more about alternatives. The local administration says there have been consultations on the construction, but it remains unclear with whom (54AGPF). The elected representatives (60ERGPMF) say that the decision was taken in a monthly meeting. Those farmers who do not have good access to their land had asked for a road and then Gram Panchayat (the village council) – not the Gram Sabha (the village assembly) as prescribed in the Act – decided. In this location the local elected representatives seem to rather listen to the better of farmers, which have also benefitted from the construction of farm ponds in the last years, as the NREGS workers point out (57FGDMF). The elected representatives claim that they have access to the NREGS Operational Guidelines and Government Circulars, but they also say that they do not use them (60ERGPMF). Their overall awareness and vision for the scheme is low and they do not organise participatory processes.

The situation was somewhat different in the other location in Amravati in the Chikhaldara Block. Here the workers were better informed about their rights and also the variety of works carried out was larger. The workers demanded the construction of a road, but it was due to interdepartmental disputes that this work was not sanctioned. The works that

were sanctioned, such as farm ponds, were partially not well executed. In this second location the inequality within the village was much smaller and largely participants agreed that the works benefitted all. But without particular pro-poor provisions as they are in place in Andhra, all benefited less. This was for example the case when the fertile soil from de-silting work was unused because none of the farmers had the means to transport the soil to their fields.

But, during my fieldwork I also had one interview, which suggested that the space offered on local level could indeed be claimed. In another village in Chikhaldara, the local staff had an own idea what to do with the scheme. This interviewee is an example of someone who has an idea of the scheme – and also other schemes, he knows that “there are schemes from cradle to grave by the government” (48AGPM) – and pushes the limits to realise the potential that he sees in the scheme. According to his account he was able to make a difference at local level despite indifferent to reluctant Block and District administration.¹⁹⁷

At District level in Amravati a leading official points out that the focus in the District is on the development of “quality assets”, fruit plantation, wells, irrigation, the development on own lands, the cultivation of fallow land, whereas for soil development on private lands there is not much demand (51ADM). These are types of NREGA works from which the

¹⁹⁷ This interviewee is adamant that the basis for a successful implementation of the scheme is a trustful relationship with the people in the village (48AGPM). He builds on this base in the discussions what NREGS should be used for in the location using techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal. According to him, in this village the inhabitants discussed the nature of their lands, its fertility, irrigation, the amount of obstacles such as stones, and their needs more generally, before they thought about projects of works in the village (ibid.). The NREGS works in the village are designed to meet these needs. When the needs are different than the possibilities foreseen in the NREGS guidelines, in this case the improvement of drinking water supply, he still tries to make them possible also against a reluctant District administration. Towards them “rigorous follow-up is required” (ibid.). However, now that the village is seen as successful the Commissioner of Amravati has visited the location 19 times. Therefore, he has built himself a reputation, which makes it easier for him to pledge demands to the administration. And, he points out that it is also helpful for him that local CSOs make demands on the administration too (ibid.). The initial ‘rigorous follow-up’ is rewarded by a reputation, which now eases his relationship with the administration at higher levels.

better-off may benefit more than poorer sections of the local population. Moreover, unlike in Andhra, there is no ceiling on land-holding for those requesting development of private land (ibid.). NREGS in Maharashtra also has a list of priorities, which says that historically disadvantaged groups should benefit first, but unlike in Andhra this is not explicit criterion to measure the success of the scheme.

In Amravati there is a call for more staff to be hired for the scheme, because currently nearly all the staff working for NREGS is staff, which already held their positions before, and for whom the administration of NREGS is an additional responsibility (ibid.). At the time of the field-work numerous administrative posts in the District were vacant.

The discussion of the empirical material from the field shows that the perceptions of whom the scheme is meant for has an impact on processes of distribution. The comparison of the objectives and interpretations of the scheme between Andhra and Maharashtra shows that State level interpretations can limit or open up room for manoeuvre at local level. In Andhra where there is a clear focus of the scheme – which is not the official universal access, but explicit indirect targeting for the poorest of the poor – this leaves less room for discretion. In Maharashtra – where on State level there was little effort to own the scheme and develop an explicit goal for it – there is much more room for the locally more powerful sections of the society to claim benefits from the scheme. The very different interpretations, or maybe the lack thereof in Maharashtra also contributes to overall quite different implementation efforts in the two States. In that sense interpretation clearly matters for the gap between policy text and interpretation. But, also the example of Andhra shows, a State that is seen to be successful in implementation, actually the State administration of NREGS liberally interprets the scheme and e.g. questions one of its central features, the universality of access.

Earlier I referred to Grindle & Thomas (1991: 8), who point out that the perceptions of policy elites in the South matter for the definition of the policy space and in determining the room for manoeuvre. This section shows that this is also true for policy implementors. Their perceptions of the policy space impact on the room for manoeuvre that they claim and thereby also on the space which they leave for others. But this also raises questions on the difference between the administration and

the participants when it comes to claiming that space. Participants with the knowledge still could not successfully claim their rights and entitlements, whereas administrative staff with knowledge and an own idea of the scheme does claim that space. To this issue I will return in the second part of the following section on awareness.

7.4 *Context, legacies and rights-claims*

The core of the second argument introduced here engages with the importance of context and legacies for policy implementation. A central feature of the NREG Act is the change to a rights- and demand-based logic, which has not taken place to the desired degree yet. It has been asked how NREGS can be expected to do better than its predecessors, given that the implementation is supposed to be done by “the same ossified, decaying structure that has deeply institutionalised corruption, inefficiency and non-accountability into the very fabric of Indian democracy at the grass roots” (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008: 41).

For implementation context and legacies matter. I highlighted above that institutions can undergo change and that concepts such as path-dependency overemphasise the weight of prior institutional choices.¹⁹⁸ Hence, there is no strict path dependency. But, as I argue in this section, perceptions of the context and legacies of institutional decisions, as well as concrete memories of earlier encounters between citizens and representatives of the state, influence implementation today. The politics of implementation rests on this insight that new policies are always embedded in the context of prior policies. Therein it builds both on IPA (Yanow, 1990: 219), historical-materialist policy analysis (HMPA) (Brand, 2013), welfare regime theories, as well as earlier theories on implementation in the South that emphasised the importance of the policy context (Myrdal, 1968; Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991). The arguments of institutional and contextual embeddedness contribute to explain why new ideas on state-citizen-relationships in demand- and rights-based schemes have not yet taken hold. Legacies and embeddedness in a given context also contribute to explain why awareness does not play the central role in reversing earlier patterns that is assumed in prior studies.

¹⁹⁸ See the chapter on ideas in social policy in India.

7.4.1 Change of everyday practices and their governing logics

It is not only the image of the self or the other, as well as the policy objective, which influences implementation, also perceptions of the context matter. As Hay (2002) points out, we cannot establish certainty about the context. In most cases we can draw on and are guided by experiences, which we had in previous encounters with other policies and with the administration. The argument of this section is particularly concerned with these encounters between citizens and administration, and the mechanisms and logics that govern these.

Everyday practices manifest themselves in encounters between administration and citizens and are a central part of inquiry for approaches of the anthropology of the state, because the state is seen to manifest itself in such every day practices. Also HMPA “understands the state as a structural feature of modern societies that is reproduced through daily practice and acceptance. And its reproduction can fail” (Brand, 2013: 432). Brand highlights the contested nature of the state even in its everyday manifestation. “Struggles and compromises of the past are inscribed into the state as institutional practice, as the political orientation of state officials, and as laws” (ibid.: 432). For Sharma and Gupta (2006a: 19) practices and representations – discussed as sightings of the state – are analytically distinct, yet they are “deeply co-implicated and mutually constitutive. How people experience bureaucratic practices is shaped by representations of the state; in turn, how people read representations is mediated by their daily encounters with bureaucratic practices.”

A central feature of NREGA is that it calls for the reversal of both institutional practices and the underlying logic to the rights-based provision of entitlements on demand, in the delivery of the scheme. Centrally, the Act demands the reorganisation of employment from supply to a demand-based logic. The demand-based provision of employment is key also to realise welfare gains with regards to reliability and also agency, whereas certain material gains can be realised through NREGA without a reversal of the underlying logics. The Act, in short, foresees a new logic – a governing principle – for the state-society interaction in which implementation takes place.

