How do Intermediaries Build Inclusive Markets? The Role of the Social Context

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ABSTRACT   Intermediaries – organizations that connect actors who could not otherwise transact – play an important role in building inclusive markets. However, we know little about how the specific characteristics of the social context influence the effectiveness of intermediary activities. The purpose of this study is to unpack how the fit between intermediaries' activities and the social context shapes the success of efforts to build inclusive markets. Using an in-depth qualitative study in India, we examine how intermediaries' activities fit with two central features of the social context – inequality and dependence. Our study contributes to the literature by suggesting a contingent view of the process by which intermediaries build inclusive markets.

Keywords: assertion, coordination, dependence, inclusive markets, inequality, intermediaries, persuasion, poverty, social norms

INTRODUCTION

Intermediaries connect actors that could not otherwise transact, building markets in the process (Kistruck et al., 2013; Mair et al., 2012). While the concept of markets implies the freedom to engage in voluntary exchange (McMillan, 2002), not all markets are inclusive; social exclusion may preclude meaningful market engagement (Bhatt, 2022; Mair et al., 2012). Some intermediaries counter this exclusion and build inclusive markets – markets that allow participation from individuals from across society, irrespective of traditional social standing (George et al., 2012). In order to overcome exclusion, intermediaries engage in activities that help marginalized social groups develop the capabilities necessary for market participation (Dutt et al., 2016; Qureshi et al., 2021b; Sutter et al., 2017).

Furthermore, intermediaries play an active role in negotiating a more supportive social context for market participation (Dutt et al., 2016; Kistruck et al., 2013; Mair et al., 2012; Sutter et al., 2022).

Theoretical and empirical accounts of how intermediaries develop capabilities and negotiate the social context vary; these studies depict various intermediary activities (Armanios et al., 2017; Bhatt, 2022; Sutter et al., 2017). For example, some studies describe how intermediaries build new connections within the social context (Qureshi et al., 2016; Sutter et al., 2017). Other studies emphasize how intermediaries work to alter the institutionalized power dynamics between groups (Mair et al., 2012; Qureshi et al., 2018; Riaz and Qureshi, 2017). The outcomes also vary, with some studies providing evidence of the development of more inclusive markets (Mair et al., 2012; Sutter et al., 2022), while other studies suggest neutral or even adverse outcomes (Riaz and Qureshi, 2017; van Wijk et al., 2020). We propose that a stronger understanding of the relationship between the social context and intermediary activities will reconcile these differences. Clarifying this relationship helps explain and predict intermediary success and guide intermediaries in how they might adapt their activities to better fit within a given social context.

Thus, our study explores the fit between the intermediaries' activities and the social context, and how this fit influences the extent to which more inclusive markets are established. To accomplish this objective, we undertook a seven-year qualitative study involving 26 months of fieldwork. We examined four intermediaries' efforts to build more inclusive markets in rural India. These intermediaries focused both on capability development (introducing new agricultural practices) and negotiating more supportive market infrastructure (introducing more inclusive social norms and practices). We found that intermediary activities differed along two key dimensions: entry method (direct or indirect) and approach (various combinations of assertion, persuasion, or coordination). We also found that the intermediation process was heavily influenced by two key features of the social context: inequality and dependence. We contend that the development of inclusive markets depends largely on the fit between intermediaries' activities and the characteristics of the social context.

Our study makes several contributions to theory and practice. First, our study reconciles various theoretical accounts regarding how intermediaries build inclusive markets. We do so by introducing a contingent view that accounts for the fit between intermediaries' activities and the social context. Second, we develop a framework for analysing the social context. Given the recently renewed focus on understanding how organizations influence societal challenges (Berrone et al., 2016; Wickert et al., 2021) this framework responds to calls to move beyond viewing the social context as simply a setting (Filatotchev et al., 2021; Mair et al., 2016). Third, we add to emerging management research on caste (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Bhatt, 2022; Sutter et al., 2022) by identifying sets of activities that helps break vicious cycle of caste-based socioeconomic marginalization. Finally, our study also contributes to inequality research within management more broadly. Inequality remains a challenge within and across organizations (Bapuji et al., 2020; Suddaby et al., 2018). Our study suggests processes by which organizations can respond to inequality, providing guidance to practitioners seeking to build more inclusive organizations and markets.

Markets and Social Inequality

The concept of markets implies the ability to engage in 'an exchange that is voluntary: each party can veto it, and…each freely agrees to the terms' (McMillan, 2002, p. 6). Thus, freedom is central to the concept of markets as participants decide where and how to engage with others. However, not all markets meet this ideal. For example, poverty or deprivation may cause individuals to engage in undesirable transactions simply because they have no other options (Sen, 1999). When inequality is high, markets are less likely to provide meaningful economic freedom for all participants (Bruton et al., 2021). Societal economic inequality refers to the 'uneven distribution in the endowment and/or access to financial and non-financial resources in a society, which manifests in differential abilities and opportunities to engage in value creation, appropriation, and distribution' (Bapuji et al., 2020, p. 64). Frequently, these distributional concerns are tied to social characteristics, such as gender, caste, ethnicity, or race (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Maurer and Qureshi, 2021; Qureshi et al., 2018). Furthermore, such social inequality is typically embedded within institutional norms, understandings, and rules, and is reflected in institutionalized power relations (Bapuji et al., 2020; DiTomaso, 2021; Suddaby et al., 2018). As such, social inequality is deeply connected to market exclusion. Conversely, the creation of inclusive markets often requires addressing social inequality (e.g., Mair et al., 2012).

Within inclusive markets, each individual, group, or community has the freedom (both in terms of capabilities and the lack of social constraints) to engage in market participation as they choose (see Mair et al., 2012; Sen, 1999). Freedom increases economic prosperity, and is important in and of itself (Sen, 1999). Governments, scholars, and the private sector increasingly promote inclusive markets (Mair et al., 2012; World Bank, 2013). Doing so often requires directly addressing the social context within which market activity occurs (e.g., Qureshi et al., 2018).

The Role of Intermediaries in Building Inclusive Markets

Theories that address how inclusive markets are developed are only now beginning to emerge (George et al., 2012). One of the key insights from this literature is that inclusive markets often do not emerge spontaneously. The tendency to perpetuate market exclusion results from the resistance of dominant market participants that benefit from the exclusionary arrangements (Robinson, 2012). Intermediaries – organizations that connect actors that could not otherwise transact (Dutt et al., 2016) – play a central role in overcoming this resistance and building more inclusive markets (Mair et al., 2012; Sutter et al., 2017).

Intermediaries engage in two primary activities as they build inclusive markets: capability development and reshaping the social context (Dutt et al., 2016; McDermott et al., 2009). Capability development is important because marginalized actors may lack the necessary capabilities to effectively participate within markets (Bhatt et al., 2019; Hota et al., 2019; Sutter et al., 2017). Capability development often involves training, knowledge development, and providing access to other resources such as financial support or certification (Armanios et al., 2017; McDermott et al., 2009). However, capability development among marginalized social groups may create

resistance among dominant social groups (Qureshi et al., 2018). Thus, intermediaries may have to contend with dominant social groups as they develop capabilities among the marginalized.

