

Comparing Regional Rural Development Councils: Do ‘Invited Spaces’ Empower?

*Participation at the State–Society Interface*¹

Rural Mexico is now filled with an untold number of regional councils whose official goal is to allow social organizations to deliberate with government agencies over how to allocate public rural development resources. These state–society councils address issues ranging from agricultural investment, food distribution, electoral administration, regional infrastructure investment, watershed management, and sustainable use of natural resources. Federal agencies began to promote these regional councils in the 1970s and 1980s, and the result is a complex, multilayered set of deliberative bodies whose mandates often overlap and whose scope rarely coincides with territorial forms of representation, such as ejidos, municipalities, and state governments. For better or worse, these councils constitute a web of sites that both parallel and overlap with much of actually existing rural civil society.²

This chapter asks: Do these spaces constitute opportunities for state–society power-sharing, or are they window dressing that merely legitimates government decisions? The research strategy compares regional councils involved in seven different rural development programs, focusing on their capacity and degree of inclusion of actually existing organizations, following a discussion of broader analytical and conceptual issues. These councils are examples of a broader category of governance reforms that attempts to change the balance of power within civil society by creating pluralist spaces for civil society

¹ Thanks to Andrea Cornwall and Jennifer Franco for comments on an earlier version.

² Unfortunately this study does not address the role of councils involved with schools and clinics in rural areas, but no independent research is available that suggests significant degrees of participation or impact.

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deliberation, of which participatory budgeting and parent-managed schools are the most well-known examples. Fung and Wright call them institutions of 'empowered participatory governance' (2003). For Evans, they are examples of 'state–society synergy' (1997). For Avritzer they are cases of 'participatory publics' (2002). For Bebbington, Delamaza, and Villar, they are 'public spaces for local *concertación* (bargaining)' (2006). De Sousa Santos sees them in terms of 'democratizing democracy' (2005). For Ackerman, they are examples of 'co-governance' between state and society (2004*a, b*). Cornwall's term emphasizes the degree to which they are state initiatives: 'invited spaces' (2002).

Analysis of contested participatory spaces in government programs faces at least two major challenges. The first is empirical, and involves the difficulty of generating enough independent data about numerous and diverse regional experiences to be able to generalize about broader, sometimes contradictory patterns. While it is often straightforward to find cases of co-optation or exclusion, or occasional cases of transformation and empowerment, how does one distinguish the exception from the main trend, especially when extensive grey areas of 'partial inclusion' are involved? In addition, the degree of pluralistic inclusion involved may change significantly over time, depending on the interaction between civil society efforts to make them work and the varying strength of backlash that such efforts often provoke. Only a representative sample of regional processes and outcomes can provide a rigorous basis for identifying the broader patterns (an empirical standard that will not be adequately met by this chapter). A second research challenge is analytical and involves how to *explain* the dynamics of institutional change. Even the World Bank has recognized that for anti-poverty policies to successfully reach poor people, the institutions that carry them out must be transformed in favor of the poor.³ In spite of this 'official' intellectual recognition of the need for 'pro-poor' institutions, the causal processes through which institutions *become* pro-poor are not well understood. Specifically, how do pro-poor reform innovations scale up and spread out, to go from bounded enclaves to influence entire agencies, regions or nation-states?⁴ In

³ World Bank analysts spelled out their assessment of the reasons *why* pro-poor institutions are needed to promote poverty reduction in the *World Development Report 2000/2001*. This influential report argued that the local empowerment of poor people is important for the success of anti-poverty policies. Critics pointed out that this approach ignored power imbalances at the national level (e.g. Moore 2001). Many of the institutional logics and incentive structures that explain why some public agencies are more pro-poor than others were detailed in World Bank (2004*a*).

⁴ For a useful recent intellectual history of related theoretical debates in the fields of political science and public administration, see Olsen (2004).

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this context, analysis of the dynamics of state–society interfaces can contribute to the broader question of how institutions become ‘pro-poor’.

This chapter explores whether regional state–society councils can become arenas for accountability politics, and therefore potential levers for institutional change. Although these regional councils lack operational power and independent spending authority—they are almost all exclusively consultative and their deliberative quality is politically contingent—this study explores the possibility that inclusion of representative organizations could permit regional councils to promote public accountability. In other words, the inclusion and exclusion of preexisting autonomous organizations would be a key indicator of the potential for official regional councils to become arenas for accountability politics. More generally, this focus on the interaction between autonomous civil society and the state reflects the need for ‘public spaces that are outside the domain of the state’ as ‘an essential precondition for citizen engagement that does not simply serve to legitimate the existing political system’ (as posed by Habermas, cited in Cornwall 2004: 78–9).⁵

Official claims that engagement with government consultative processes will involve actual power-sharing always warrant a high degree of skepticism. This chapter explores whether these spaces for state–society interaction actually lead to changes in the balance of power. Previous chapters addressed this question through varying strategies. Chapter 3 compared the degrees of relative opening in regional deliberative spaces over time, and found ebbs and flows rather than linear change. Chapter 4 addressed regional state–society interfaces from the point of view of a regional producer organization, and found at least one turning point when official participation created new autonomous space. Chapter 6 compared World Bank-funded regional agricultural councils and found that autonomous indigenous producer organizations were consistently excluded. Chapter 7 compared Mexico’s wide variety of institutions of submunicipal representation, suggesting that rural municipalities can be better understood as microregions that include multiple communities. Given that rural municipalities rarely adequately represent outlying

⁵ Cornwall goes on to note that ‘thinking of spaces less as concrete locales than as sites that are constitutive as well as expressive of power relations focuses attention on agency... A gamut of cultural, social, historical and political contextual factors are all tangled together in shaping the boundaries of the possible in any given encounter... “invited spaces” are always already permeated with the power effects of difference’ (2004: 83). For further discussion and a wide range of comparative cases, see Cornwall and Schattan Coelho (2007).