The logics that govern implementation in NREGS are of special interest for this book because such – partially unarticulated – principles shape

the ways in which institutions and actors engage. They form a link between the interpretative study of implementation and the welfare regime studies. Because regimes, according to a veteran of regime studies Krasner, are built around “a set of explicit or *implicit* principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area” (Krasner, 1982: 185ff, emphasis added). Additionally, from a regime point of view, the move from supply to demand, from beneficiary to rights-holding citizen, is potentially welfare regime changing, because entitlement rules are at the core of welfare regimes. Researchers in an interpretative tradition of policy analysis do not assume that actor expectation converge around the same logics – they are contested. They argue that the exploration of the implicit dimension of policy implementation, is a central component of such an analysis.

Both, the practices and the logics – upon which the practices are built – of interaction between institutions and citizens carry legacies of earlier encounters. These are not determinant path-dependencies – as lined out above for institutions and ideas – change is possible. However, the legacies often provide the lens through which encounters in a new scheme are seen. Paths, routines, practices and believes from earlier policies continue to shape the perceptions of a new policy and related practices. For the change not only of policy, but also of implementation practice, legacies are thus very relevant. Given that the practice of implementation often is the only way in which citizens interact with a policy, which otherwise remains distant, it matters to them, whether or not the changed logics become manifest in the action of the local administration, which represents the state to them.

7.4.1.1 A changed logic or ICT-monitoring in Andhra Pradesh?

In chapter 6 I presented evidence from the research location that the mode of employment provision has not changed from supply to demand-driven. The only potential exception is Utnur. Here, the reports by participants and administration suggested that this location is not too far from organising the provision of employment in a demand-based manner. A member of the District administration argues, “my duty is where the wage seekers want to work. Where required, the Mandal level staff, they have to provide. If there are any problems, I have to solve them”

(11ADM: 29ff). One interviewee from the scheme's administration points out the "Central Government has given the right to the wage seeker by way of an Act. ... Thereby ... the wage seeker has got rights to demand for work" (8ABM: 159f). And also at District level in Adilabad, there is recognition for the fact that NREGA "is a right of the people. It's a ... '*Chattam*' [Telugu word for Act]. ... Anybody wants employment ... our employees at Mandal level, they have to give employment" (1ADM: 334ff). However, when asked directly, whether the fact that it is an Act and a right makes it easier for people to gain access, the interviewee answers, "No ... no its not" (ibid.). In Utnur the fieldwork suggests that participants are not necessarily included in planning, written applications are not used, and when there is no field assistant in the village, the participation rate was low. And, in an interview with a leading State official in Andhra, he points out that the whole talk on demand- or rights-based is "all humbug" (30ASM: 446).

In India this rights-based in the people's context has never been there and it cannot be there. Maybe for the next 20-30 years also I cannot really talk about it as something rights-based. But, say the pro-poor government and implementing agency [they] can use this as rights-based and push the system. (ibid.: 427ff)

For him the rights-based scheme has a value, not because it really makes the scheme work on demand, but because it allows "some pro-active people from AP, ... [to] push the entire administration by saying look this is an Act and this is what we need to do, do, do" (ibid.: 447f). Herein the interviewee shows that he, and a group of others that he perceives as pro-active people, actively interpret the policy and use it in the way that they deem pro-poor, which is the focus that they see at the core of this legislation. And, therein the delivery to the poorest of the poor is more central than that it is all rights- and demand-based.

Accordingly, the discussions with much of the Block, District and State administration suggest that NREGS is not even demand-based in Andhra, where it has relatively high participation rates. What rather appears to be behind Andhra's success is a tightly knit net of administrative control that is at least partially enabled by information and communication technology (ICT) solutions. One of the most important initiatives of the nodal DoRD in Andhra Pradesh has been the development

and deployment of *Rashtra Grameena Abhivruddhi Samacharam* (RAGAS) software, which allows Field Assistants to register attendance in real time, and thus also enables real-time monitoring of the roll-out (Palisetty, 2011: 5f).¹⁹⁹ The particular role of the RAGAS software is also highlighted by officials in the field as a reason for Andhra to fare better in NREGA implementation than other states, “this [RAGAS] is the only reason ... why we have improved compared to other states. ... We are improving, best execution, and best implementation. ... The only reason is this package” (10ABM: 69ff; also see Reddy, 2013).

In the fieldwork District of Adilabad “everything is online” (1ADM: 547). I witnessed how field assistants take attendance manually on the muster roll and have the workers sign, or leave their thumbprint, and subsequently submit the attendance at the worksite for each individual worker per mobile phone (FN 05.03.2012). The workers each have their individual identification number, and are registered with the system when they receive a Job Card. Attendance has to be taken before 2 pm every workday for every site. Thereby RAGAS enables the upper tiers of the administration to check the number of workers on site without being physically present “every payment, every module, every detail, every whatever” (10ABM: 69ff) is known thanks to RAGAS that “day by day, minute by minute we can have the correct figure as on that day, as in that time” (15ADM: 234).

However, not only the participants, also the administration is monitored. The data collected allows to “intervene properly. ... We are monitoring regularly so that they [the local officers] cannot escape work” (15ADM: 234, 455). From the data the administration can easily see “if any manipulation is there, I can identify easily, ... I can see it. I can catch him [the employee]” (15ADM: 214ff). If Mandal level employees are absent from

¹⁹⁹ As further central innovations, (Palisetty, 2011: 5f) lists the electronic Fund Management System (eFMS) to increase the speed of wage payments, the development of a worker friendly Rural Standard Schedule of Rates (RSSRs), the closer integration of more (line) departments as implementing agencies for better coordination of resources in the field, and the formation of labour groups or *Shrama Sakthi Sanghalu* (SSS). The model of planning of works is said to be more farmer centric and wage slips are to be issued in the local language with all relevant details. And to increase accountability and decrease corruption, the Society for Social Audit, Accountability and Transparency (SSAAT) has been formed.

their duty station, where their presence is deemed crucial to realise access for the participants,

they have to give explanation why they are absent. ... That's stern. That's the rule. If they don't stay there, we'll get some action. We'll punish, we'll suspend them... otherwise we'll give some fine. ... Some of them [the Mandal level staff] we'll suspend also, because if they don't work, we don't require them. If they work we'll require them. ... After one month they'll get punctual again... we'll release them. That is... that is the process of this NREGA. ... If some GPs are zero [have no participation], we'll cut the field assistants' salaries. ... If that GP will be zero, then why [do we] require him? Anyhow it is zero. You [the FA] go and we'll recruit another FA. ... That is the process. If one GP is zero for 10 days, definitely he will be removed. That is our procedure. (1ADM: 27ff, 56ff, 512ff, also see 12ADM: 117ff)

Clearly, the software is not only used to monitor the progress of the scheme. It is also used to monitor to the work of the local staff. The interviewee admits that this puts "pressure" on the staff, and "those who are unable to afford this pressure, [find it] very difficult to work here" (1ADM: 440ff). He justifies that the employees have to bare the pressure because "otherwise some hundred or so people [NREGA workers] will suffer. If they suffer then we will suffer. So some of the pressure, they [the staff] have to handle" (ibid.: 440ff). Not only do they have to be able to bare pressure, it is even deemed essential to put them under pressure.

They have to be always in pressure condition because ... if they won't get pressure then payment will delay, wage seeker won't come ... then again wage seeker suffers from the living standard ... the employment aim is lost. That's why we'll keep watch every day. Watch like watch dog. ... We are also having pressure ... Without pressure you cannot work here. You have to handle the pressure. If you don't handle pressure then ... how pressure will transform to the field level, site level? (ibid.: 440ff, 562ff).

The pressure that is created through the constant monitoring is justified as essential to the success of the scheme. Whereas a leading government official in the District, who is however less involved in the daily running

of the scheme, claims “there is no such thing as pressure in this” (21ADM: 156f), the Block level staff clearly report such. One interviewee recalls,

the day before yesterday, the PD [project director] called me and scolded me, what happened to your improvement in this recording? ... In every parameter we have to improve ranking-wise. ... We have to ... improve the performance Mandal wise and Gram Panchayat wise, Field Assistant-wise, every aspect we have to take care of, take care of this. (10ABM: 305f, 328ff)

Hence, this employees clearly feels pressure to deliver a certain performance. As outlined above the failure to perform can have consequences such as reduced pay or even the loss of the job. Not only for the workers, but also for staff the work in NREGS is seasonal. As most of the works happen during a particular time, typically after harvesting during the dry months before the next monsoon, there is high pressure to perform particularly throughout this period. As one interviewee points out, “in summer, ... six months we have seasonal work. ... We have very pressure and we have no particular timings at all. Most of the time we have to spend on job only” (10ADM: 336ff). In the busiest season of NREGS the administrative and technical staff has no regular working times.