Intermediaries also reshape the context of markets to make them more inclusive. The literature on intermediation describes developing market infrastructure (Dutt et al., 2016), renegotiating market architecture (Mair et al., 2012), building social bridges (Kistruck et al., 2013; McDermott et al., 2009), and developing institutional scaffolding (Mair et al., 2016; Sutter et al., 2017). While these concepts vary in their specifics, they all point towards the need to transform the social context in which market activities occur. Such a transformation is necessary because the process of building inclusive markets often takes place in the presence of complex, powerful, and competing informal institutions (Mair et al., 2016, see Sutter et al., 2013). These spaces contain significant social and political barriers to the market participation of marginalized groups (Qureshi et al., 2018; Sutter et al., 2022). Furthermore, altering the social context and developing new capabilities among marginalized actors may require the assent of dominant groups (e.g., Qureshi et al., 2018, 2021a). Intermediaries often face stiff resistance from dominant community members that seek to undermine their efforts and preserve the traditional social order (Platteau, 2004; Rigon, 2014; Sutter et al., 2022). As a result, intermediaries must devote significant efforts to transforming these spaces in ways that make them more inclusive (e.g., Mair et al., 2016; Qureshi et al., 2018).

Thus, how intermediaries engage with the social context while building inclusive markets is consequential, and the literature suggests the need for a tailored approach (Dutt et al., 2016; Kistruck et al., 2013; Mair et al., 2016; Qureshi et al., 2018). For example, Mair and colleagues (2012) describe how one intermediary sought to include women in markets by restructuring market architecture in ways that dealt with religious, social, and political realities. Such efforts required the 'renegotiation of existing institutional arrangements to define who can access and participate in markets and under which conditions' (Mair et al., 2012, p. 828). In doing so, the intermediary had to engage with dominant community members directly to accomplish this task. However, other accounts of building inclusive markets highlight different ways of restructuring the social context. Sutter and colleagues' (2017) account describes the need to establish new relationships to overcome local resistance but emphasizes building new connections rather than co-opting dominant social groups.

We propose that the social context can explain these differences; in each of the studies, intermediaries responded to the unique challenges presented by the social context in which they were operating. However, the social context is rarely the subject of careful theorization (Mair et al., 2016). As a result, despite the rich depictions of the social context across various studies, we know relatively little about the underlying theoretical relationship between dimensions of the social context and the process of building inclusive markets. In this paper, we ask, 'How does the fit between intermediary's activities and the social context influence the process of building inclusive markets?'. We fill this theoretical gap by developing a contingent view of the intermediation process that takes into account how dimensions of the social context influence the process of building inclusive markets.

METHODS

Our research project started in 2008 with the study of four intermediaries working within villages to build capabilities and create a more inclusive social context. Their activities were undertaken in various social contexts and resulted in very different outcomes. Our data collection involved 26 months of fieldwork over a seven-year period and included interviews, observations, and archival data.

Research Setting

For our study we chose Madhya Pradesh (MP), India because it has an overwhelmingly rural population that relies on agriculture (more than 70 per cent of its 73 million inhabitants) and faces severe challenges with food shortages (Government of India, 2013). Our unit of analysis is the village. Villagers undertake agricultural activities and sell their products, generally through middlemen, who aggregate products and sell them in the *mandi*. The social context of the village influences the ability of villagers to participate in markets in several ways (see Parthiban et al., 2020, 2021; Shalini et al., 2021). First, the ability to participate in markets depends heavily on the capabilities held by villagers. Without the ability to produce efficiently, villagers cannot participate meaningfully in local markets. Access to capability development opportunities, however, is often constrained by social exclusion. Second, effective agricultural production is dependent on accessing key inputs such as land, water, seeds, and fertilizer. Again, the social context shapes who can access these inputs. Finally, the ability to sell agricultural products is also constrained by exclusionary social practices, as dominant members control key relationships and means of transportation. Thus, building more inclusive markets where all villagers can actively participate requires significant changes to the social context.

Significant caste-based social exclusion complicates efforts to build more inclusive markets in MP. The caste system designates four main groups, including the 'lower caste', as well as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), which are considered to be of very low status (Ambedkar, 2010). In this paper, we prefer to use marginalized castes to include 'lower caste', SC and ST, and use marginalized groups broadly to include women, 'lower caste', SC and ST. The caste system is especially salient within rural areas and forms the basis of the social structure (Srinivas, 1996). The extant literature identifies various ways in which dominant caste can throttle the attempt to include marginalized castes in education and other formal or informal institutions (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2022; Thorat, 2009). The caste system determines many aspects of social life, including occupations and social interaction (Ambedkar, 2010). For example, caste membership determines where individuals are allowed to live or visit within villages. Marginalized caste members are prohibited from entering the homes of dominant caste members, as they are considered impure. Marginalized caste members are prohibited from some areas such as wells, ponds, and temples that dominant caste members use (Ambedkar, 2010). Exclusion also occurs in education and economic activities (Bhardwaj et al., 2021). Various cultural norms and social institutions limit the participation of marginalized caste members in livelihood activities by confining them to menial labour or to crops that require hard

work and low return (Qureshi et al., 2018; Sutter et al., 2022). At its best, the caste system relegates marginalized caste members to inviable economic opportunities, and at worst, it facilitates discrimination and exclusion from various economic activities (Ambedkar, 2010). Violent social sanctions are often applied to those that violate these norms (Das, 2013). While gender also played an important role in our setting, given the space constraints, we have focused our analysis primarily on social divisions at the village level related to caste.

   We observed an effort to build inclusive markets initiated by an international NGO. The NGO sought to increase inclusion in existing markets by providing knowledge about various production methods, inputs, and opportunities. To accomplish this, the NGO developed a method for creating and screening videos of valuable and novel agricultural practices in rural areas. The videos portrayed agricultural practices that are potentially valuable and low-cost, but not widely known. The NGO worked through local intermediaries (including other NGOs and social enterprises) that provided new capabilities and restructured the social context (see Dutt et al., 2016; Mair et al., 2012). Our research focused on four intermediaries– Intermediary1, Intermediary2, Intermediary3, and Intermediary4 – that operated across MP. These intermediaries produced the videos, worked to gain access to villages, coordinated screenings, introduced new social norms, and helped disseminate and implement the new knowledge. The four intermediaries engaged in different activities and used different overall approaches.

Data Collection

Our data collection included visits to villages, regional offices and headquarters of the intermediaries and NGO that we studied. In the initial visits, we visited some villages with the partnering intermediary in each sub-region. However, we visited more than 90 per cent of the villages on our own without being accompanied by staff of either the intermediary or NGO. In about 65 per cent villages we spent at least two nights, and in another 25 per cent of the villages, we spent at least one week. We intentionally spent extensive time in the villages to move beyond what the intermediary could show us. We also utilized diversity within the author team in terms of gender, nationality, and culture to access different groups within the village. Diversity in the author team helped us listen to the voices of dominant and marginalized groups. The author team engaged in regular reflexive internal dialogue and journaling about our respective thoughts, feelings, and views. The author team sought to recognize and bracket our own perspectives to better capture our informants' understandings and perspectives. Tables I and II summarize our data collection efforts.