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villages, opportunities for local leaders to come together outside the purview of municipal authorities have the potential to forge regional counterweights. This chapter pursues this concern with the ‘scaling up’ of autonomous voice by comparing regional ‘state–society interfaces’. Interface analysis is an actor-oriented approach that focuses on interlocking relationships, contested discourses, and conflictive negotiations.⁶

Institutional advocates of empowerment have begun to assemble a substantial body of research. Drawing on the intellectual space opened up by relatively heterodox *World Development Reports*, World Bank social and institutional analysts recognize the relevance of ‘institutional climate’ and agency, but they sidestep the role of conflict and the political dynamics of changing the balance of power within the state (Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland 2006; Narayan 2002, 2005). Independent analysts, in contrast, put power imbalances between state and society at the center of the empowerment process. This emphasis on power and conflict is shared by both those who argue that the new official acceptance of participation is limited to official discourse (Cooke and Kothari 2001), and those who see processes and outcomes as politically contingent (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Cornwall aptly describes official channels for participation as ‘domesticated sites of invited, or indeed induced participation’—in contrast to autonomous participatory spaces that ‘people make or shape for themselves’ (2002: 3, 20). Yet this distinction between ‘invited’ and ‘autonomous spaces’ does not necessarily mean that they are dichotomous. Cornwall notes that “‘invited spaces’ offer one important vehicle through which development intervention can support more transformative participation... they come to be defined by those who are invited into them, as well as by those doing the inviting’ (2002, 2004: 76, 80). Much of this study has sought to identify this realm of possibility, the room for maneuver to push back initial constraints. Yet the evidence shows that most of the time those constraints have not moved, or openings turned out to be temporary. Therefore the question remains, to what degree can ‘invited spaces’ actually contribute to changing the balance of power between the state and underrepresented social actors?

⁶ See Long (1999), which details Mexican case examples, as well as Long (1989, 2001) and Arce and Long (1992). For conceptual discussion that focuses specifically on participatory councils as state–society interfaces that act as ‘transversal accountability’ agents, see Isunza Vera (2004, 2005).

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While the differences between autonomous and official spaces for participation often appear stark, the often-posed dichotomy between them may turn out to be overstated, for at least two reasons. First, at least in rural Mexico, many autonomous organizations are themselves the legacy of previously official spaces that were appropriated from below, as described in earlier chapters. Experiences with past engagements with the state are therefore embedded in those organizations' repertoires. Second, the process of engagement with official spaces depends heavily on whether the decision to engage is made autonomously. The dynamics of engagement are likely to be path-dependent, so it is crucial to know whether those 'invited', such as regional membership organizations, make their own choices as to whether or not to engage, as well as how they perceive the potential risks and benefits. Their choices are certainly often constrained, insofar as the government programs involved may offer development funds needed for the leadership to deliver tangible results to their rank and file. Limited information also constrains the decisions of autonomous, representative organizations about whether and how to engage with the state. Their most reliable information draws from their own past track record of engagement with the state, which may lead to the 'rational wariness' discussed in Chapter 6. Key information variables also include the degree to which organizations are networked with counterpart organizations in other regions, as well as their degree of access to insider information about the balance of power within the state.⁷ This issue of varying degrees of transparency and information access is part of the broader question of whether these invited spaces are institutionally structured with measures that attempt to 'level the playing field' between potential participants with highly imbalanced degrees of power. As Bebbington, Delamaza, and Villar note, these local bargaining arenas are always embedded in their local political economies, which 'implies that political-economic differences of power, interests and material resources are also present' (2006).

The emerging broader comparative literature on 'empowered participatory governance' shows that it is indeed possible to find significant

⁷ Whether an autonomous decision to engage turns out to be empowering or disempowering is another question. In principle, such organizations could engage with regional councils with their eyes open, yet find themselves further constrained and end up sacrificing autonomy in favor of conditioned access to resources. When discretionary and less-than-transparent resource allocation is involved, co-optation is a frequent outcome. Yet the criteria for determining whether or not a social organization is co-opted are often in the eye of the beholder, especially if one recognizes that autonomy from the state is relative rather than dichotomous.

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examples of mutually empowering synergy across the state–society divide, in different sectors and around the world. While participatory governance bodies institutionalize conflict—if successful, bounding it—they also create deliberative mechanisms that can turn what would otherwise be zero-sum confrontations into win-win solutions. Their dynamics build on, but are qualitatively distinct from, more conventional and adversarial forms of representative democratic pluralism.⁸ Most notably, the literature so far suggests that these cases are usually limited to modest enclaves compared to the national context—specific cities, towns or regions—with the notable exception of Mexico’s electoral administration system (e.g. Ackerman 2007; Avritzer 2002). As will be seen below, however, Mexico’s rural development council programs fit the much more common pattern, in which balanced power-sharing turns out to be highly exceptional.

For reasons described above, then, the main factor that limits the potential effectiveness of ‘empowered participatory governance’ is that, in contexts in which the informal distribution of power is highly lopsided, such institutions can be easily co-opted and end up providing a democratic veneer to preexisting power imbalances.⁹ Fung and Wright conclude that such experiments are most likely to work when high levels of ‘countervailing power’ are present—a reference to dense, locally grounded representative social actors (2003). This explanation is certainly consistent with many experiences with regional councils in Mexico, but it has two major gaps. First, it does not account for cases where political exclusion prevents participatory cogovernance in areas of dense local levels of countervailing power (as in much of southern Mexico). In other words, inclusion of the already-organized cannot be assumed, it is a process that requires explanation. This point is analogous to Chapter 3’s critique of Putnam’s depoliticized explanation of social capital accumulation, where ‘them as has, gets’. Second, to find that participatory governance functions well where countervailing powers are already dense does not indicate how such powers can be bolstered where they are thin. These two gaps suggest the need for a more dynamic framework that can account for how social actors and pro-participation state managers can interact in ways

⁸ Note that the conventional dichotomy between participatory and representative democracy falls apart in the cases of larger scale institutions of empowered participatory governance, insofar as the participants are themselves elected representatives of constituency groups.

⁹ Because local power relations vary, community level homogeneity should not be assumed. See, for example, Williams et al. (2003).

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that shift the balance of power, triggering virtuous circles of institutional change. This involves making some conceptual assumptions explicit, such as the distinction between formal and informal power relations.

Formal versus Informal Power¹⁰

One key point for identifying the obstacles and opportunities for institutional change involves explicitly recognizing the distinction between how power is supposed to be exercised, according to official policy processes, versus how power is actually exercised. The premise is that, in practice, institutions operate based on combinations of formal and informal power resources. Formal power resources refer to official mandates, including the administrative, legal, and political authority and resources assigned to carry them out. At the same time, these *de jure* mandates and authority structures are also influenced by *de facto*, informal power relations. While the former may be quite visible, the latter are often deeply embedded and well hidden from outsiders. In other words, official administrative incentive structures may compete with alternative and often conflicting incentive structures to determine patterns of actual institutional behavior. For this reason, the analytical distance between underperformance and corruption is less than the ethical distance between them. Both sets of institutional behaviors are driven by tensions between official and *de facto* incentive structures. This approach suggests that public institutions whose leadership attempts to transform them in more pro-poor directions will have limited results if they rely solely on their own formal authority.