Obviously, the meaning of the electronic monitoring is not limited to the District level. But it has been developed and is also used by the State level administration of the scheme. The monitoring tells the DoRD how many households actually get wage employment, what the shelf of works is, what share of the vulnerable sections access the scheme, how many receive the notified wage rate etc. In short it enables the DoRD to measure “what capacity I actually have, what kind of delivery I am doing” (30ASM:191ff). And again not only the progress of the scheme, but also that of the employees is monitored. One leading State level bureaucrat interviewed points out that he does not trust the field staff to deliver, if they are not regularly monitored, and that they would not by themselves provide employment. He states, “they don’t respect the rights. They never respect the registration. They never respect the Act” (30ASM: 461f).

Yet, the stricter oversight of the employees in turn creates its own problems. Because the State has put emphasis on bringing down corruption

and stopping leakages “people now are very alert. They don’t want to write wrong measurements. They are scared of the social audits. They know they can be asked to repay misappropriations from their own salaries” (30AMS: 205f). As a consequence, and because village level functionaries do not calculate properly, the wage rate has come down. Every month the average wage declines by one Rupee (ibid.). This may explain the significantly lower wage rates in Andhra compared to Maharashtra.

Overall, the use of ICT appears to be a Janus-faced development. On the one hand it serves as tool for reversed accountability structures i.e. in social audits. On the other hand, it also runs counter to the spirit of the Act because it is a top-down, not a bottom-up, control mechanism. Hence in Andhra a seemingly demand-based provision of employment – in which demand is not really voiced by participants but foretold by the administration – is based on a logic of administrative control.

7.4.1.2 The legacy of an earlier ‘employment guarantee’

One reason why Maharashtra was chosen as one of the States for this comparison, are its prior experiences with an employment guarantee scheme. Maharashtra started experimenting with such a scheme in the late 1960s and legislated the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act (MEGA) in 1977 and implemented its Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) by 1979 (Gaiha & Imai, 2006; Moore & Jadhav, 2006; Shah & Mehta, 2008). MEGA already gave a guarantee for employment in unskilled manual work to every adult who demanded work and stipulated equal payment for men and women at minimum wage rates. MEGA “can probably be termed as the birth of the idea of a legalised Right to Employment in India” according to Chopra (2009: 76ff). Hence, when NREGA was formulated in in the early years of the millennium policy makers and activists drew heavily on the MEGA (for a comparison see Shah & Mehta, 2008: 7f).

This prior experience of an employment guarantee scheme with many of NREGS central features could be expected to form a positive legacy in terms of institutions and mechanisms established to i.e. deliver employment as demanded. Yet, section 6.3 shows **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**that at the two Maharashtrian research locations employment was not provided on demand. To the contrary, Maha-

rashtra performed much worse than Andhra, which cannot look back on such a history. What seemed to be an advantage at first appears to be a difficult legacy at a closer look.

Most observers agree that in its first years EGS was a success, providing income of the poor, creating durable infrastructure, and contributing to the empowerment of the rural poor (Gaiha & Imai, 2006; Moore & Jadhav, 2006; Shah & Mehta, 2008). In the 1970s and early 1980s EGS enjoyed widespread public support, the scheme offered

something for everybody. The rural poor receive employment. Cities reduce overcrowding. Cultivators profit from the creation of agricultural infrastructure and freedom from traditional obligations. Politicians benefit from EGS because it provides them with a progressive image, not to mention an abundant source of patronage. The industrial dynamism of the state makes financial support for the programme tolerable. As a result, the EGS enjoys widespread support and immense popularity. (Echeverri-Gent, 1993: 94 cited in Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1294)

But, over the years both funding and participation declined. “The State government covertly restricted EGS expenditures, finding ways to unofficially ration employment offered by the scheme,” argues Chopra (2009: 39). And Gaiha & Imai (2006: 3) agrees that the sharp reduction of participants between 1987 and 1989 to a large part “was due to rationing, and borne by the poor.”

In principle the funding for EGS was collected through a specially levied tax and to be matched by State funds. The scheme was legislated “in an environment of fiscal liberality” (Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1279). There were no potential legal grounds on which the contributions of the State could be overridden, and in 1974 the government declared “that there would never be an excuse of lack of plan funds for EGS” (Sathe, 1991: 62 cited in Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1279). But by the mid 1980s the State government covertly restricted EGS expenditure, “employing ‘*administrative measures*’ to suppress the apparent demand or need for work” (Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1289, emphasis original). This could easily be done, as it was the State Planning Department that calculates budget ceilings and subsequently releases credit limits to the District Collectors

on a quarterly basis (Gaiha & Imai, 2006: 2). Additionally, work in NREGS was specifically deemed not to “interfere with normal agricultural activities, and should not be activated when work is available on other plan or non-plan public works projects” (Gaiha & Imai, 2006: 2), hence, it had always been designed as a temporary, seasonal relief.

Behind the decline of the scheme, was then the loss of political and administrative support. The implementing bodies of EGS had become “lethargic” (Datar, 2007: 3454); they argued there is no demand for EGS work, and a saturation of possible worksites. In other words, the scope for the construction of infrastructure in EGS had been exhausted. And, there is more to this bureaucratic fatigue:

The public officials involved in the implementation of the EGS often rather have a negative view of the Scheme. They experience the tensions of a matrix organisation where responsibilities are divided between different parts of the State apparatus and inter-agency interactions have in-built tensions designed to help check corruption. Further, because EGS financing is guaranteed by law and does not face the competition of routine budgetary processes, there is little incentive for any single agency to promote the virtues of the EGS, publicly or within bureaucratic arenas. (Moore & Jadhav, 2006: 1281)

This attitude left its imprint on the participants too. In-line with my earlier argument on mutual creation of expectations in the encounters between citizens and states, Moore & Jadhav (2006: 1294) argue,

the government was able to reduce the level of political mobilisation around EGS simply by changing its own behaviour in a relatively covert way. ... The rights-based incentives for the poor to mobilise ... may be significantly eroded by a centralised and disciplined public bureaucracy determined to do things differently.

EGS Maharashtra, at least in more recent years, had an employment guarantee scheme that worked according to a supply – not a demand – logic. Rather than being able to draw on the positive experience of having had an earlier demand driven scheme, thus, Maharashtra has to deal with the engrained institutional practices of supply driven delivery

logics in a demand driven Act. The institutional legacies of MEGA and EGS prove to be obstacles, not assets.

The interviews in the field confirm this view. For example, one interviewee suggests that EGS was not an employment guarantee according to his opinion (FN 21.03.2012). An interviewee from an CSO argues “that is the same process [between EGS and NREGS]. No difference” (39CSOBM: 319f). This is an interesting remark given that – with regards to decision-making and the role of the local administration – there have been “major changes ... in the execution of the [NREG] schemes, in tune with the present ethos of decentralisation” (Datar, 2007: 3455). His statement could be read as an indicator how little has changed in the Chikhaldara Block, where his CSO is working, between EGS and NREGS. Rather than a de-central bottom-up structure, the interviewee describes

pressure from the government, do, do, do, do. ... If the Central government does not pressure, ... they [the administration] never [do a] thing about it, they will be smoothly going on. ... Centre pressures the State, and State on the District. ... District Collector pressures to Tahsildar ... [to] Gram Sabha. (39CSOBM: 320ff)

Yet, he deems this pressure necessary for the administration to work, similar to some of the opinions heard in Andhra. But, unlike Andhra, in Maharashtra this interviewee was the only one that pointed to such pressure. Overall, the picture of the level of engagement of the administration was one of indifference to neglect, rather than an emphasis on achieving something through the scheme (with the earlier noted exception of interviewee 48AGPM). Generally, in Maharashtra it also was more difficult to find interview partners from the administration that were willing to give their view on the scheme and their work. Whether that was because they were occupied with other work or because of a lack of interest, is difficult to tell.

That the logic of provision of work has not changed from supply to demand in many cases is increasingly acknowledged at Central level too. Part of it is blamed on the States by one interviewee, who points out “in many places there is no real village level decision-making, i.e. a State secretary announces 100.000 wells will be constructed under NREGA.

But it should be decided by the panchayats” (64ACM). Yet, the Centre too has put its demands on the States and down to Panchayats, when it demanded that every panchayat should erect a Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendras within three years between 2009 and 2012.²⁰⁰

Another interviewee from central level agrees,

from the government machinery and implementing agencies the recognition that this [NREGA] is a right has not yet happened. Still that mind-set has not yet changed, that work now has to be provided on demand. It is difficult to internalise that mind-set in the minds of government functionaries and officials who are used to deliver programmes as a kind of ... [*inaudible*]. That has not yet happened and will take time. It will happen when the demand is strong and when they are made accountable. (65ACM)

Hence, the problem of the change from supply to demand is also recognised as an issue that cannot simply be regulated from central level, but that needs to be accepted and practised by the local administration. The interviewee proposes that the administration would need more demand voiced by participants as well as mechanisms of accountability to reverse their logic. The shortcomings of this argument are the theme of the following section.