Interviews. Given our research focus, we gathered information from both marginalized populations (e.g., women and marginalized castes) and dominant populations (i.e., men and more dominant castes). We also included the views and perspectives of other stakeholders (village heads, intermediary staff, and government officials). We conducted a total of 442 semi-structured individual interviews and 99 group interviews over a period of seven years (see Table II). In addition, we conducted 945 informal individual

Table I. Intermediaries and distribution of villages arranged by social context

| | High inequality | | Low inequality | | |
| | High dependence | Low dependence | High dependence | Low dependence | |
	HH	HL	LH	LL	Total villages
Intermediary1	14	13	8	10	45
Intermediary2	17	12	8	4	41
Intermediary3	14	14	6	5	39
Intermediary4	12	9	11	12	44
Total	57	48	33	31	

Note: Because our analysis ultimately separated villages by their inequality (high or low) and dependence (high or low), we have separated the villages accordingly in this table as well.
HH-high inequality and high dependence; HL- high inequality and low dependence; LH-low inequality and high dependence; LL- low inequality and low dependence.
Numbers in the cells are the number of villages in each category.
We additionally visited 86 villages where NGO project was not being implemented (not included in the Table above). The breakup of those villages was: HH- 26; HL – 24; LH – 19; LL – 17. These visits helped us understand the differences between the project and non-project villages.

conversations and 321 informal conversations in the group setting to understand the issues related to inequality and dependence in the villages. Interviews varied in length and averaged 105 minutes. The interviews at the headquarters and some interviews at the regional office were conducted in English. The rest were conducted in the local language, Hindi. The preliminary analysis was done in the language of the interview. The final analysis was done in English after translating preliminary insights from Hindi to English.

Non-participant observation. To triangulate the findings from our interviews, we observed video screenings, village meetings, interactions between intermediaries and the local community, and other key events. We generated detailed field notes from our observations.

Archival data. We also relied on archival data to complement our understanding, including NGO annual reports, documentation from partner intermediaries, and relevant government documents. This data allowed us to better appreciate the context and the intended strategy of the NGO and partner intermediaries.

Data Analysis

Our analysis involved three distinct steps as we iterated between data and theory over time. We began by reviewing the data collected throughout the study. From this data, two co-authors used an 'open-coding' approach to identify distinct concepts that were repeated in the data and identified 165 distinct codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). At this stage of the analysis, it became clear that inequality based on caste differences greatly influenced individuals' ability to participate in markets meaningfully. We also began to notice divergent activities undertaken by various intermediaries. These themes

Table II. Various sources of data arranged by social context

	HH	HL	LH	LL	Total	Grand total
Interviews with NGO field staff, field managers	15	11	9	13	48	
Interviews with the field staff of the Intermediaries	16	13	11	9	49	
Individual interviews with the farmers who participated in the screening	27	24	18	22	91	
Individual interviews with the farmers who did not took part in the screening	16	14	9	8	47	
Interviews with the representatives of NGOs who conducting screenings	9	9	8	6	32	
Interviews with other stakeholder (field staff of various government agencies, schoolteachers, village head etc.)	18	16	13	12	59	
Interviews with the farmers who appeared in the video	8	6	5	4	23	
Interviews with NGO executives and regional managers*					23	
Interviews with the executives and regional managers of the intermediaries*					44	
Interviews with the video producers*					26	
Total individual interviews						442
Interviews in the group setting with the farmers who participated in the screening	18	16	11	12	57	
Interviews in the group setting with the farmers who did not took part in the screening	12	12	9	9	42	
Total interviews in the group setting						99
Video screening observed	14	16	13	14	57	
Farmers field school observed*					12	
Field demonstrations observed*					18	

Note: HH-high inequality and high dependence; HL- high inequality and low dependence; LH-low inequality and high dependence; LL- low inequality and low dependence.
*Cannot be categorized into different quadrant because they either involve broad discussion (in the case of interviews with executives or video producers) or include more than one type of villages (in case of the farmer field school and field demonstration).

informed the next stages of the analysis. To formalize these initial insights, key portions of the data were translated into English, and distilled into 'first-order concepts' (Gioia et al., 2013). We discussed the coding until arriving at a consensus, creating 49 'respondent themes' (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Our data structure presents our first-order concepts, respondent themes, and concepts (see Table III). Each respondent theme was supported by a minimum of 10 distinct sources of data (interview, observation, or archival data source). These respondent themes created a set of concepts that we could refer to throughout the rest of the analytical process.

This initial analysis led us to several key themes relating to the social context, intermediary activities, and outcomes related to inclusive markets. As we iterated between data and theory, it became evident that in addition to social inequality, dependence between social groups was a key dimension of the social context that influenced the process of building inclusive markets. Thus, for the second step of our analysis, we classified all of the villages covered by the four intermediaries as high or low in terms of both inequality and dependence (see Table IV). The criteria that we used for inequality and dependence, as well as details as to how we constructed these indices, are available in Appendix. We drew on past literature on inequality (Das, 2013; Srinivas, 1996; Thorat, 2009) and our own observations to create an index regarding inequality. We also constructed an index of dependence based both on existing literature (Srinivas, 1996) and on our observations in the local context. We were able to classify 169 of the villages within one of the four quadrants. We could not classify 23 villages because we did not have enough information in our field notes regarding the specific and detailed social dynamics within those villages.

As described above, the second stage of our analysis allowed us to examine the 'fit' between the social context and the intermediary activities, and the resulting outcomes. The third step in our analysis was intended to help us explore the processes that created (mis)fit between the social context and the intermediary activities. We constructed case narratives for understanding the process by which each intermediary entered and interacted with a community, and the associated outcomes. In doing so, we were mindful of the concepts that we had identified through our preliminary analysis and used these as one basis of comparison. After constructing narratives of distinct cases, we focused on identifying common patterns between the cases. In doing so, we were seeking a conceptual leap. Such conceptual leaps are often facilitated through abduction or the iteration between data and theory that combines both inductive and deductive processes (Bhatt et al., 2019). Thus, we went back and forth between data and interpretation, and also engaged in deep discussion between co-authors regarding the cases. To finalize our analysis, we identified a case (one village) within each quadrant that would serve to illustrate the activities used by intermediaries and help us present our findings more clearly.