Informal power resources include social capital relationships—within the institution, bridging to counterparts in other institutions, as well as reaching across the state–society divide, as discussed in Chapter 5. Informal powers also include *political* capital, which refers to resources that generate the capacity to seek to change the balance of power. These resources include intra- and extra-institutional credibility, as well as a willingness to use (and create) leverage to influence other actors. Political capital is grounded in a combination of networks of social capital, the capacity to deploy institutional resources, as well as a willingness and capacity to use the media to inform public debates

¹⁰ This section draws from Fox (2004). Helmke and Lewitsky bring together political scientists who address informal power (2006).

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over the issues at stake. The effective investment of political capital requires entrepreneurship, especially since it often involves some degree of risk. Like social capital, the idea of political capital has a certain ‘you know it when you see it’ quality. This certainly limits its measurability, but not its relevance.

The capacity of policy ‘implementers’ to use both formal and informal powers to divert or capture prochange directives from above is well known.¹¹ The factors that shape reformers’ capacity to use their formal and informal powers to move from lesser to greater influence over their institutions has received less analytical attention. When both pro-poor policymakers and social actor counterparts start out with limited leverage over the state and social actors that oppose institutional change, the result is a ‘chicken-and-egg’ problem that requires deliberate strategies to crack. Put another way, how can pro-poor actors inside and outside institutions break out from a relatively static ‘low power equilibrium’, in which both sets of counterparts lack leverage?

Contending Cross-Sectoral Coalitions

An interactive approach to institutional transformation suggests that pro-poor reforms require changes in three distinct arenas: within the state itself, within society, and at the state–society interface. Each of these three arenas involves both formal and informal power relations. If one looks at pro-poor institutional change through this lens, then one can frame the reform process as one driven by *contending cross-sectoral coalitions*. These coalitions both require and generate bridging social capital between institutional and social actors, and in the process generate ‘state–society synergy’ (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3).

In this approach, institutional change depends on changing the balance of power between pro-reform actors embedded in *both* state and society against an anti-reform set of actors, which are also embedded in *both* state and society. Yet while the anti-reform forces in state and society are very likely to constitute an organized coalition, closely linked through informal ties and grounded in shared material interests, pro-reform forces do not necessarily coordinate their efforts or perceive shared interests. Potential pro-reform coalition partners may share ‘objective’ interests in institutional change, but past experiences may feed mutual wariness and distrust that limits cooperation across

¹¹ The recognition of the relevance of such actors dates to Lipsky’s focus on ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (1980).

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the state–society divide.¹² Only unusually, entrepreneurial reformists are willing and able to take the political risks involved in reaching out to build pro-reform cross-sectoral coalitions. While it is very common for policymakers to take risks with other people’s resources, in practice it is rare for policymakers to take the specific kinds of risks involved in encouraging the empowerment of poor people and the transformation of public institutions into pro-poor actors. Such risks involve accepting the uncertainties inherent in partnering with autonomous poor people’s organizations, which by definition bring their own goals and strategies to the table. Yet strategic interaction between policymakers and civil society counterparts is needed to help both sets of actors to target and weaken obstacles to change. This suggests that cross-sectoral coalition-building requires its own set of investment strategies, which involve both social and political capital.

Regional Rural Development Councils

This comparison of regional councils maps the range of processes and outcomes across seven different rural development programs. A wide range of federal programs expect social actors to participate in local and regional councils—a total of *thirty-six*, according to one federal expert in municipal governance (Acosta 2006). The seven programs studied here were chosen based on two main criteria. First, each convened ostensibly power-sharing councils that were all considered potentially significant from the point of view of at least some autonomous peasant and indigenous people’s organizations.¹³ Second, in the case of each program’s regional councils, some body of empirical research was available that permitted national generalizations about actual practices. This narrowed the range of options considerably.¹⁴ While this approach lacks the depth provided by ethnographic

¹² On the ‘rational wariness’ of poor people’s organization to engage with participatory policy reforms in less-than-democratic settings, and ‘intersectoral trust as a resource for reform that requires investment’, see Chapter 6.

¹³ This claim is not based on a systematic survey, but rather on extensive interviews over 20 years with regional leaders in central and southern Mexico. These discussions focused on where they perceived opportunities for constructive engagement with the state.

¹⁴ For example, the Social Development Ministry’s Micro-regional Councils would have been interesting to include, since they were involved in a large-scale program that targeted Mexico’s lowest-income regions. According to one official evaluation, only 40% of the councils were created, and often not according to the rules. In those, the councils did not represent many areas within the regions, and they were often limited to public works committees. Those project-specific committees, similar to those created by the National Solidarity Program, did ostensibly carry out an oversight function. But the councils were

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research, it allows analysis of the broad trends and avoids the problem of sampling on the dependent variation (whether one is looking for successes or failures). The main constraint is the unevenness of the independence and quality of the data. In some cases only semi-official evaluations are available, while in others, council performance was low on the research agenda.

Some of these programs included power-sharing bodies at the community level, others operated at regional levels, representing dozens of communities, while others created bodies that operated at both levels. At least two programs included national level meetings of regional councils. All were federal programs of national scope, and all provoked varying degrees of resistance from within both state and federal government. Most of the field research focused on cross-regional variation within the state of Oaxaca, though some studies cited also included interstate comparisons that involved other low-income states. The program reviews draw on available independent research, since no known official government evaluation, whether internal or external, addresses the question of autonomy and capacity of regional councils.¹⁵ All of the programs are still in operation, with widely varying degrees of support from the federal government.¹⁶

1. The DICONSA Rural Food Store Network

The Mexican government has long intervened in consumer food markets with a variety of direct and indirect policy instruments, including a gradual and uneven shift from generalized to targeted subsidies (both systems overlapped for an extended period). The first significant targeted rural consumer program focused on remote, low-income areas, creating thousands of community-managed local stores that were supplied by the retail distribution branch of the government food company (DICONSA). The stores sold basic foods with modest per unit subsidies of price and transportation costs. The stores' main impact on low-income rural consumers, however, was

not a priority for the ministry, whose leadership eventually eliminated them in 2005, having concluded that public works issues should be handled by the Municipal Planning Commissions (SERPRO 2006: 73).

¹⁵ Federal social programs have been legally mandated to commission external evaluations since 2001, but their agendas are determined by the agencies to be evaluated. As a result, these assessments focus on a narrow range of operational questions, and they do not attempt to assess regional council dynamics. Though legally required to be public, a study of the public accessibility of these social program evaluations found that many either remained confidential or were difficult to find as of 2005 (Fox and Haight 2005, 2007a).