Before turning to awareness, one needs to say that the Central government is not without means when it comes to the reversal of the pattern of provision. A central feature to reverse that logic would be to enforce the payment of unemployment allowances. But, in the current funding structure, in which the States are deemed to do both, registering (unmet) demand and pay allowances, it is not surprising that the States do not fulfil this role. There is an administrative disincentive for the States to do so. This disincentive could be changed by the Central Government through altering the funding patterns.

Considering the evidence above on the cases of Maharashtra and Andhra, which is supported by other studies on the provision of employment discussed above, it seems fair to say that the change from supply to

²⁰⁰ The Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra are planned as local informational centres on NREGS, and a space where participants can give feedback on the quality of implementation of the program (GoI, 2009).

demand in the provision of employment has so far remained symbolic rather than substantial. Fischer (2003: 60) argues, “policy is a symbolic entity, the meaning of which is determined by its relationship to the particular situation, social system, and ideological framework of which it is part.” For NREGA the enactment of the rights- and demand-based logic had the effect to show that government “is indeed responsive to the needs and demands of its citizens, and that citizens’ claims on government for action are legitimate” (Yanow, 1996: 14).

This was the message that many left-leaning, progressive academics and activists read from the enactment of NREGA – as well as other entitlement-based policies of the past years. For example Drèze (2010: 510) argues, “the enactment of NREGA is a victory of sorts for Indian democracy. It shows that the underprivileged majority is not completely marginalised in this elitist political system.” The rights- and demand-based logic of the Act, has been fuelling much of the motivation for individuals and organisations to work in and with the scheme. This is one way in which the policy is symbolic and substantive at once (Yanow, 1996: 12). But, the Act with all its provisions can be and is interpreted differently, as the discussions above show. “The real political challenge is not the enactment of NREGA, but its implementation on the ground”, continues (Drèze, 2010: 510). In implementation the rights-based logic is as, if not more, contested as it was in the policy-making circles in Delhi.

7.4.2 Awareness and rights-claims

The previous section showed that institutional legacies in the form of governing logics are deeply engrained in institutional encounters between citizens and administration, and they are hard to change. This is not only true for the administration, which has not adapted to the new logic of the provision of employment by demand. Another central role herein is played by the participants and in how they adapt to the rights and demand-based logic. Clearly, “a policy designed to produce changes in the behaviour of a ‘target’ population can succeed only if the ‘target’ agrees to the terms of the transition” argues Yanow (1996: 231). Also on their side the referral to rights is rare.

Participants’ perceptions of the Act and their approach towards it also has legacies. As Corbridge *et al.* (2005: 8) point out, “we always see the state through the eyes of others, with close regard for past memories,

accounts that circulate in the public sphere, and how we see other people getting on or being treated.” Given that prior programmes – with the exception of EGS – were not supposed to work by a demand-logic, the past experiences of participants most likely will not include a rights-based approach to the scheme and its administration.

7.4.2.1 A lack of awareness?

A large range of studies consistently shows that participants know little about the scheme, its statutory provisions and the opportunities it offers for participants. Most commonly it is assumed that participants do not engage in a rights-based rhetoric because they are not ‘aware’ of their rights (see e.g. Dev, 2004; A. N. Sharma, 2004: 271f; Rajasekhar *et al.*, 2006: 16; World Bank, 2011b; Working Group on Social Security, 2012). In Maharashtra a leading official at State level points out that the main obstacle to achieve the full potential of NREGS is that the “scheme has not reached the last person. That people are not aware that this can be done” (63ASF).

However, there are two reasons why deeming it an issue of ‘awareness’ underestimates the problem. First, ‘awareness’ sounds benign, as if the participants could easily be aware of all provisions etc. if they wanted to. But, typically it is not a matter of choice. Participants’ primary source of access to information about the scheme more often than not are members of the local administration. In my research the local administration is the prime source of information on the scheme’s provisions in all locations, except the third research site where an IEC by a local CSO had recently taken place. Where the local administrators are in such a position, there typically is an information asymmetry between administration and workers, which allows the administration to wilfully withhold information.

This seems to be the case in Bhatkuli, where the workers are partially not informed and partially misinformed. The participants’ lack of knowledge impacts on their capacity to influence what the scheme is used for and by whom. Because knowledge is intimately connected to power, to agency, and to empowerment, there are also powerful interests against ‘awareness’.

However, there is a second argument to be made about this ‘awareness’ and the gap between being aware about one’s rights and entitlements

and the capacity to realise these rights. As the case of the village in Chikhaldara shows, awareness and knowledge can be insufficient to realise rights. At this third research site, an IEC campaign had previously taken place in the village, and it proved effective in the sense, that all interviewees were comparatively well informed about the scheme. They participated in Gram Sabha meetings, and they called for works to be carried out on their own land where possible. Some NREGA participants from this site know about the right to work for 100 days and the entitlement to unemployment benefits. Yet, despite their awareness, their knowledge, and even stating their rights – they were not able to realise these entitlements. Similarly, in Talamadugu the participants knew about the provisions for first aid, shade and water and still they were not met.

Besides the abstract knowledge on the scheme – or awareness about its statutory provisions – there is something else they lacked: the experience that upon their call, the administration would actually change and grant them their rights. Hence, it is not only about knowledge as such, but also how it corresponds with prior knowledge and experiences. Fischer (2003: 12) argues that a policy is “bound to be rejected” no matter how efficient it is “if it fails to confront the basic value frames that shape our understanding of the problem.” The participants do not reject the scheme but neither do they adopt rights-claims as a strategy to realise their entitlements. Participants devise their approach to the scheme

in a context which is strategically selective, favouring certain strategies over others as a means to realise specific intentions. Yet, actors have no direct knowledge of the selectivity of the context they inhabit. ... Some understandings are likely to prove more credible given past experiences. ... Although the relationship is never likely to be one of direct correspondence, there is always some relationship between the context itself and the ideas actors hold about that context. (Hay, 2002: 212)

Their experience with structures of delivery of public services – such as public employment – may be such that they do not expect a rights-claim to be a useful strategy. This has to do with the perception of the context in which they navigate, and which strategies they deem more or less useful in such a context based on prior experiences. But the perceptual

“or ideational is only ever relatively autonomous of the material”, because for “ideas, narratives and paradigms [to] continue to provide templates through which actors interpret the world, they must retain a certain resonance with those actors' direct and mediated experiences” (Hay, 2002: 212). The participants in Chikhaldara lack that experience.

Moreover, taking a rights-claiming strategy towards a Gram Sewak that does not deliver may not seem a successful strategy if he or she is the main access point to all other public services too. The encounters between administration and citizens in NREGA can probably not be seen independently from the encounters in other schemes if it is the same personnel delivering them. The delivery structures of NREGA are embedded in other social structures, some of which are dependency structures. Some researchers and activists (see e.g. Khera, 2008; Drèze, 2010; Roy & Dey, 2011) hoped that NREGA can turn these structures around and institute demand-based processes at the grass-roots level. This research rather suggests that the supply-based structures have changed the character of NREGS.

A similar argument could be based on Chatterjee writings on political society. He might suggest that IEC campaigns by a civil society group and rights-claims may prove unsuccessful in a context that favours other strategies. These strategies are the politics of civil society, which are not really accessible to the members of political society. The privileged form of realising intentions could then be through “factions, patron-client linkages, ethnic ties and personal coalitions” (Grindle, 1980: 17). Chatterjee describes these as the legitimate tools of ‘political society’ of the marginalised that do not have access to the formally democratic, modern tools of civil society (Chatterjee, 2004, 2010 [2001]). Also other authors give importance to brokers, intermediaries and personal ties in gaining access to public goods to which citizens could in principle also make a rights-claim (Pellissery, 2005; Witsoe, 2012; Paul *et al.*).