FINDINGS

Our findings examine how the fit between the social context and intermediaries' activities influences the extent to which they were able to build inclusive markets. Figure

Table III. Data structure

First-order codes	Second-order themes	Aggregate concepts

Economic inequality
  Social inequality
  Political inequality
	Inequality	Social Context

Economic dependence Social dependence	Dependence	
Village head allowed to form the groups Dominant farmer is allowed to form the groups	Group formation excludes lower status groups	Ignore the social context
Village head/ dominant farmer disseminate the information about screening (MC not informed) Screening conducted in DC house (MC can't enter)	Exclusionary screening practices	
Form joint screening groups where possible Form separate groups for all the social groups where joint groups are not possible	Group formation includes lower status groups	Engage with the social context
Use neutral locations such as schools and choupal for the screening Encourage participation of marginalized groups in discussion during screening	Inclusionary screening practices	
Engage the entire village in activities that do not involve resources conflict Engage the entire village in activities that benefits everyone but cannot be done by any single group	Coordination	Intermediary approach

Convince DC to let MC watch video through economic argument
  Convince DC to let MC watch video through interdependency argument
  Convince DC to let MC watch video through social justice argument
	Persuasion	

Insist there will not be any screening if some social groups are excluded Make market linkages conditional on inclusive screening	Assertion	

Intermediary enters with the community water project
  Intermediary enters with community plantation/ forestry project
  Intermediary enters with community soil erosion management project
  Intermediary enters into consultation with various social groups without referring to screenings
	Indirect entry	Intermediary entry method

Intermediary enters with screenings Intermediary forms screening groups of easily accessible individuals	Direct entry	

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Table III.   (Continued)

First-order codes	Second-order themes	Aggregate concepts
Information about new practices	Screenings of agricultural practices	Capability development
Updated information about existing practices		
Step-by-step demonstration of how to implement new practices		
Discussion about new practices learned from other sources	Discussion of agricultural practices	
Discussion before, during, and after video is played		
Discussion while implementing new practices		
More effective use of existing practices (increased marketability)	Increased agricultural capabilities	Market inclusion
Learned new practices (better meet the demand)		
Increased mutual dependence	Altered social context	
Better social interactions leading to efficient market linkages (combined purchase of inputs, and combined sale of output)		
MSGs were not able to attend screening	Exclusion from learning	Market exclusion
MSGs were not able to discuss improvised existing or new practices		
Increased social inequality resulted in MSGs excluded from joint input purchase	Exclusion from market linkages	
Increased social inequality resulted in MSGs excluded from joint output sale		

Abbreviations: DC, Dominant caste; MC, Marginalized caste; MSG, Marginalized social group.

[1] illustrates the overall process. The process began as intermediaries entered a village. Some intermediaries chose to engage directly with the social context, while others simply ignored it. Intermediaries that ignored the social context were able to transfer capabilities quickly, but only among the dominant group, leaving exclusion unchanged or even amplifying it.

In contrast, the intermediaries that engaged deeply with the social context as they worked to transfer capabilities were much more likely to build inclusive markets. However, their ultimate success depended on the fit between the activities they undertook and the characteristics of the social context, as we discuss below.

Dimensions of the Social Context

We identified two social context dimensions that were particularly relevant for building inclusive markets – inequality and dependence. Social inequality was largely related to caste and was manifested in many ways. We found caste-based disparities in land ownership, the location of homes (with lower-caste households clustered far away from upper-caste households, where all the amenities were located), prohibitions

Table IV. Summary of engaged intermediary activities

| QIII: Low inequality and high dependence	QIV: High inequality and high dependence
Synchronization	*Prolonged persuasion*
Indirect entry	Indirect entry
Approach: Coordination and soft assertion	Approach: Soft persuasion
Successful intermediaries worked across social groups by introducing shared projects, thus creating some degree of mutual dependence. They then insisted on joint screening groups that would benefit all groups	Successful intermediaries worked with the dominant groups for years on various activities that were related to farming. After several years, they were able to slowly persuade the dominant groups to allow separate screenings for lower-status groups
QI: Low inequality and low dependence	**QII: High inequality and low dependence**
Leverage	*Construction*
Direct Entry	Indirect entry
Approach: Hard persuasion and assertion	Approach: Coordination and soft persuasion
Successful intermediaries formed screening groups for both lower status and dominant group and introduced screenings to the dominant group first, but then made further screenings conditional on allowing lower status groups to participate	Successful intermediaries built some degree of goodwill with the dominant group either through joint projects or through screenings. They then leveraged this goodwill to introduce separate screenings for lower status groups
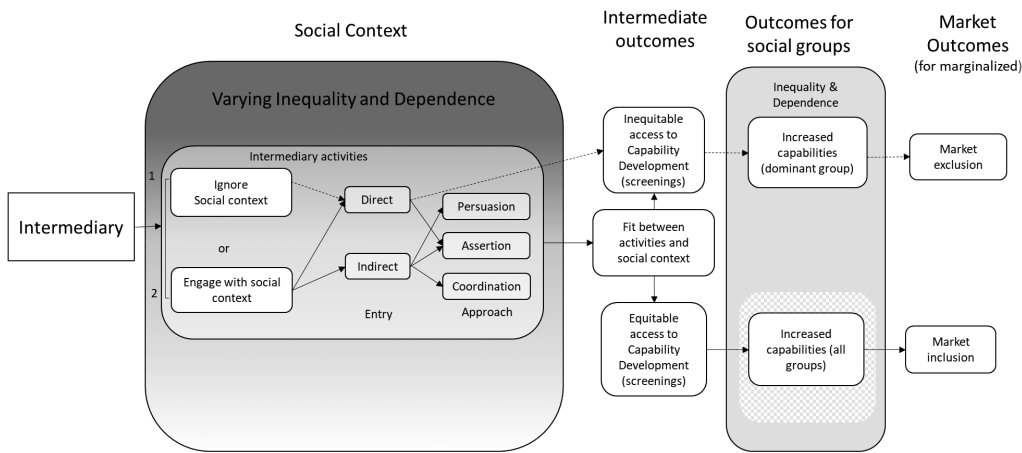
Figure 1. Process of building inclusive markets

against the lower-caste using public spaces such as village wells or choupals (common area in the centre of the village), exclusion from common services such as ration shops (public distribution systems centres), medical services, and so forth. Social inequality was deeply engrained in village life, and our data is replete with quotes and observations of inequality.

> Most villages have *tolas* [cluster of hamlets]. The [dominant caste] have their houses at the center of the village. They have better road access. They have temple… They don't

let other villagers [from marginalized caste] enter in their *tola*, nor let them visit temple. [Representative conducting screening, Intermediary2][Village disputes] are age-old. We are not going to resolve this. We do not oppose if [the dominant caste] decides that there will be no [marginalized caste] member in the screenings. There is no use in opposing. They will not agree. These people [dominant caste] don't even let [marginalized caste] fetch water from a common source. Sitting together for screening is impossible. [Regional manager, Intermediary1]No, we [dominant caste] are not against them [marginalized caste]. We only want them not to enter our place [*tola*]. It is for their own benefit. Because if they do enter, someone will thrash them. [Dominant caste farmer, region 1]We tell our kids not to venture near their [dominant caste] tola. They do not even have mercy on these little kids… [Marginalized caste farmer, region 2]

While inequality was pervasive, it did vary in severity from village to village. In our observations recorded in the field notes, such variations in inequality were largely dependent on the caste differences present within the village. In areas with significant differences in the caste hierarchy between social groups, inequality was much greater. For example, in villages with higher caste differences, we heard many stories such as the one reflected in the following quote:

Last year there was a wedding in our community. The bridegroom was from a nearby village. By mistake groom and his family entered in the village from the side of [dominant caste hamlet]. He was beaten so badly that he couldn't walk for months. [Marginalized caste farmer, region 1]

In other areas, caste differences were smaller, though still quite important. In these villages, the marginalized groups were not located very far from the centre of the village and had access to some public spaces.