¹⁶ The first several program summaries draw from Fox (2004a).

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to weaken local grain oligopolies, most notably in corn deficit regions. Any economic assessment of the program's benefit to consumers must take into account the counterfactual, in terms of its regulatory impact on the highly fragmented and imperfect grain markets that characterize remote rural areas.

Beginning in 1979, the program pursued its first systematic attempt to use community participation and oversight to encourage the public accountability of the food distribution company. The key institutional innovation was to scale up rural consumers' opportunities and capacities for oversight by creating regional councils that would meet regularly at the DICONSA warehouses charged with supplying the rural stores. Each warehouse supplied several dozen stores. This regional level of organized participatory oversight was critical because the warehouses proved to be the key site for possible diversion of subsidized food to private elites. In many of these rural regions these councils were the first autonomous and representative civil society organizations to be tolerated by the government. The local store management committees and the regional councils were launched by the program's national network of grassroots organizers, which was initially independent both of DICONSA management and the ruling party. Though this outreach network was purged early on after a backlash from regional elites, many of the participatory councils, once launched, continued to function (Fox 1990, 1992a).

By the mid-1980s, approximately one-third of the councils had achieved some degree of autonomous oversight capacity, and national networking efforts have ebbed and flowed since then. Many food distribution councils spun off or reinforced autonomous regional producer associations. In spite of the highly targeted nature of the program, it has long lacked high level policy support. Nevertheless, the rural store network survived several attempts to liquidate it during the late 1990s and it continues to operate more than 22,000 village outlets.¹⁷

2. Indigenous Regional Development Funds

Starting in 1989, the government dramatically increased the economic development role of its National Indigenous Institute (INI). In the mid-1980s, the INI had launched Community Planning Committees,

¹⁷ For further discussion see Chapter 9. For official data, see www.diconsa.gob.mx and the official studies located at www.sedesol.gob.mx, under the Planning and Evaluation Subsecretariat.

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but they functioned merely as ‘transmission belts’ for administrative decisions (Oehmichen Bazán, 1999: 100). As part of the National Solidarity Program, however, the INI created dozens of regional economic development councils that were designed to include actually existing autonomous regional membership organizations. Key INI staff drew from their experiences with the DICONSA food councils as well as with the self-managed economic development initiatives of the Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations (UNORCA) (Fox 1994b, Oehmichen Bazán 1999: 106). Elected representatives of indigenous producer organizations jointly evaluated grassroots funding proposals, and even cosigned the checks together with INI outreach officials. These councils achieved widely varying degrees of autonomy and capacity, and in some regions INI operational officials managed to exclude autonomous organizations. A 1991–2 field study compared the INI’s own ranking of varying degrees of consolidation and pluralism with an independent assessment based on a survey of local civil society leaders (Fox 1994b). The variable of pluralist practices is key because, in political systems characterized by persistent authoritarian clientelism—all other things being equal—‘participatory’ councils will be controlled by pliant official membership organizations that lack the autonomy necessary to represent their members. As in the case of the rural food store program, economic and political support from federal level pro-empowerment policymakers made pluralism and autonomy possible in a significant minority of the regional councils, and the program continues to exist.

The program managed to survive the institutional change of the INI into the Indigenous Development Commission (CDI), as well as concerns from the Treasury Ministry about uneven loan recovery rates (due in part to ambiguous rules).¹⁸ In 2004, the program funded 250 regional councils, still composed of indigenous producer organizations, with an annual budget of approximately US\$12 million and an officially estimated beneficiary population of just over 32,000, with 30 percent of the resources concentrated in Chiapas, 15 percent in Oaxaca and 11 percent in Veracruz (UAM-X 2004: 11, 17). The official evaluations do not explain the significant overrepresentation of Chiapas.

¹⁸ During the Fox administration, the INI was transformed from an agency with the Social Development Ministry to a more autonomous Indigenous Development Commission. This shift appears to have been largely administrative, since the CDI is widely seen as a continuation of the INI. The CDI puts only a few of its external evaluations on their website, in locations that outsiders cannot find without guidance from insiders (based on internet search and official reply to public information request, June 2006)

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Yet over time the rules that governed the decision-making role of the regional councils changed significantly. In the early years, the INI would disburse funds directly to the regional councils, for distribution to those organizations whose projects they approved. This turned out to violate federal laws governing public finance, leading the INI to convert the regional councils into formal nonprofit organizations (Oechmichen Bazán 1999). As recently as 1996, the project decision-making was a process that was officially shared between the INI and the regional council. The leadership of the council would review the proposals, together with the INI's technical support, they would prioritize the proposals, and they would be presented to the general assembly for debate and final decision-making. The rules changed, however, giving the CDI full control over the project selection process. As a recent official external evaluation observed:

In this sense one could note that the current rules make a healthy distinction between the functions and responsibilities of the Indigenous Regional Funds and the Indigenous Development Commission, in terms of project review and selection, which is the core of the program. Nevertheless, the final decision is explicitly to be made by the Commission, which does not correspond with the [program's] specific goal of 'strengthening the participation of indigenous communities and organizations in their development, generating co-responsible and self-managed processes that would permit them to raise their social and economic levels'. (according to the Rules of Operation 2004, cited in UAM-X 2005a: 10–111)

In addition, in 2004 another top-down rules change required that the Regional Funds constitute themselves officially as nonprofit associations. While this change in status clarified their separation from the government agency that originally convened them, it also created potential problems insofar as they managed regional funds that were supposed to be market-oriented. Though subsidized, they were supposed to attempt to generate surpluses for reinvestment. After fifteen years, 'they function to receive proposals for productive projects, but not as a convening body for organized groups to come together to discuss and plan regional projects' (UAM-X 2005a: 11). Over time, the program's budget was down since 2000, to approximately 60 percent of its annual budget during the heyday of the early 1990s, but because of funding smaller numbers of people, the estimated per person investment went up (UAM-X 2005: 14). This is related to a significant shift toward livestock projects, a strategy that raises environmental concerns. Half of 2005 project investment funds went to livestock projects (UAM-X 2005). Such investments were mainly for cattle, which served

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more for status and a low-productivity savings reserve than for economic development (Oemichen Bazán 1999).