This might explain why everyone wants to use the NREGS structures in Andhra, where it is somewhat independent from other structures. The field staff is employed only in NREGA and cannot create trouble with other schemes. At the same time the social audit structures have been build next to, not in, the existing administrative structures. More and new people in Andhra who are only responsible for this one scheme

might make it easier to address demands to them. In Maharashtra on the other hand the Gram Rozgar Sewak in the one village was not able to make a difference, because he himself is embedded in older structures of conflicts and power, that he cannot change. At the core of the non-realisation of rights is then not the lack of awareness about rights by participants. At the core is a social structure in which this scheme is embedded, in which some actors remain more powerful than others. Awareness alone is insufficient to overturn these pre-existing structures. Potentially, easily accessible and effective grievance redressal structures could open the path from knowledge of rights to entitlements. Such structures as also e.g. social audits have not been the focus of this research, but certainly constitute a field for future research on rights-based schemes and the realisation of entitlements.

7.4.2.2 The performativity of rights-claims

The view above on rights-claims is essentially pessimist, because it gives a lot of weight to legacies as well as experiences and says little about possibilities for change. A more optimist view on rights-claims is adopted by Zivi (2008). For her the concept of performativity is key in making rights claims.²⁰¹

In saying 'I have a right' I am not simply describing an already existing reality, but I bring into being a set of relationships or ways of being that may not have existed prior to my speaking. I am not simply representing a reality, but actively doing something in the process of making the claim, and doing something more than just making the claim itself. (ibid.: 165f)

She highlights that for a right to be recognised I need to be able to refer to "common intuitions and norms about rights-bearing subjects. ... I cannot simply say that I have a right ... and expect that it is understandable" (ibid.: 166). A common frame needs to exist. In referring to this frame existing norms are replicated, and existing relations of power that are written into such norms are reinforced. But, Zivi continues, per-

²⁰¹ Above I treat encounters between administration and citizens, as well as the mechanisms and logics according to which these take place as institutions. Such an understanding of building public institutions, and also the state, in face-to-face interactions entails the recognition of the importance of performativity, in acting as a state or a citizen.

formativity is never only about replication. It “always entails an excess that holds out the promise of transformation” (ibid.: 166). Rights claims always have a dual function of reinforcing existing norms, and revealing that these norms are only seemingly universal, that in fact they are limited and exclusionary. She concedes,

just because I say that those who have been traditionally excluded from human rights are actually rights-bearing subjects does not mean that my claim will be understood. Such claims can certainly go unheard and be rejected. ... There is no guarantee ... that my utterance, even if it does cite already existing norms, will be acknowledged or accepted as a repetition. (ibid.: 168)

Zivi thus also recognises instances as they have been described above, in which NREGA participants state their rights, while they are aware of the fact that these rights are currently not being fulfilled. For Zivi this is no reason for pessimism, on the contrary,

according to a theory of performativity, terms and norms can be invoked and cited in ways that exceed and help shift dominant ways of thinking, being and doing. This makes a performative politics a hopeful politics. The potential of performative politics lies with the fact that unconventional repetitions can expand the thinkable. (ibid.: 168)

Overall, Zivi remains adamant that although rights-claiming cannot “guarantee particular political outcomes” and despite “devastating critiques and disappointing outcomes, rights-claiming can remain an important part of democratic politics” (ibid.: 158).

The aspect of rights-claims was not a focus of this study, and Zivi’s claim is one of the long-durée rather than the quick change. It would be very interesting to see whether in settings with frequent rights-claims entitlement provision indeed changes, or does so quicker than in other locations without rights-claims. This too constitutes a field for further research that is worth to explore.

7.5 Interim Conclusions

The chapter shows how the approach of politics of implementation can contribute to explain the gap between policy intent and implementation,

and differences in implementation. The core arguments are first that (self-) perceptions of both policy actors and ‘targets’ of policy, as well as their interpretations of the policy goal influence implementation. Second, interpretations and perception are shaped by prior institutional practices, memories of previous encounters between citizens and the state, as well as prior implicit governing logics. With the help of these arguments I re-examined three phenomena that had emerged in Chapter 6: a) the distribution of welfare gains within the villages and exclusionary processes around these, b) the mechanisms by which employment is provided on demand or not, and c) the role of awareness.

With regards to the first argument, the discussions in the chapter highlighted how the different perceptions of the participants and the focus of the scheme held by the administration contributed to accessibility and distribution of benefits from the scheme. Where the administration on either local or State level had developed an own interpretation of the scheme, its purpose and its target group they also proposed works that matched this idea. In Andhra this largely happened on State level, and thereby the scope for own priorities for the local administration was somewhat narrowed. The notion of the ‘poorest of the poor’ for whom the scheme is meant, was found on all levels of the administration in Andhra. This focus provided for more works that were deemed to benefit farmers from vulnerable groups, both in their opinion, and in the opinion of the better-off farmers.

In Maharashtra, where there was little guidance on the specific purpose of the scheme or its targets, the leeway of the local administration was much greater. However, it was largely not used because most of the local administration themselves developed few ideas what they could do with the scheme. Additionally, they could not count on a lot of support from the upper levels of the administration. Without a guiding idea what the scheme could be used for, it became a play ball for either the interests of the locally powerful (Bhatkuli), or interdepartmental fights (Chikhal-dara). The policy space available in implementation was largely not claimed. The examples from the field show how centrally actors and their interpretation can shape policy spaces of implementation, or not.

Sharma & Gupta (2006a: 13) argue, “official procedures are not devised or directed by anyone in particular. They are authorless strategies

through which power is exercised and inequalities instituted.” Even though the official procedures may appear authorless, the way they are interpreted and applied is not, therein actors in the administration crucially matter. This is true at least for the administration.

Another central role in terms of the importance of interpretation was attributed to participants as active readers of the policy. With regards to access and distribution of the benefits of the scheme, however, it seems that the influence of participants was not very large. For Andhra, it is not clear how big the influence of the participants was, as this was little discussed in the interviews, and from the administration came contradictory reports of the selection of works. Moreover, here the State sets important priorities for what are deemed pro-poor works. In Maharashtra, it is clear that the participants at the sites had little say. Many of them hardly had an idea of the scheme, but that it would provide them with employment. In Bhatkuli they had no say on the nature of the works, and they had few ideas on what could be possible within the scheme. In Chikhaldara, where most participants had an idea about the entitlements of the Act and what works would be useful for their village, they were not heard. Partially the suggested works were not carried out because of the interdepartmental disputes. But this was only one reason.

That the participants’ impact on the scheme is rather small has much to do with the second explanatory logic of the politics of implementation, with context and legacies. The interactions between administration and participants take place in a context in which other policies have been implemented before. These prior institutional practices, as well as the implicit logics that govern them, act as legacies that continue to influence encounters between citizens and the state. Institutional contexts and practices are shaped by power relations and are selective. Thus, Brand (2013: 432f) argues, “policies have asymmetrical consequences for social actors ... also because of the institutionalised and discursive selectivities of the polity - and therefore of policies.”

Especially in Maharashtra there is fatal legacy of a former rights-based scheme, which was not rights- and demand-based in its delivery. Therefore, there is little reason to believe that the new scheme would be different for both administration and participants. Additionally, in Maharashtra, where far less dedicated NREGS staff has been hired, the persons

that deliver the new scheme are the same that delivered previous schemes. Moreover, typically they continue to deliver other schemes too. This context is selective against a demand-based argumentation by participants. If demands are made but not met, the local staff has little to fear. It would be asked a lot from the participants to complain about the staff, typically the Gram Sewak, given that he/she is the primary connection for many programmes and services. The structures in which participants were meant to have more space for such complaints, social audits, were just about to be introduced at the time of the fieldwork.

In Andhra to some participants in the location with the best implementation among the sites surveyed the scheme appeared to be demand-based. That the participants can find employment when they need it is very good. However, even in Andhra neither is the demand for work effectively registered, nor are unemployment allowances paid. In sum, the implementation logic is still not rights-based. Yet, as the engaged State level staff argued, the rights-based paradigm can be – and is in the case of Andhra quite successfully – used by committed individuals to push the less dedicated to offer employment. From a material view, this is good because in effect more people find employment in the scheme. With a view to agency it is more problematic, because it means that participants do not have the say that they should have. With regards to reliability it makes the scheme dependent on a few committed people at the helm. Moreover, this State administration build up a large ICT monitoring infrastructure in order to ensure that works are offered, and the employees in NREGS are kept on the short leash of temporary contracts so they can be pressured to deliver. From a labour rights perspective of the employees in the scheme, not so much the participants, this seems problematic.