To you, it might still appear appalling, but it is nothing compared to many villages. Here at least a [marginalized caste member] can use the road [that passes through dominant caste hamlet]. He has to be still careful that he does not cross paths with the [dominant caste]. However, he will not be punished just for using that road. [Field manager, Intermediary4]In these villages, you will see almost everyone able to go and purchase what they want. The owner may not treat them [marginalized caste] well, may not let them touch the items. But he will not refuse them. But there are several villages in this region where [marginalized caste member] is not even allowed in the shop. [Field manager, Intermediary3]

Dependence is a second characteristic of communities with important implications for building inclusive markets that emerged from our data analysis. For the purposes of this study we define dependence as the extent to which one social group was reliant on another. In our observations recorded in the field notes, we generally found high dependence in areas where the marginalized caste relied on the dominant caste for political, social, and economic necessities. For example, in some areas, the marginalized caste needed permission from the dominant caste to engage in religious ceremonies, including festivals or marriage.

We cannot afford to antagonize [dominant caste]. This will not help anyone. They will make our job difficult. They will also create problems for [marginalized castes]. Who will give a loan to them [marginalized caste members]? Who will give them fertilizers [on credit]? In some villages, they can not have even a small birthday celebration without the blessings of [dominant caste]. [Representative conducting screening, Intermediary4]

Low dependence occurred when social groups operated relatively independently. For example, in some areas with indigenous (ST) and dominant caste social groups, inequality was high, but dependence was relatively low as the groups interacted very little.

Some villages have a large number of *Adivasis* [indigenous communities]. They used to rely on forest produce. Some of them still do. These people do not depend on [dominant castes] for their livelihood. They might still need loans for other purposes… Their social ceremonies are very different. In most cases, they are not looking for [dominant caste] blessings. [Field manager, Intermediary3] Compared to *Adivasis*, [marginalized caste] are more dependent on [dominant caste]. In many villages, especially in [regions 1 and 2] but also in [other regions], farmers from [marginalized caste] are dependent on the [dominant caste] for loans, seeds, and other inputs. Some of them also worked in [dominant caste] farmers' fields… This results in many instances of exploitation… *Adivasis* are more used to forest produce for their livelihood. They are less dependent on the [dominant caste] for loans or agriculture inputs. This is especially true in [region 3], where forest cover is thickest and *Adivasis* were allowed to collect produce from the forest. [Field notes]

Figure 2 demonstrates how high and low levels of inequality and dependence create a framework for classifying villages.

Two Dimensions Characterizing Intermediaries' Activities

Intermediary activities varied along two key dimensions: entry method and approach. Entry method refers to how intermediaries introduced themselves to the community and the range of initial activities that intermediaries employed. Some intermediaries used *direct entry* in which they immediately began to transfer capabilities and change the social context. In other cases, we observed *indirect entry*, in which the intermediaries began with general community activities that were not directly related to inclusive markets, such as reforesting or community water projects.

The *approach* that intermediaries used refers to how they interacted with villages. We observed three general approach styles, including *coordination*, *persuasion*, and *assertion*. Coordination refers to intermediary efforts to work across different social groups to promote increased communication and interaction. Coordination was generally associated with an indirect entry mode. Persuasion refers to intermediary efforts to change market architecture through enticement. When using persuasion, intermediaries would try to win over dominant social groups through careful arguments and encouragement. Assertion refers to a more decisive mode of changing the social context of market activity. When using assertion, intermediaries would often make screening sessions conditional on changes to social norms.
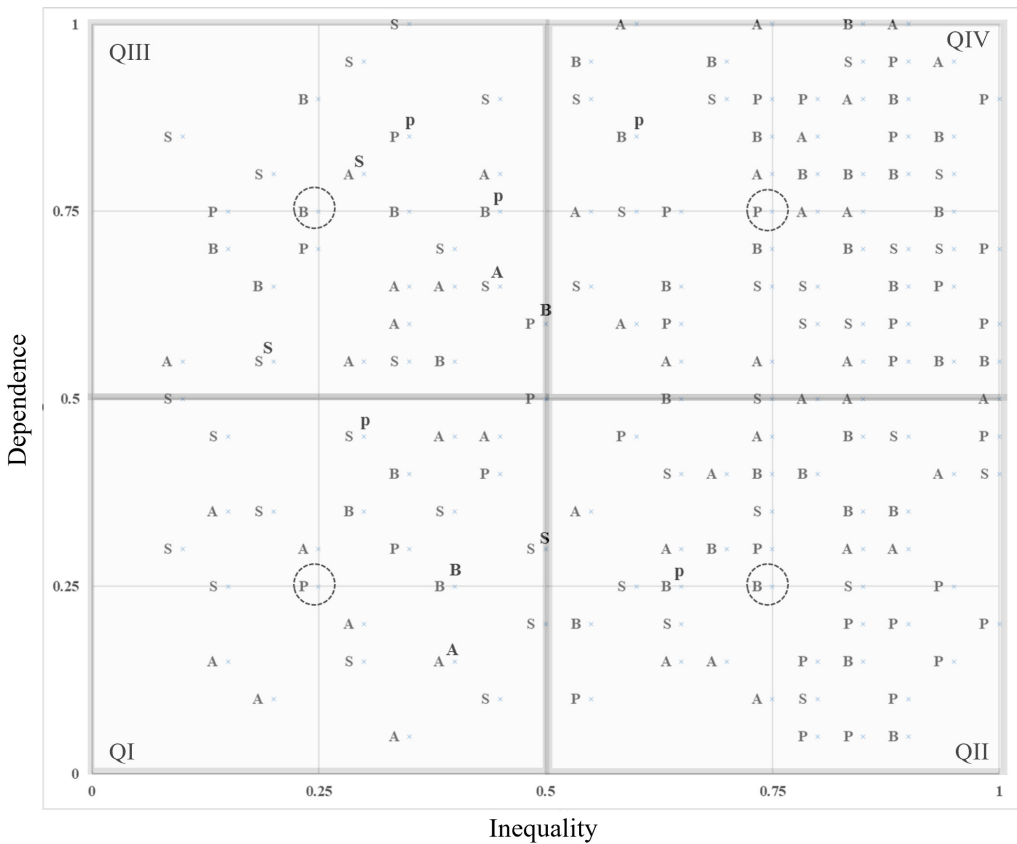
Figure 2. Distribution of Villages along Inequality and Dependence. *Note*: A, B, P & S respectively represent villages served by Intermediary1, Intermediary2, Intermediary3, and Intermediary4. In each quadrant, the circled village has been used as a representative village. QI to QIV represents Quadrant-I to Quadrant-IV, respectively [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

For example, an intermediary might require dominant caste groups to allow the participation of marginalized caste groups in order for a screening to proceed. Those intermediaries who ignored inequality and dependence did not use their influence to negotiate the context. Instead, their activities focused on dominant caste members.

Fit between the Social Context and Building Inclusive Markets

We found that the outcomes of intermediaries' efforts to build inclusive markets were heavily shaped by the fit between the social context and their activities as outlined in Table IV. We next describe each process using an illustrative narrative from each of the quadrants described above.