While the Regional Funds have many operational problems, such as delayed disbursements, low recovery rates, lack of technical assistance, and dispersal of resources into many small projects, the character of the councils as a pluralistic space appears to have often been maintained. Though independent research is lacking, the most recent official review concluded:

The Funds' long path and the review of their member organizations has reached a situation in which the old forms of organization and control that dominated in the countryside (ejido commissioner, municipal authorities) have little or no role in the initiative and in the organization of projects. Nor is there involvement by the Peasant Centrals [corporatist organizations] or political parties. What stands out are the working groups or organizations that have small horizontal organizational structures where the initiative in the formulation of projects and decision-making is in the hands of the members (UAM-X 2005a: 13).

This same evaluation also found a consistent increase in the participation of women and women's organizations in recent years, including a minimum of 30 percent of program resources.

3. Rural Municipal Development Funds

The Mexican government's Social Development Ministry launched its first large-scale investment program for rural municipal investment funds at the beginning of the 1990s, as part of the National Solidarity Program. This program lacked regional power-sharing bodies, but local investment decisions were supposed to be made by grassroots communities, as part of a process that included an inclusive municipal planning council (and not by the local governments alone). As noted in Chapter 6, this program tended to work in those communities that already exercised a high degree of assembly-style decision-making. A study of a representative cross section of Oaxacan municipalities found that in a clear majority of cases, project selection decisions were made by the community assembly rather than the mayor, a local subgroup or external actors (Fox and Aranda 1996a). This experience was not generalized, however. The key proparticipation variables in Oaxaca—dense horizontal social capital and autonomous *sub*-municipal village governments—were not widespread in other low-income rural states. Therefore the government's rural municipal funds probably empowered authoritarian municipal governments elsewhere, most notably in Chiapas and

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Guerrero (see Chapter 7). In contrast to the DICONSA and INI programs, this one lacked both local capacity-building component and regional participatory councils that could become counterweights. The participatory elements of the program lacked strategic political support from federal level reformists, leaving its fate up to local and state political dynamics. To sum up, the degree of inclusion and power-sharing in the allocation of municipal funds varied enormously, both between and within states, depending primarily on existing structures of representation for villages within municipalities (Fox and Aranda 1996a).

4. Natural Protected Areas Advisory Councils

Many of Mexico's biodiversity hotspots are denominated Natural Protected Areas, and 85 percent of the land is in the 'social sector', meaning in *ejidos* and agrarian communities rather than private or federal property. Nationwide, Mexico has forty-seven Protected Areas, under the authority of a National Commission. In order to create a state-society venue for dialogue with the landholders, fifty Advisory Councils have been created since 1992. After a difficult start, most were either created or revived in the late 1990s, with encouragement from the Global Environment Facility, which funds seventeen of the Protected Areas. A high-level faction in the environment ministry leadership came from university and NGO backgrounds and encouraged nonpartisan grassroots participation. As with Mexico's other regional councils, in practice these ranged from vibrant to nonexistent.

In 2005, an official evaluation carried out a remarkably balanced assessment of the Advisory Councils, involving field visits to thirty-two Councils (Rosas Hernández et al. 2005). Of these, twenty-six actually functioned and allowed for an assessment based on a comprehensive set of performance indicators. Of all the official evaluations of programs with regional Councils, this was the only one to include a serious empirical assessment of their performance. The indicators ranged from very basic, such as Advisory Council validation of the Protected Area work plan, women's participation, whether meetings have a facilitator, availability of training, whether meetings are called by government officials or council leaders, to more serious forms of power-sharing, such as involvement in designing the work plan, and access to a share of the Protected Area's budget. Together, these indicators allowed evaluators to rank the Advisory Councils they visited in terms of four broad categories, ranging from very satisfactory to unsatisfactory. Table 8.1

230 *Comparing Regional Rural Development Councils***Table 8.1** Protected areas advisory councils: degrees of consolidation

Group	Category	Number
1	Very satisfactory	6
2	Satisfactory	7
3	Barely satisfactory	7
4	Unsatisfactory	6
5	In formation, with active subcouncils	5
6	Not in operation for two years	8
7	In operation but not visited	10

Note: This table does not include: Advisory Councils in formation, with active subcouncils, Advisory Councils that have not met for two years, and Advisory Councils in operation that were not visited.

Source: Rosas Hernández, et al. (2005: 10–13)

also includes the numbers of councils either not in operation or not visited.

The main finding is that, of those observed, half were either satisfactory or very satisfactory, while the other half were 'barely satisfactory' ('poco satisfactorio') or simply unsatisfactory. The fact that as many as half of the advisory councils were functioning adequately reflects several years of institutional investment, starting from a very low base-line. Of the seven programs with regional councils discussed here, this one appears to have one of the highest shares that actually function to some degree.¹⁹ In a few cases they have functioned as 'citizenship schools', in terms of encouraging new repertoires of participation. Nevertheless, these councils did little scaling-up. They met or communicated rarely amongst themselves, and they had little impact on national conservation policy.²⁰

5. The Rural Development in Marginal Areas Program

In the late 1990s, the Agriculture Ministry, with World Bank funding, launched another rural investment program in low-income areas. The design of the program was informed in part by the INI program experience. As discussed in Chapter 6, regional councils of elected representatives of producer organizations were created, with a mandate to choose among grassroots funding proposals. In contrast to the INI program, however, the Agriculture Ministry's decentralization process

¹⁹ For ethnographic case studies of participation in the management of protected areas in Mexico, see Cortez and Paré (2006) and Paz Salinas (2005).

²⁰ Email communication, Martha Ileana Rosas Hernández, January 3, 2007.

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through *Alianza para el Campo* created more formal and informal opportunities for state government officials to influence or veto council decisions.

Most state government officials involved in the Rural Development in Marginal Areas program opposed power-sharing with producer organizations. The federal officials involved claimed that they supported power-sharing, but there is no evidence that they invested substantial political capital to overcome state government resistance. As a result, few regional councils gained either autonomy or capacity. As shown in Chapter 6, most of those councils that did begin to develop the capacity to represent organized producers were broken up or starved for funds by the state government of Oaxaca. The more powerful autonomous producer organizations were wary of investing their political capital in a program that seemed closed to them anyway, an example of 'rational wariness'. The result, however, was limited pressure from below to open it up. The Agriculture Ministry was not committed to a program that was intended to encourage both investment in and power-sharing with low-income producers. The regional councils withered after 2000, and were later supplanted by municipal agricultural councils (see below).