And, as I pointed out throughout this chapter, participants' awareness is not the panacea to move from a supply- to a demand-logic of the scheme. In particular where the interactions between administration and participants in NREGS are not distinct from other schemes and state-society interactions, it is difficult for participants to claim their entitlements even when they know them. In this sense legacies and embeddedness in a given context also contribute to explain why awareness does not play the central role in reversing earlier patterns, which is often assumed in other studies as well as by parts of the administration. To

attribute low participation in NREGS to low demand, as it is done in Maharashtra, shows how local power structures are downplayed or neglected. Whereas in fact existing structures of dependency and power are significant for participants not to claim their entitlements. This also speaks against the use of the term awareness, which inherently suggests that information on the scheme and its opportunities alone would be sufficient. It is not. What is rather needed is the knowledge that a) making rights claims leads to the effective realisation of the entitlements and b) that this claim will not harm other relationships on which the livelihood in a given setting depends. It calls for knowledge or even experiences of successful claims, and the credible assurance that claims will not be used against you. Whereas I point to current limitations of rights claims especially in the Maharashtrian setting, Zivi (2008) is more optimistic about the empowering effect of rights.

This finding also opens another interesting question, not with regards to earlier studies that assumed that awareness would be the key to an effectively demand driven schemes, but with regards to the role of citizens as active readers of policy. Yanow (1996: 231f) argues, that the idea of politics at the implementation state is not less democratic – because it takes the policy out of the hands of the legislators to a certain degree – but more democratic, because citizens are seen to be more than passive recipients of policy texts. The idea of active readership actually gives agency back to the citizens. She points out that if we adopt

a more cyclical and long-range view of the process, we would see that policy ideas rarely begin *de novo* and that debates arising during implementation may be precursors to the next round of policy design. In this view, tenants, landlords, parents, doctors, and other citizens and residents are all active creators of meaning and cannot be controlled. In its own way, it is a more democratic theory than the control theory it challenges, in that it counters the view of people as ‘targets’ of policies. Targets do not move, think, act, feel. They are a major silent group, as distinct from policy ‘actors.’ It is the actors who ‘play’ with language, while the client-targets are passive receivers of meaning. This is a view of objects who take no initiative, engage in no independent thought or action, and are happy to have government save them. Reader-response theory applied to a policy

context leads us away from such a paternalistic view of passive readers. Interpretive approaches rest on a belief in human autonomy. (ibid.: 232)

To Yanow an active reader is one that engages with the policy, and takes initiative based on their independent thought. In the case of NREGS it may be exactly these thoughts, and an understanding of the selectivities of the policy context in which they navigate, that leads people not to pressure their entitlement claims. As also Brand (2013: 430) points out, many IPA approaches remain “overly optimistic with respect to the possibilities and effects of participation.” Nonetheless, Brand is with Yanow and other IPA approaches, as I am myself, when it comes to their normative stand “for the democratization of political and societal processes” (ibid.: 430).

Another link that may be drawn at the end of this chapter on the politics of implementation, which showed how the arguments on the importance of interpretation and of contexts and legacies could contribute to explain the puzzles around distribution and exclusion, employment on demand and awareness, is to the welfare regime literature. In the welfare regime literature, actors and their interests, institutions and ideas were highlighted as important factors that shape the development of regimes. Essentially the same factors – but on another level – also matter in the politics of implementation.

8 Conclusions

This book is motivated by the global lack of social security, which is particularly prevalent in the Global South. This is progressively recognised as a pressing political problem. To tackle this problem, an increasing number of international and national initiatives in (and for) countries of the Global South have been initiated in the past 15 years. Yet, even in cases in which social protection schemes have been designed and established, these neither necessarily reach the (targeted) population, nor do they assure welfare gains for them. The overarching question of this book thus concerns the reasons why schemes in the South have often remained confined to small groups or otherwise failed to ensure a greater degree of socio-economic security for the majority of the population, and ultimately how social security can be broadened for people living in poverty and deprivation in the South.

This greater analytic and normative research interest connects to three research themes and respective research questions. First, I engage with the question how and why specific welfare arrangements have developed over time. This is the theme of emergence, which is embedded in the academic debate on Southern welfare regimes, to which I aim to contribute with this book. Second is the theme of implementation, which addresses the large differences in the delivery of social protection schemes. In the exploration of this theme, I draw particularly on interpretative policy analysis, which helps explain some remaining gaps in previous policy studies on the expansion of social policy in the South. The third and last theme of the book concerns welfare gains for the (targeted) population. Herein, I again draw on qualitative methods and interpretative approaches to assess the scheme from a participants' perspective.

Albeit these are large global questions, they can hardly be answered at such a general level. Therefore, I chose to study the case of India and its employment guarantee scheme NREGS. As I show above, India is an exemplary case of a large Southern democracy with a long tradition in welfare policies, while, nonetheless, a large portion of the population lives in poverty. NREGS is an important case for social security expansion in the South, because it is the largest employment scheme in the world and has been a trendsetter within South Asia. It is furthermore a

suitable case both with regard to implementation, which varies widely between the India's federal states, as well as with regard to the welfare gains. The rights- and demand-based character of the NREG-Act at least has the potential to contribute to substantive welfare gains.

In the following presentation of the concluding findings from the chapters above, I take up the three themes in reverse order. First, I deal with conclusions on and for social security expansion through NREGA in India, in particular regarding welfare gains for the population. This is, followed by the discussion on the politics of implementation. I conclude with insights on the emergence of welfare regimes in the South and the lessons we can draw from these. Within each of the following sections, I start with findings from the case of India and NREGA, before I turn to potentially more generalizable conclusions.

8.1 Findings on participants' perspectives and welfare gains

The theme of welfare gains for the population has been explored through qualitative interviews with NREGS participants and non-participants in four research locations in two Indian states. The importance of the participants' perspective is based a) in the empirical uncertainty of implementation, i.e. the fact that we cannot assume that the policy intent is realised, and we thus need to inquire, whether certain objectives have been met; and b) because participants' perspectives on the scheme impact on implementation.

A central question to NREGS participants therefore was whether the scheme has led to social security and welfare gains for them. In the analysis of the interviews from the field, I found a reflection of the encompassing notion of social security that I presented at the beginning of this book. Social security was introduced as a central component of and a stepping-stone for realising dignity and freedom, as an important contribution for people all around the world to "live long and live well" {Sen, 1999 #203@5}. Thus understood, social security has three mutually supportive dimensions: material welfare gains, reliability and agency. These three dimensions, which were developed at an argumentative normative level, proved useful for explaining why participants were not satisfied with the NREG-Scheme – despite certain material welfare gains. In particular, the aspect of reliability is seen to play a central role in the perception of welfare gains.

This is due to the situation that for most participants the material impact of the scheme is important, if not crucial. NREGS constitutes a positive change for themselves and often also for the village community. In most of the researched locations, NREGS was deemed more easily accessible, and, in some cases, better in general than other welfare schemes. One prime reason for this positive view is the availability of work close to home. This argument is stronger for families with children or older workers, and less for younger workers, who may still prefer to migrate – be it for better wages or for other reasons. For women, the comparatively higher wages form an additional incentive. In Adilabad, both women and men positively evaluate the opportunity to work on their own lands. Further material benefits can be seen in locations where the implementation is deemed better. Here, participants go to usurious moneylenders less frequently.

However, even where NREGS leads to more money to buy items of daily needs, not all is well. A prime reason why NREGS does not realise larger welfare gains is unreliability of both the provision of work and payment of wages. This is of particular importance for Maharashtra, where the scheme is seen as unreliable in both fieldwork locations. In all four fieldwork locations, late payment is mentioned as a problem, but there are large differences in degree of delay between Andhra and Maharashtra. And yet, at the Bhatkuli site, NREGS participants did not even drop out when wage payments were delayed by several months, though they reported that others did. Moreover, the participants at this site give account of the hardship they suffer due to the delayed payments. However, even in these dire circumstances there is a widespread belief that the state will eventually pay the hours worked.

The continued lack of reliability also negatively impacts on the spaces for greater agency, which the scheme in principle offers. In both Maharashtra locations, people are dependent on the goodwill of a few government officers that administer all schemes in their location. The fact that in NREGA employment is a right, does not make a large difference in strengthening the agency of participants. In most locations, the knowledge of this right is relatively limited. And even where this knowledge exists, it is not claimed. A typical answer is, “when there is work they’ll tell us.” The legacies of previous experiences of supply-

based employment provision are stronger than knowledge of the new logic of employment on demand.

Moreover, the effects of the scheme across groups of the population differ between the locations. During the pilot study in Dhule in 2011, it seemed as if participants with land generally benefitted more than those without. This pattern is not repeated across locations in the main fieldwork phase, but there certainly is a tendency for the better-off to benefit more in Maharashtra.²⁰² In Adilabad, , the situation is reversed: here, the better-off farmers complain that the poor get more benefits, because they get more work on their own land done, and can for example benefit from the fertilizers from de-silting works. In my fieldwork, a further example of exclusion that I came across was the exclusion of women, who are deemed unfit for certain types of work, either in their self-perception or in the view of others.