Low Inequality and Low Dependence: Leverage

In villages characterized by low inequality and low dependence, intermediaries had some influence to push for more inclusive markets. We label their activities as *leverage* because

they were able to make capability transfer conditional on changes in the social context. Leverage involved direct entry combined with hard persuasion and assertion. To illustrate, in Pagi, a village served by Intermediary3, poverty was very high and even the socially dominant groups experienced significant resource scarcity. Pagi contained one higher caste with four distinct sub-castes with a graded hierarchy, as well as one other caste group. In this narrative, we focus on the relationship between the four sub-caste social groups. Intermediary3 communicated that screenings would not be conducted unless they took place in a public space where all social groups could participate. Thus, the entry into such villages was relatively direct. Intermediary3 in Pagi engaged in forming screening groups relatively quickly.

Given their poverty and the need for these resources, the dominant sub-caste agreed to hold a screening with the lower status sub-castes. However, the dominant group members did not allow the lower status sub-castes to attend the screening on the day of the first screening. Intermediary3 noted this but went ahead and let the screening happen. Once the dominant group saw the screening, the intermediary screened the same video for the lower-status groups. This helped all the four sub-caste groups understand the utility of the videos. However, Intermediary3 subsequently insisted on holding future screenings only if there was a joint viewing. This created some dialogue across the groups as they participated in joint screenings. After a while, the dominant group again exerted their influence and sought to limit the participation of the lower status sub-castes. At this point, Intermediary3 informed the dominant group that they could help create new and more lucrative connections to the local market. This connection would involve aggregating produce within the village and then selling directly to larger market buyers, rather than working through local and regional intermediaries. Once the dominant group accepted the idea, the intermediary let this group know that unless they accepted the produce from everyone in the village, they would not have enough volume to create the new market linkage. This forced the dominant group to again cooperate with lower-status groups and opened up new market opportunities for all groups within the village. Thus, Intermediary3 was able to manage the complexity of the social context carefully.

> In this [village] everyone is poor. The [socially dominant group] members are not rich but they have control over [lower status groups]. We know that everyone will benefit from the screening. So, we don't mind if [the dominant group] gets the first screening. We make sure that everyone is able to see. When we see that [dominant group] is too aggressive, we find ways to include or provide separate screening for the [lower status groups] [Field Manager, Intermediary3] This extended stay in several villages has been helpful in observing how delicately [Intermediary3] fine-tunes its approach in different villages… [Intermediary3] ensures everyone's participation in the villages that have less disparity in resources. In these villages, most of the farmers are small landholders. They all can potentially benefit from learning new [agriculture] practices. Most of them have no other source of learning new practices. [Intermediary3] use this situation to advance the inclusion of farmers from marginalized communities. [Field notes]

Interpretation, additional examples, and insights. In villages characterized by low inequality and low dependence, intermediaries were able to make screenings conditional on more inclusive social practices. Intermediaries iterated between persuasion and assertion, and were able to use leverage to push for inclusion. Given the high poverty levels for everyone within the communities, higher status groups were grudgingly willing to allow lower-status groups' participation, as long as caste differences were not large. As a result, mutual dependence between the groups (particularly for sub-castes within the same general caste group) slowly increased while inequality was somewhat decreased. In regions where intermediaries successfully built inclusive markets, they were very deliberate in their efforts to ensure that lower-status groups had access to screenings, but such efforts were faster and less complex than in other villages.

A lack of fit between intermediary activities and the social context could result in a failure to build inclusive markets. In region 2, Intermediary2 tried to engage both dominant and marginalized castes in villages that had low dependence and low inequality. In the village Bara, intermediary2 started with the creation of screening groups and persuaded dominant castes members to allow the creation of separate screenings among the marginalized groups. While persuasion helped intermediary2 form screening groups in Bara, the lack of assertion meant three things: 1) joint screenings did not happen; 2) the videos used were only relevant to crops being cultivated by the dominant groups, and 3) the screenings were predominantly conducted for dominant groups, as these groups insisted having their screening first and normally the projector battery would not last for the second screening in the same night. This led to the exclusion of marginalized caste from the market inclusion activities. Failure could also occur if intermediaries attempted to use leverage when it did not fit the social context. In its initial engagement with villages with high inequality and high dependence, Intermediary3 used leverage (high assertion and high persuasion). In the village of Pondi, the dominant caste members were socially and economically strong in this village and not only resisted the inclusive approach to group formation initiated by intermediary3 but also successfully prevented any possibility of having even the separate groups for marginalized castes.

High Inequality and Low Dependence: Construction

In villages where inequality was high but dependence was low, we observed and recorded in our field notes that successful intermediary activities involved indirect entry combined with coordination and soft persuasion. We label these activities as *construction*, as the intermediary worked carefully to build goodwill across different social groups. These activities generally involved indirect entry as intermediaries first established village-wide projects to promote goodwill and then encouraged the dominant group to allow marginalized groups access to screenings.

Intermediary2's activities in the village of Bori were typical of the more successful initiatives. In Bori, Intermediary2 entered the village by approaching the dominant caste but did not immediately begin forming screening groups. The immediate formation of screening groups would have resulted in complete control by the dominant caste, and the exclusion of lower-status groups. Instead, Intermediary2 used an

indirect entry method that involved introducing several projects designed to benefit the entire community, including reforestation and erosion control. These projects required the participation and contribution of each group within the village. These projects endured for several months and helped break down some of the barriers between the higher and lower status groups within the village. These projects also introduced a small degree of mutual dependence between the groups, as they relied on each other for the execution of the project. While dependence was generally negative (as it resulted in exploitation), developing mutual dependence was important because it increased the opportunities available to all groups.

After several months, Intermediary2 introduced the idea of screening groups and formed several groups. Given their prior work in the village, they had developed sufficient influence to suggest and implement screening groups among both the higher and lower status groups. However, they were careful to introduce screenings that were tailored individually to each group, to avoid direct competition for each screening. For example, they introduced screenings related to systemic rice intensification among the dominant caste, while the marginalized caste was shown videos on vegetable cultivation and the ST were shown videos on collecting forest products. This variety ensured that there was no direct competition among groups for specific screenings, which avoided a scenario in which the dominant caste would exclude other groups. Over time, Intermediary2 was able to build a somewhat more inclusive market within the village of Bori by improving access to relevant knowledge across all groups within the village and breaking down some social barriers.

Interpretation, additional examples, and insights. Intermediary2 used construction and was relatively successful in promoting more inclusive markets. We observed that successful intermediaries were careful not to initially introduce resources that would create conflict. Given the high degree of inequality, the dominant group had significant control over village activities, and would find ways to usurp new resources. As a result, village-wide projects designed to increase coordination had to be carefully selected by intermediaries. Successful intermediaries selected projects that would generate benefits for the entire village, such as reforestation.