6. Regional Rural Sustainable Development Program (PRODERS)

Between 1996 and 2000 the Environment Ministry created and implemented a regional sustainable development program that was designed 'to build on civil society's expertise and experience of participatory approaches, with an emphasis on the region as a political, administrative and socio-ecological unit' (Blauert and Dietz 2004: 1). By bringing together civil society actors and researchers with the three levels of government, the program attempted to institutionalize a participatory approach to the design, implementation, and evaluation of local and regional sustainable development projects. The Ministry was newly led by nonpartisan policymakers who drew on their prior experience with more similar, though more localized NGO-university-led sustainable rural development initiatives. In practice, the Treasury Ministry caused delays in budget disbursement that seriously affected the launch of program operations (Toledo 2000: 46). Program design required both high levels of interagency collaboration and extensive technical studies, which contributed to operational delays. Yet coordination with other agencies was critical for leveraging funds

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for investment and employment, since PRODERS' own budget was miniscule (Blauert and Dietz 2004: 20).

The program targeted twenty-four regions, and in some of them favorable political conditions permitted the emergence of pluralistic councils. According to the lead policymaker, in the Purépecha highlands of Michoacán, the councils were 'taken up enthusiastically by the municipal presidents, who formed an "Inter-municipal Network of Mayors", in spite of state government opposition' (Toledo 2000: 48). Even where grassroots conditions were promising, as in the Montaña of Guerrero, where policymakers had prior experience and other ministries were supportive, the program remained vulnerable to state government opposition. There the program's council worked well during an interim governor, until a new, less tolerant governor took office (Blauert and Dietz 2004: 39).

After fifteen regional councils came together at the first national meeting, forty-two met at the second such meeting in 2000 (Toledo 2000: 50, 52). Participants at that meeting called on the federal government to bring together its many different and overlapping regionalization and council strategies. The meeting came to the modest conclusion that 'at least *some* regional councils have managed to become the general space for inter-institutional coordination and regional community participation.' (emphasis added, Bartra 2000: 76). As a sympathetic assessment concluded 'After the presidential elections of 2000, the new environmental ministry slowly dismantled some of PRODERS' operational roles, trust in this space was eroded, [leaving it to] local governments or CSOs to take up the cause again' (Blauert and Dietz 2004: 40). However, reading between the lines of these evaluations suggests that from the point of view of grassroots organizations, the more likely result was 'rational wariness' along the lines discussed in Chapter 6.

7. The Municipal Councils for Sustainable Rural Development

Mexico's 2001 Sustainable Rural Development Law mandated the creation of Councils for Sustainable Rural Development at the national, state, district, and municipal levels. One consultant and former policymaker involved with the process of 'municipalization' claims that:

today they constitute a national social and institutional movement of great importance, with the possibility of structurally transforming rural public policy... The formation of 'mixed' Councils, meaning, with the participation of

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government institutions, but [also] with strong, pluralistic and inclusive social organizations represents a form of organization of rural regions that can help to overcome the old problem of the Mexican countryside: corporatism and state control of rural society. . . . Often the resources targeted to rural areas followed the logic of political control more than development. Rural regions, especially the poorest, cannot renounce the resources . . . from more economically developed regions, but they do have the right to decide for themselves how these resources . . . should be allocated in their regions and localities, without having to pay for them by supporting one political party or another. This involves exercising autonomy based not on the absolute separation from government institutions, as the Zapatistas . . . propose, but by means of pluralistic, inclusive and legitimate participation in mixed bodies like these councils, which would be transferred authority over the use and destination of public funds and in which an intense social participation and effective decentralization would be assured (Toledo 2006: 32, 34).

He goes on to recognize that these councils drew from prior histories with the PRODERS regional councils (which he led), the Agriculture Ministry's Marginal Areas regional councils (discussed above) and the Social Development Ministry's 'micro-regional councils, in the Cañadas region of Chiapas, which although contaminated by the logic of counter-insurgency that dominated in those years to confront the problem of the Zapatista uprising, nevertheless developed valuable approaches to peasant and indigenous participation' (Toledo 2006: 34).

The Municipal Councils were formed quickly in 2002, with little participation by producer organizations and little activity for at least the first two years. They became more active in states where the governors took an interest. Beginning in 2004, some degree of resource decision-making capacity in the Agriculture Ministry's Rural Development Program was transferred to the municipal councils, which Toledo reports encouraged 'a process of appropriation of the councils by social and producer organizations' (2006: 35, 36).

The federal law does not specify how membership in the councils is to be determined, so participation is at the discretion of the municipal authorities, together with the Agriculture Ministry. New rules for these councils in 2004 did not improve the situation, and even set back the role of civil society participation by requiring that the councils be led by government officials. Toledo reports that

when only organizations are represented, that facilitates control of the CMDRs and there is a tendency towards clientelism. For that reason, a combination of representatives of organizations and communities [submunicipal leaders] is the best formula, since the presence of the representatives of localities balances the participation of organizations, which obliges them to consult more, resulting in greater participation (2006: 36).

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While this makes intuitive sense, no distinction is made between sub-municipal leaders who are chosen by their villages, and those who represent the mayors to the villages, the key distinction discussed in Chapter 7. For example, municipal agents are included in these councils in the state of Jalisco, but in that state they are chosen by the mayors. Therefore their presence does not offset the general tendency, in which no more than 20 percent of the municipal councils could be considered minimally democratic, according to one of their main promoters in the state.²¹ Toledo recognizes that 'currently, the representativity of the councils varies and oscillates between some with a high degree of representation to others where it is still insufficient' (2006: 40). He does not go so far as to assign relative weights to these different scenarios, though the overall thrust of the article implies that if he had evidence that the first trend predominated, he would have cited it. The full study remained confidential as of mid-2006.

The two field-based independent studies of municipal councils carried out so far come to different conclusions. Merino and Macedo studied five municipalities selected by Agriculture Ministry officials as exemplary, and carried out a survey of government officials in the states of Morelos and Zacatecas (2005). They conclude that the municipal councils are mere transmission belts for decisions made at higher levels. 'They do not play a decision-making role, the councils are limited to the role of assistance and consultation.' For local projects to be funded, they must not only fit precisely with detailed federal policy rules, they must also be approved by a state level Technical Committee. Moreover, the federal law obliges municipalities to participate in agriculture policy through nineteen different administrative processes, including thirty decisions and seventy-one routines, as well as six steps to be accredited to participate in the first place, but it does not provide policy instruments 'specifically designed to produce incentives to make the active participation of municipal governments possible'. As a result, they conclude, state governments dominate the municipalities, traditional power relations have not changed and 'the new procedures have been adapted to the old routines' (Merino and Macedo 2005: 11, 16, 20, 22, 29).