Overall in the four locations in the two States, the scheme can be seen to have created partially modest but crucial material welfare gains for all participants that I spoke with. A major problem that remains is that an uncounted number of people cannot access the scheme for a variety of reasons, or that they do not get as much work as they would like to have. One major problem that limits the welfare gains in particular is the lack of reliability, in both the availability of work (on demand) and of payments. However, with the example of Andhra the study shows that more reliability is possible. Gains in the field of agency could not be explored in more detail in this research, but certainly form a fruitful field for further studies.

More generally, the inquiry into participants' perspectives brought to the fore differences in implementation, that had not been visible from the official data. And, more often than not this data contradicted the administration's view of the scheme. The theoretically grounded decision to place one focus on participants and their perceptions of the scheme proved crucial for identifying the three issues in implementation, which were then further analysed. The findings thereof are discussed below.

²⁰² The dynamics of exclusion could not be explored in more detail, because it proved not possible to speak to more non-participants that would have liked to work in the scheme. Partially, these had apparently migrated (in Bhatkuli) or I was in the village for too little time to find them (in Talamadugu).

8.2 Findings on (the politics of) implementation

Participants' perspectives are also a central component of the multivocal view on NREGA, which forms the base for the further analysis of reasons for the differences in implementation. The multivocal empirical review of welfare expansion in NREGS confirmed what was stated theoretically before, namely that differences in access to and benefits from welfare exist within countries, and even within locations. In the case of NREGA, many of these differences cannot be explained with policy design but rather with programme implementation.

A key difference that NREGA was supposed to make is the change from a supply to a demand-based provision of employment. In practice, neither in Andhra nor in Maharashtra can the scheme be deemed demand-based. In the former, the State administration of the scheme is sensitive to this fact and tries to compensate the lack of demand-based interaction in the field through extensive levels of supply of NREGS work. In Maharashtra, the State administration finds it easier to blame the participants for not demanding work. With regards to this important envisaged change, this research suggests that NREGA constitutes a change at the level of policy prescriptions rather than in implementation. NREGA is successful in the sense that it has reached more people than previous schemes. Yet, the quite radical diversion from earlier logics of running social welfare schemes that is inscribed in the NREG-Act, and was hoped for by many activists, has largely not materialized. Instead, I find a lot of continuity in NREGS with earlier social policies in India.

When it comes to explaining the differences in implementation, a member of the NREGS administration has a simple answer: "sometimes this scheme depends on persons" (38ABM: 251f). And, as the analysis in Chapter 7 shows, this is true in particular for the personnel in the administration who can claim and shape their room to manoeuvre to quite a large extent. Whether or not they make use of this possibility,, is driven by personal motivation and a more or less enabling environment.

In Maharashtra, the influence of individuals from the Block, District or local administration and his or her personal intrinsic motivation can be very important, because there is less guidance, and there are fewer monitoring systems in place. In Maharashtra, therefore, the scheme depends much more on local enthusiasm. At the same time, the majority of the

administration's staff I met in Maharashtra appeared to be lacking motivation, complained about the burden of work placed on them and generally had very little vision for the scheme. However, maybe naturally, the reasons for the lack of engagement with the scheme – and sometimes for the job as public servant more generally – were more difficult to explore. Those less interested in the scheme were also less interested in being interviewed. Overall, the staff in Maharashtra showed little openness to discuss shortcomings of the scheme or their own contribution to problems. Problems were generally blamed on other levels or departments.

In Andhra, individuals also prove to be very important for the implementation. However, in Andhra, there are very active persons at the helm of the State's administration of the scheme, which shaped the policy space considerably. Through this strong guidance from State level and with the help of ICT-based monitoring mechanisms established by the administration, the room for decisions on the local level is narrowed. Generally, at all AP sites, at local level as well as in the State capitol, more of my interview partners appeared to be intrinsically and personally motivated, as the Andhra government also hired more dedicated staff. The costs are, to a certain part, carried by the central government, but also by the relatively poorer – compared to Maharashtra – state of Andhra Pradesh. Additionally, in Andhra those that are less motivated can be sanctioned if they do not perform. The ICT systems allow to monitor and control the performance of employees, and their non-permanent employment status makes cuts in pay and other disciplinary measures possible. The staff is monitored at least as strictly as the participants, if not more so. For an officer that does not deliver according to the internally established goals, it is thus difficult to keep his or her post. In sum, the mechanisms of supervision and control are much tighter in Andhra. The ICT solutions also contribute to, for example, quicker payments. And, despite – or because of – the tight monitoring, staff was generally more available to also talk about problems in the scheme, and their own role in these. They were also more open toward discussing the fact that

NREGS is contested among various groups in the village or a larger public.²⁰³

As there are influences of different groups on the social policy-making on national level, social policy is locally embedded in the politics of implementation. This also means that certain changes in social relations, which are foreseen in social policy, may be altered – or not – at the local level. With regard to the argument that social policy is an active force of ordering social relations, one could – at least for the Bhatkuli village – rather say that social policy, in the form of NREGS, is ordered by the local social forces. Or, in other words, social policy as an active force of ordering social relations can act to preserve the power of those already empowered.

Conversely, in Andhra, the State government appears to use the scheme successfully to re-order social relations to some extent, through its special focus on marginalised groups. In Andhra, the interpretation of the ideal participant of the scheme as the ‘poorest of the poor’ shapes the access to and the distribution of benefits from the scheme. Therefore, work is offered that is deemed particularly suitable for this group. The favoured treatment is not necessarily intrinsic and local; it is part of the official preferences of the State. The comparison with Maharashtra suggests that these mechanisms of targeting within the universal scheme make the scheme more inclusive and pro-poor in Andhra. This, however, does not mean that the scheme is free from errors of exclusion of the poor. They still happen, but the scale at which they occur seems to be smaller.

Generally, organising change in access, distribution and the logic of the provision of work has been shown to be a demanding process given the context and the legacies in which the scheme is locally set. Also, the much-acclaimed awareness – which is regularly mentioned as a condition and a driver for the change to a more demand-based logic – cannot easily bring change, as to the results from the field demonstrate. More is needed than abstract knowledge about a new scheme and a new institutional logic. Knowledge is at least partially contextual and based on experience. If there are no experiences which suggest that the institution

²⁰³ For the case of Andhra social audits might play an additional role in ensuring implementation. However, this could not be further explored in this book.

did or has already changed, when there are disincentives to claim rights, it can be hard to act on the abstract knowledge – especially if it means giving up ties that delivered security before – like confronting the local Gram Sewak or other officers.

Ultimately, the discussion of the politics of implementation shows that, even when new schemes are legislated, and even when the governing principle of social policy entitlements has, on paper, been changed from being needy and deserving to a *right*, it is a long way for this right to be delivered. The older normative frames, the established forms of encounters between citizens and the state institutions are not easily reversed. In the comparison between Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the former seemed to be much more successful – not because it adopted the rights-based approach per se, but because the State administration developed a dedicated idea of what it wanted to achieve with the scheme and built an ICT infrastructure to monitor whether the local administration also works towards this aim. In Maharashtra, where the state administration developed little initiative for the scheme, it became a ball to be tossed around amongst the lower tiers of administration and powerful groups.

Overall, with regards to implementation, this study highlights that implementation must be seen in the context of previous schemes and practices of implementation, which shape the perceptions of administration and participants alike. Additionally, context and legacies provide important answers as to why certain (new) policy objectives are not easily reached. Moreover, the new scheme, as all old schemes, is embedded in the societal structures in the field, which cannot easily be overcome. Interestingly, more change in the direction of work on demand had happened in Andhra, where the scheme was interpreted as a targeted scheme for the poorest of the poor.

8.3 Findings on emergence and Southern welfare regimes

Turning lastly to the theme of emergence, which is concerned with the forces behind welfare development in the South, I start with the factors that drive the emergence of the Indian welfare trajectory. The historical review of the Indian welfare trajectory gives special importance to ideas. The historic review highlights the strong legacies of inequality and difference as central normative principles, with roots in both pre-colonial and colonial times. Further legacies of the colonial rule were the early

social security schemes in limited sectors, and the relative neglect of social security for rural areas. A major influence on the post-independence organisation of welfare was exercised by leading – but competing – figures of the Indian independence movement: Ambedkar, Gandhi and Nehru. However, all radical social reforms were stalled to foster internal unity after the experience of partition. It was the achievement of Ambedkar that India put compensatory discrimination policies for indigenous (*Adivasi*) and marginalised (*Dalit*) groups in place early on.