In some villages we noted that the lack of dependence created some limited opportunities. In these areas, the dominant group was more likely to eventually allow screenings for lower-status groups. For example, in one village the marginalized caste men were not initially allowed to form screening groups, though the dominant group was willing to allow the formation of groups by marginalized caste women, as illustrated in the following quote:

> At first it was difficult. I asked my husband many times about [attending screening]. He would not let me form the group. He was trying to form his own [lower-caste] group. But he could not form it… [Representative of intermediary who conducts screening] told us that they [upper-caste men] are not allowing them to form a group of [marginalized caste] men, but they have no problem in letting us [marginalized caste women] form the group. They did not want their [dominant caste] women to form the [screening] group. [Marginalized caste woman, village served by Intermediary3]

Thus, managing the social dynamics was not easy, but intermediaries using construction activities were able to achieve some success in building inclusive markets. For example, after introducing community-wide reforestation projects, intermediary3 was able to bring screenings to marginalized ST groups. These screenings focused on gathering forest produce, such as honey, herbs, and nuts. The dominant caste was generally tolerant of these topics because they consumed the forest produce collected by the marginalized groups. Over time, intermediary3 was able to help the marginalized groups sell these products to a nearby market.

Again, we found that a poor fit between the social context and intermediary activities decreased the likelihood of increasing market inclusion. In the initial years of its operations in region2, Intermediary2 used direct entry for the villages with high inequality and low dependence. However, it soon learned that even when there is low dependence, and different social groups are engaged in different activities, the dominant caste would not allow the formation of screening groups of marginalized groups, especially when inequality is high. This experience helped intermediary2 design indirect entry modes for such villages. Intermediaries' efforts could also fail if they used construction in a distinct social context. Learning from its experience in the villages with low dependence and high inequality, Intermediary2 wanted to use construction in the villages with high inequality and high dependence. In the village Dudha, it tried to initiate several projects such as reforestation and erosion control for the benefit of the entire community. However, since the dominant caste was economically and socially powerful, and the marginalized caste were dependent on them, the dominant caste ensured that all the work on these projects was done by the marginalized caste, defeating the purpose of social interactions among various caste groups.

Low Inequality and High Dependence: Synchronization

In villages with low inequality and high dependence, successful intermediaries used indirect entry and soft assertion as a means of bringing villagers together. Given the importance of bringing villagers together, we labelled these activities *synchronization*. The village of Basti provides an illustration. In Basti, Intermediary2 began with an emphasis on water projects. They avoided drinking water projects, as this could create contention since the dominant caste did not want the marginalized caste to drink from the same sources. Instead, they focused on water for irrigation and animal consumption. They were able to use some degree of existing mutual dependence on water in the village and engage all social groups in the construction of a small check-dam (a small barrier on a stream that collected water). In coordinating the project, Intermediary2 was careful to ensure ownership by the entire village rather than ownership by those whose property bordered the stream (and who were from the dominant caste). Intermediary2 engaged the marginalized caste to perform the labour without pay, in exchange for a share of ownership of the project, while the dominant caste held an ownership share given the proximity of the check-dam to their fields. Through the check-dam and other similar projects, Intermediary2 was able to slowly increase the mutual dependence within the village, without creating exploitative dependence. This led to increased communication across caste lines and a small reduction in social inequalities.

With these community projects as a foundation, Intermediary2 began screenings and was able to require joint screenings across social groups. While it was still difficult to bring different social groups together in a single household, the increased mutual dependence allowed Intermediary2 to form the groups in neutral areas such as the village school or choupal.

Interpretation, additional examples, and insights. Given the relatively lower inequality and relatively higher mutual dependence in this quadrant, intermediaries had more ability to negotiate within the social context. While successful intermediaries in quadrants II and III both used coordination, the nature of successful coordinating projects was different in this quadrant. Because inequality was lower, the intermediary had more ability to ensure that the project was not usurped by the dominant group and could introduce projects that had direct benefits for the villagers, such as the water project described above. Villages with lower inequality and relatively higher mutual dependencies were more likely to accommodate the marginalized caste than in regions with higher initial social inequalities. However, these intermediaries also understood their limitations – they could not simply force the dominant caste to accept lower status groups immediately into their screenings. Nevertheless, the general level of poverty, the lower initial differences among groups, and existing interdependencies, made the dominant caste more amenable to some assertion:

> We don't expect that we will go in a village and lecture dominant groups to let everyone see screening. We cannot say, you know, this is good for community, we should all help each other. It doesn't work that way. We have to speak the language of a *baniya*.[1] Tell them why they should care. Tell them how it is going to help them if we have screening for the [marginalized caste]. Convince them that it is in their own benefit. [Field Manager, Intermediary3]

As a result, holding joint screenings was a possibility in these villages, unlike other villages with higher initial inequality. Intermediaries that had some success in building more inclusive markets sought to carefully coordinate across groups through indirect entry, and then made further engagement in the community conditional on the implementation of joint screenings. For example, once intermediary2 was able to organize joint screenings, it used this arrangement to create an informal extended group to secure inputs at more favourable prices for all farmers. They also had some success in aggregating farming products for sale in nearby markets, though this was not as successful as the input aggregation given some product differences between caste groups.

Different activities in similar contexts were less successful. Intermediary2 failed in an earlier attempt to create screening groups for the marginalized castes in the village Bisali that had similarly low inequality and high dependence. While Bisali had similar challenges with water, Intermediary2 did not create water projects and synchronize activities across the social divides to create mutual dependence. Instead, Intermediary2 started with direct entry and immediately formed screening groups for both dominant and lower status groups. However, the dominant caste not only opposed the formation of screening groups for the marginalized caste but also further restricted their access to irrigation water from the

limited sources available in the village. In addition, in this village, dominant castes members stopped offering seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers on credit to marginal castes members. As a result, Intermediary2 had to abandon its plans of forming screening groups for marginalized castes.

In another example, Intemediary2 tried to replicate successful water projects in the village Dongra. However, Dongra had high inequality and high dependence. Initially, the dominant caste did listen to Intermediary2. However, once they got the sense that these projects would also benefit marginalized caste, they backed off from water projects. In Dongra dominant caste members were strongly opposed to participating in a project that would also benefit the marginalized caste. There was also little mutual dependence, as dominant castes members had wells (open and borewell) for their own water needs. Therefore, ensuring their participation was difficult. Since most of the small streams were bordering dominant castes farmers' fields, their permission was necessary in creating check-dams. In the absence of participation by the dominant caste, water projects failed to launch, and no subsequent screening groups for the marginalized caste were formed.

High Inequality and High Dependence: Prolonged Persuasion

In villages with high inequality and high dependence, successful intermediaries used activities we label as *prolonged persuasion*. Prolonged persuasion involved indirect entry in which negotiations were conducted with the dominant caste before screenings were introduced (to the dominant group). The initial negotiations focused on who would have access to these screenings, the locations of the screenings, and the topics of the screenings. Given very high inequality and high dependence, many of the rich farmers had employed the marginalized caste laborers/ farmers, and there was debate around who of the marginalized caste, if anyone, would have access to these screenings. However, this was followed by a slow and gentle effort to convince the dominant group that marginalized groups should be allowed to receive access to capability development opportunities.