The second independent study of the municipal councils focused on the Altos region of Chiapas. A survey of sixteen program outreach workers reported that 70 percent of the mayors in the region did not know about the law and were not interested in the council meetings, and 80 percent of the participants in the first meetings of the councils

²¹ Interview, Guadalajara, April 28, 2006.

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did not know about the law either, attending only in the hope of receiving resources (Cartagena Ticona et al. 2005: 362). The study found few advances toward effective decentralization and participation, in part because of the ‘institutional and cultural context’ which was the product of:

a state–society relationship based on authoritarianism and clientelist and corporatist relationships. As a result in all levels of government there is a pattern of *simulation* . . . in which, depending on the requirements of the official discourse, each level or official informs their immediate superior that the process is developing normally, in accordance with the law. Social participation in the municipal sustainable development councils has been very limited and tends strongly to be illegitimate. The constitution and operation of the councils has been until now under the responsibility of actors external to the municipalities, mainly the municipal coordinators, since there has not been an efficient process of dissemination of the law nor outreach to the social actors that could generate local leadership that could push this space to promote participation in development decision-making (Cartagena Ticona et al. 2005: 393, emphasis in original).

This study’s methods permitted robust generalization about the trends among the region’s eighteen municipalities.

The new rural development research center of the national Congress also commissioned research on the municipal and district councils in selected states (e.g. CEDRRSA 2006). This report confirms the extraordinary administrative complexity emphasized by Merino and Macedo, as does a study of the new federal law through the lens of the implications for the Michoacan state government (Chapela 2006). In Veracruz, the CEDRRSA study did not find significant social participation in either the municipal or district councils (2006). The mayor’s role as council president proves significant, as noted by a mid-level Agriculture Ministry official in the Zongolica region:

Yes, the projects are discussed in the Council, but . . . the Municipal President has a lot of influence over the others. If in the past there were ‘godfathered’ projects, now they really are, by the mayor. We cannot deny that they are politically handled, the municipal president insists that he made a commitment to a certain community and he is going to do everything he can to pull it off, because he made a campaign promise (CEDRRSA 2006: 91).

In most of the municipalities studied, however, the mayors were simply unaware of the new federal agriculture law, while in others the councils reportedly were inclusionary and rendered accounts to the citizens. In Xoxocotla, for example, the council members are elected, women as well as men, including the municipal agents, block judges, and leaders of producer organizations (CEDRRSA 2006: 229). In other

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municipalities the agents were on the council but unable to participate effectively because of lack of training and information. The report does not systematize its findings and therefore the relative weights of the different trends are not clear. Overall, the CEDRRSA report confirms Merino and Macedo's findings insofar as 'static forms of operation are still "dragging," with reflex actions in which each level follows what the level immediately above does' (2006: 243). This includes persistent state government control of funds.

In Veracruz, in spite of the obligatory rule that state governments must channel at least 50% of the Rural Development Program resources to the municipalities, this scheme simply did not operate. The cases reported in this study show that the failures were not at the municipal level, but rather at the state level, and to some degree also at the federal level, given its role as supervisor of compliance with the rules. In the municipalities, with all the doubts and errors that come with inexperience, they complied with all the required rules and the councils selected the projects and prioritized the use of funds that they were assigned. In contrast, the role of the state level agency (INVEDER) left much to be desired and revealed how difficult it will be for the municipalities and the Councils to take away its power to decide how to use those resources. (CEDRRSA 2006: 250)

A World Bank study of the municipal rural development councils draws similar conclusions, stressing the role of selective information access for biasing access to federal funds.

The complexity of the rules makes it also difficult for potential beneficiaries to understand the characteristics of the programs. Hence, they tend to rely on information from intermediaries . . . Complexity, thus, by militating against dissemination, reinforces clientelistic ties and discriminates against those who, because of educational level, time constraints or remote location, have less access to information. (Caballero 2005a: 13)

This same report goes on to point out structural weaknesses in the councils:

. . . they are mostly confined to act as passive recipients of atomized requests from local producers, and as disseminators to their communities . . . of government rules and instructions. . . (M)ore often than not councils are dominated by *presidentes municipales*, technical coordinators or members representing SAGARPA or the state's [government] rural administration. . . Councils, thus, often behave as arms of government (municipal, state, federal) rather than as constructions of rural society. . . Members from *ejidos* and communities, who are the majority of civil society participants in most councils, rotate frequently, usually every year. This makes it very difficult for them to understand the purpose and workings of the councils, assimilate the basic rules of the programs, and participate effectively. (Caballero 2005a: 32)

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The World Bank released an abridged version of this study to the public, both in English and Spanish, but without any of this assessment, including the entire section on transparency (Caballero 2005b).

As in the cases of all the other regional councils, only more systematic comparative data, combining institutional ethnography with surveys of participants, in larger, more representative samples would permit stronger generalizations about the relative weights of the different trends. However, in the case of the Municipal Councils for Sustainable Rural Development, it is difficult to conclude that they have become spaces for state–society power-sharing in more than a small minority of cases. So far, the evidence suggests that they lack both the breadth of inclusion as well as the autonomy and capacity needed to be effective deliberative agents of agricultural policy.

Conclusions

This chapter explored the dynamics of power-sharing at the state–society interface by reviewing the available evidence regarding pluralistic inclusion and decision-making power in six different kinds of regional rural development councils. Though the empirical evidence is uneven and incomplete, and regional variation is consistently significant, Tables 8.2 and 8.3 summarize the broad trends that emerge.

Table 8.2 compares the state–society power-sharing opportunities, according to each program’s formal institutional design. In principle, most are supposed to include representation of producer organizations, and the councils are officially to be able to participate in decisions about how to allocate program investment funds in their regions. However, in few cases is there evidence that broader program operations and decision-making processes are transparent to regional council members.²² In addition, in almost all the cases, state governments retained veto power over council decisions, whether directly, through their representation on the councils, or indirectly, through their power over disbursements for projects that councils selected for funding. For example, in the case of PRODERS,

²² The transparency assessments in Table 8.1 are based on reviews of officially public program documents, manuals, and interviews within policymakers, consultants, regional indigenous and peasant leaders, and nongovernment public interest groups. Most of this research was carried out primarily in the context of collaboration with the NGO *Trasparencia*, which was most active in partnership with regional organizations in Oaxaca and the Huasteca region between 1997 and 2002 (see Chapter 6).