In the contestations of the post-independence order, some legacies of the former rule prevailed, while others were successfully fought off, always depending on the issue at hand, the strength of contending groups and overarching political ideas. After independence, the shared fear of social and political turmoil was a central argument for sticking with much of the colonial heritage. Similarly, family and communal organisation of welfare emerged as major traditions from pre-colonial times, but not as a functional legacy. They also remained powerful because employment-based social security never reached the majority of Indians. In post-independence India, societal acceptance of inequality remained high, and schemes – other than for the formal sector – were typically targeted at certain groups, may these be ethnic (*Adivasi* or *Dalits*) or social (BPL). The lack of comprehensive social welfare provision led to the continued reliance on strong solidarity within groups, which acted as an obstacle to the formation of a common horizon of solidarity and citizenship-based social policies.

A sub-question from the literature review in chapter 2 concerned the role of the international environment (next the importance of domestic ideas) for these domestic developments. The analysis in chapter 5 highlights that in some shifts of the social policy orientation the international environment was more important than in others. Colonial rule, of course, is one important influence, but also the collapse of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on Indian social policy-making. The effect of international ideational changes have always been mediated by existing institutional arrangements, by prevailing societal ideas about what is just or at least tolerable, and by actor coalitions taking up the international argument and pushing for change, or not. For example, the most recent change to social rights-based entitlements is often embedded in an ‘in-

clusive growth' narrative, but the connection between these two appears to be constructed at least partially ex-post. Overall, national and international political environments play different roles for ideational changes in different phases of the history of Indian social policy.

Some insights from the historical review of the Indian case point beyond the country case itself and can also be of interest for Northern welfare regimes. First is the combination of individual rights or benefit entitlements with collective development goals for villages, regions or communities, which can be found already in early post-independence social policies. Northern welfare literature typically focuses only on the individual entitlement, but welfare gains can also be achieved through collective action. An embedding of individual entitlements in collective development goals potentially increases the opportunities to develop, articulate and organise around collective aims. Studies on the subject could offer interesting lessons for progressive social policy for the North.²⁰⁴ It could be a field in which the North could and should learn from the South, in which theory from the South can improve policies for the North.

A second insight from the analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory is that India was very early to install reservation policies – i.e. affirmative action – for indigenous and marginalised groups. This may actually constitute a policy innovation from the South, and could prove to be a fertile field for comparative historical studies of social policy.²⁰⁵

This said, a critical reflection on the approach developed and pursued in this book also demands to point out that the study of ideas remained selective. The review above produced insights on the importance of ideas without studying schools of thought and ideas in depth. Identify-

²⁰⁴ This last argument is further supported by the study of NREGA, which – not always in delivery, but in design – entails a few more interesting details, such as the direct involvement of beneficiaries in the planning and evaluation of the scheme, and the transparency guarantees in the form of social audits.

²⁰⁵ Another point that is at least interesting to note is the difference of vocabulary in welfare debates between North and South. While in India – and also e.g. in South Africa – there is a discussion on the “right to work”, recent social policy reforms in the OECD have much rather been discussed as “workfare.” This may be another promising ground for research on ideas in social policy in North and South, which could, however, not be pursued further in this book.

ing certain ideas with a few selected individuals such as Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar, is of course a simplification. It has also been beyond the scope of this study to inquire how the ideas of the local administration have been formed and by what mechanisms ideas gained traction and became pervasive and powerful. While this is a shortcoming of my study in particular, it shines a light on the little attention that is given to ideas in much of political science more generally.

Furthermore, the literature review in Chapter 2 and the analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory in chapter 5 revealed that explanations for the development of welfare regimes are to be sought in domestic developments rather than in global structural or functional logics. Welfare and social policy expansion always appear to be mediated by domestic politics, by prior institutional choices, and by the times in which such processes take place. This book highlights that, despite the scepticism whether distinct welfare regimes would evolve outside the OECD, these have not only recently evolved, but have existed for some time. Southern welfare regimes are distinct modern configurations of welfare and social policy that can and need to be analysed in their own right.

This book can make a number of contributions to the emerging field of Southern welfare regime approaches that set out to analyse Southern welfare arrangements. First, the approach developed by Gough and his co-authors (Gough, 1999; Gough *et al.* 2004b; Gough & Abu Sharkh 2010b) was pioneer work and provides a thorough analysis of the different institutional and structural settings in the South within their comprehensive framework of welfare regimes. Yet, their regime types remain largely descriptive. They do not explain how or why a certain state became a member of one or another cluster, and theoretical innovations such as de-clientelisation, or diverse actor constellations are hardly reflected in their empirical work. The study of India showed that ideas and actors pushing for them are central for the formation of its specific welfare arrangements.

Another finding from the literature review is the neglect of ideas and colonial legacies in previous studies on welfare in the South. This became apparent by my shift in focus away from regime type construction to the explanatory logics of welfare regime studies in the OECD. The insights concerning the importance of ideas and colonial legacies were

then taken up in the analysis of the Indian welfare trajectory. The approach of political-ideational analysis chosen proved useful in examining the Indian welfare trajectory. It helped to uncover the legacies that act as obstacles to more egalitarian policy objectives. However, it is not ideas by themselves that constitute change, as could be seen in case of liberalisation, but it takes actors that actively pursue changes for it to happen. Furthermore, the institutional context also influences whether or not new socio-political ideas can successfully replace older ones. The political-ideational analysis used in this study, thus, rightly allows for taking up these factors as well.

Furthermore, the literature review revealed that approaches to Southern welfare regimes repeated a mistake of Northern approaches by not centrally including reproductive and care activities in their models. This is particularly crucial, because, in the South, many more women and men than in the North engage in both productive and reproductive as well as in subsistence activities. At a level of welfare regime theorising for the South, this issue should be addressed, and it promises to be a rewarding field for future theorising and empirical work.

Moreover, the comparison of Northern and Southern approaches to welfare exposed two further areas that would potentially be worthwhile studying in more detail – and in which Northern welfare states can potentially learn from Southern welfare regimes. These are, firstly, the variation of access to state welfare provisions within a country. In the North, most welfare regime approaches still focus on the average-production worker. However, in many Northern countries these are a decreasing share of the workforce, e.g. in Germany it never was the norm for women. Thus, access to and benefit levels in social security vary increasingly within Northern countries. This argument has been made by Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011) and deserves further exploration.²⁰⁶ Secondly, the Southern welfare regime approaches have much more consistently integrated international influences on welfare regimes into their models in the form of migrant labour remittances (Seekings,

²⁰⁶ But, e.g. in Germany currently rather the opposite seems to happen: Despite the fact that for example employment histories are increasingly broken, the last pension reforms have reinforced the reliance on continuous contribution rates and weakened the relevance of other activities (Joebges, Meinhardt, Rietzler & Zwiener, 2012).

2008) and of foreign aid (Gough et al., 2004b). More generally, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012a) argue that it is the South that is experiencing a new modernity that has to deal with the vagaries of unleashed neo-liberalism before the North has to face this challenge, and that also in this sense there is scope for learning from the South. In the end, hence, this book on the expansion of social security in the South also points back to social security and its study in the North, and has more than one lesson for the North.

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Social Security Expansion in the South: From Welfare Regimes to Implementation

A Study of India and its National Rural
Employment Guarantee Act

Labor and Globalization | Volume 18

Ellen Ehmke

The profound lack of social security for much of the world's population is increasingly recognised as a problem, both in policy making and in social sciences. Many new national and international policy initiatives aim at the expansion of social security and social protection in countries of the Global South. Correspondingly, academia is discussing the specific Southern nature of welfare arrangements and regimes, as well as the design of social protection systems. This book studies India as an exemplary case of social security expansion, Southern social policy development and welfare arrangements, with a focus on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and its implementation. Its politics of implementation approach builds on historical and ideational institutionalism as well as interpretative policy analysis. It highlights the importance of two previously neglected factors: ideational motives and implementation challenges. Whereas ideas have played an important role in the OECD welfare debates, Southern welfare studies have tended to overlook the importance of domestic ideas as shaping factors of social policy development. Putting ideas at the centre allows us to analyse Southern welfare regimes in their own right. In the South, policy implementation can be as important as its design for an explanation of its reach. Moreover, the implementation process is often a central – if not the only – arena in which (poor) citizens interact with the state. It is a politicised and contested arena.

Key words: Social security, social protection, social policy, welfare regimes, India, interpretative policy analysis, implementation studies, development studies, public employment schemes

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