Table 8.2 Comparison of power-sharing opportunities across Mexican rural development programs (according to formal procedures)

Federal programs	Community level committees	Council seats for regional social organizations	Council control over resource allocation decisions	Program transparency to beneficiaries	State government veto power over council decisions
Regional Food Councils (Diconsa, since 1980)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Regional Funds (INI since 1989)	Partial	Yes	They propose	Limited	No
Municipal Funds (Sedesol 1990–8)	Yes	No	They propose	No	Yes
Protected Areas Advisory Councils (Semarnat, since 1992)	Limited	Yes	They propose	Partial	No
Regional Councils for Rural Development in Marginal Areas (Sagarpa 1998–2002)	Partial	Yes	They propose	No	Yes
Regional Sustainable Development Councils (Semarnat, since 1996)	No	Yes	They propose	Limited	Yes
Municipal Sustainable Rural Development Councils (Sagarpa since 2002)	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Yes

Table 8.3 Regional councils compared: State–society power-sharing outcomes

	Regional councils sustained over time	National meetings of regional councils held	Majority of councils with degree of autonomy from federal agency	Significant <i>minority</i> of councils gained degree of autonomy (as of 2006)	Evidence of partial accountability impacts on the national program	Cases of spillover effects that encouraged autonomous social organization
Regional Food Councils (Diconsa, since 1980)	Yes	Six	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional Funds (INI since 1989)	Yes	?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Municipal Funds (Sedesol 1990–8)	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Protected Areas Advisory Councils (Semarnat since 1992)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Regional Councils for Rural Development in Marginal Areas (Sagarpa 1998–2002)	No	One	No	No	No	No
Regional Sustainable Development Councils (Semarnat since 1996)	Yes	Two	No	No	No	No
Municipal Sustainable Rural Development Councils (Sagarpa since 2002)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

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... (U)nder the chair of the state government, the councils were to bring together all the actors from the key society groups, though the hierarchical structure is clearly visible. The attempt was to find a locus for the councils within ... Mexico's federal structure. If this had not been the case, the councils would have represented a threat to state governors, ministries and planning authorities, and would not have been allowed to exist. (Blauert and Dietz 2004: 36)

The first general conclusion, then, is that since almost all of Mexico's state governments are consistently hostile to autonomous regional social and civic organization in the countryside, *state government veto power over the composition, decisions, and capacities of the regional councils turned out to be a systemic problem from the point of view of their potential for state-society power-sharing.*

While Table 8.2 focuses on process, Table 8.3 compares actual outcomes, focusing on the degree to which councils actually changed the balance of power between state and society within their regional domains. In half the cases the regional council programs did not survive broader policy changes. In most cases the regional councils never met at the national level, and therefore lacked even the possibility of policy dialogue with their government counterparts at the national level. Chapter 9 will explore the limits and possibilities of such national meetings in the context of the Community Food Councils.

The second broad conclusion is that *in no case did the majority of the regional councils gain a significant degree of autonomy from the federal program they were part of.* Much more systematic comparative field-based research would be needed to measure the following finding with precision, but the evidence available does support the proposition that at best a significant minority of the councils gained autonomy and then only in three of the seven programs. In each of these three programs, the village food stores, the indigenous development funds, and the municipal development councils, at least dozens of councils contributed to encouraging increased governmental responsiveness and accountability (as detailed in the historic example of the Community Food Councils' democratizing impact detailed in Chapters 3 and 4). It is probably not a coincidence that they were the three programs that also generated some cases of spillover effects, in the sense of encouraging other forms of scaled-up, regionwide autonomous social and civic organization. Moreover, only the Community Food Councils managed to generate national level policy impacts and accountability effects. Their most important impact was to successfully block efforts by the Treasury Ministry to end the program, most notably in 1999, as

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well as their veto of the sale of imported corn through the village store network (see Chapter 9).

Clearly the results in terms of actual power-sharing were uneven in most cases, but the degree of exclusion varied significantly. Differences include both varied degrees and scales of transparency and participation, as well as varied informal relationships between state and societal actors. On the society side, one of the key variables was the capacity and willingness of social organizations to engage with the opportunities for participation. On the state side, the key variables included whether there were regional representative bodies, as well as their degree of oversight and decision-making capacity. In all cases the degree of power-sharing generated in practice depended heavily on the presence of a *de facto* faction within the implementing agency, both at the top and at middle levels, that was willing to take the risks inherent in partnering with autonomous social organizations.

This suggests the third broad finding, that *institutional reforms that appear to be enabling may not be*. Institutional design clearly matters, as in the systematic problem of state government veto power. But such programs also need to be unpacked in terms of their actual coverage, to document whether or not they were actually implemented, and by what kinds of actors. In the case of the INI Regional Funds and the Community Food Councils, much of program outreach was carried out to a significant degree by a cadre of nonpartisan, pro-empowerment grassroots organizers with esprit de corps and support from a faction of national program administrators. In contrast, when the Social Development Ministry called for municipal councils to allocate their social funds, or when the Agriculture Ministry convened regional, and then municipal councils to deliberate over investment funds, in those cases such efforts were decreed by policymakers rather than actively promoted by organizers who could actually offer incentives to already-existing organizations to overcome their 'rational wariness' and engage with the state.

Yet if one looks more closely at the political dynamics within those programs that did create some space for power-sharing, the results suggest that the high-level policymakers who are willing to invest political capital in promoting state–society power-sharing have extremely limited, and often transitory influence. The Environment Ministry's regional councils were often inclusionary, but their high level allies were unable to allocate more than symbolic budgetary resources, had great difficulty leveraging intended counterpart funds from other agencies, and did not survive the change in national government. When the indigenous Regional Funds exercised autonomy, they tended to find themselves on the defensive, and over time governors

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gained increased leverage over the indigenous affairs agency that funded them. As Chapter 9 will show, the Community Food Councils program experienced several waves of autonomous organizing, and several states have consolidated blocks of autonomous councils; only occasionally have they found allies among national level program administrators.

Yet as Chapters 3 and 6 suggested, institutional reforms that encourage empowerment and accountability need to be driven by mutually reinforcing cross-sectoral coalitions between actors in state and society. This, together with the findings presented here, suggests that pro-reform cross-sectoral coalitions in favor of empowerment require pro-poor policymakers to invest their political capital, to give potential civil society counterparts clear signals, tangible incentives to engage, and some protection from backlash. This challenge underscores the fourth broad finding, that *tangible support from national policymakers for the actual implementation of reforms that empower pluralistic, autonomous regional councils has been consistently limited, uneven, and transitory*. For social actors who usually lack freedom of association and access to resources, it certainly matters when cracks in the system open up, but they will remain cracks and can easily close up again unless 'virtuous circles' are triggered that can mutually empower pro-reform actors in state and society.