Mand Village was high on both inequality and dependence, and falls directly in the center of quadrant IV in Figure 2. Mand Village exhibited many of the characteristics described above, with extreme dominance by the dominant caste. Intermediary3 had significant prior experience working in tribal areas, where inequality was high, but dependence was lower. Following their prior experience, they began by trying to form screening groups for marginalized caste women, but immediately met with massive resistance. Despite Intermediary3's significant reputation in the region, they were warned by the dominant caste group that if they continued to work with the marginalized caste women, they would be chased out of the village. Given the dominant castes' control of the political and economic sphere in the village, as well as their domination of the marginalized caste, they had the power to follow through on this threat. As a result, Intermediary3 was forced to alter their entry into the village. [2] Rather than work with women and marginalized caste groups, Intermediary3 formed dominant caste screening groups and began to work with these groups. They explained,

> Poverty among the [marginalized caste] is high. They either do not have any land
> or have land that is too small even for subsistence farming. They have to depend
> on the [dominant caste] farmers. They work on these [dominant caste] farmers'
> fields as laborers. Any mistake on our part, and you can see the immediate effect on
> the [marginalized caste] farmer. We have to be deliberate and cautious in our ap-
> proach. We do not want to antagonize the [dominant caste] farmers [Field manager,
> Intermediary3]

Over time, Intermediary3 carefully managed the existing groups in an effort to
slowly alter the social context. After developing a significant amount of trust with
dominant caste men regarding both Intermediary3's expertise and the value of the
practices shown in the video screenings, Intermediary3 began to argue that the dom-
inant caste would benefit if the marginalized caste also received the screenings. The
marginalized caste worked in the dominant caste fields, particularly during prepara-
tion, sowing, and fertilizing (they were prohibited from harvesting because this would
require that they touch the produce, which would then be 'polluted' for the domi-
nant caste's consumption). Intermediary3 argued that if the marginalized caste could
receive the screenings, they could help improve the productivity of the fields that
they worked in. After three years, the village leaders consented and screenings began
among marginalized caste groups.

Intermediary3 began forming groups among the marginalized caste men. They began
by conducting screenings that would make their work in dominant caste fields more
effective. However, after the screening groups were formed, Intermediary3 was able to
utilize their expertise in sustainable livelihoods and screen other videos that had rele-
vance specifically for the marginalized caste men. Six years after our initial visit to the
village, we found that while significant social inequality still existed, the market was more
inclusive in several ways. First, the complete dependence of the marginalized caste had
decreased to some extent, with the introduction of new types of livelihoods. The new
capabilities developed by the marginalized caste increased their freedom to engage in
market activities (see Sen, 1999). Second, the door had been opened for the marginal-
ized caste to receive at least some outside benefits, and in a small way some of the social
barriers had been broken down. Given the length of time involved, and the emphasis
on convincing the dominant caste to allow screenings for other groups, we label this ap-
proach 'prolonged persuasion'.

Interpretation, additional examples, and insights. Given the challenges of high inequality and
high dependence, we observed only a few examples of intermediaries that had some
success in overcoming these difficulties, such as Intermediary3 did in this village. In areas
where intermediaries sought to alter the social context within the village, the process was
slow. Intermediaries following this approach had a long-term commitment to the region,
spanning decades, and were willing to accept trade-offs in terms of the time and cost of
a more inclusive set of activities.

> We could have handed over the screening to the village head… He would then quickly
> form the groups. The screening could be conducted in his house. But that would

defeat the purpose. Those who need the information most would not be able to attend it. Women would not be allowed to attend; [marginalized caste] would not be allowed to attend... [Field executive, Intermediary3] If we leave it up to the village head or prominent farmer then they will form groups that include only rich farmers. They will not include women. They will not even form separate groups for women. They will not include [marginalized castes]. We need to actively encourage the inclusion of marginalized social groups. We try to do this whenever possible. However, it is not easy. We do not always succeed. [Regional Manager, Intermediary2]

Successful instances of overcoming exploitation required deliberate work involving the dominant caste. We found that ignoring the dominant caste simply was not viable given the high degree of dependence of the lower caste on the dominant caste.

Intermediaries that sought to build inclusive markets and renegotiate the social context had to find innovative ways to engage dominant groups. As illustrated above, providing benefits to the dominant caste was an important pathway. A second pathway, used by Intermediary2, was to form dominant caste groups and provide screenings about practices that required relatively little capital investment, but lots of labour, such as systematic wheat or rice intensification. Given the importance of labour for these practices, the result was that the dominant caste provided more employment to marginalized caste groups. Intermediary2 tried to convince the dominant caste that the marginalized caste groups would benefit from viewing screenings as well, but had almost no success forming new groups due to dominant caste resistance. Intermediary2 underestimated the rigidity of the social inequality in these villages, and thought that possibility of higher productivity and resulting economic benefit would be sufficient to allow the possibility of joint screening. Their emphasis on joint screenings was partly dictated by limitation of the battery life of the projector but also due to their belief that having both the groups (landowners and labourers) in the same screening room might create better outcomes for each group. However, in some cases, they were at least successful in convincing the dominant caste to pay the marginalized caste the same hourly rage that they paid other workers.

In summary, a social context characterized by high social inequality and high dependence created great difficulties for intermediaries seeking to build inclusive markets.

Anyone who would like to work in these difficult villages should be aware of the importance of engaging with [dominant caste]. You cannot ignore them. They have full control of social and economic activities... We have been able to achieve some success because we did not ignore them. In fact, we actively engaged with the [dominant caste]... We listen to their view. Understood their concerns... After becoming aware of what they want and what they think about [marginalized caste], we were then able to start convincing them. But it was not a straight process. Every time we took two steps forward, we had to backtrack a step. [Regional manager, Intermediary3]

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest a contingent relationship between the activities used by intermediaries and the social context. Inequality and dependence influence the effectiveness of distinct intermediary activities as they seek to build inclusive markets. We identify two dimensions along which intermediary activities vary: entry method (direct or indirect) and approach (coordination, assertion, or persuasion). At a more abstract level, our findings suggest an interesting pattern. The softest forms of persuasion were present in settings of high inequality/high dependence. We noted an increase in persuasion as dependence decreased and then as inequality decreased (see Figure 3). At lower levels of dependence, the dominant group would be unable to 'punish' the marginalized group if dominant groups reacted negatively to persuasive attempts. As a result, the intermediary could effectively engage in stronger persuasion (though still with great care). Assertion increased as inequality decreased. The generalized poverty associated with low inequality allowed the intermediary to make capability development conditional on increased inclusion. Assertion and persuasion were both highest when inequality and dependence were low. Coordination was most important in the off-diagonals of our two-by-two, when either assertion or persuasion was high and the other dimension was low (see Figure 3).

Implications for Theory

We make three central contributions to the literature. Our first contribution is a more complex rendering of the relationship between the social context and the process of building inclusive markets (see Tsoukas, 2017). Prior work on how intermediaries build more inclusive markets has highlighted the importance of the social context in influencing how intermediaries act (Armanios et al., 2017; Mair et al., 2012, 2016; Sutter et al., 2017). Our study contributes to this work by exploring the fit between intermediary activities and the social context as intermediaries build inclusive markets. We find that the effectiveness of the approach and entry method that intermediaries use is heavily dependent on the social context. The most appropriate entry method (direct or indirect) depends upon the mix of inequality and dependence within the social context. Direct entry is best suited to situations where the intermediary has considerable influence. In contrast, indirect entry allows the intermediary to first build some engagement across groups. Similarly, the approach employed by the intermediary must fit the context. Intermediaries can move more quickly through greater assertion and persuasion when inequality and dependence are relatively low. In other settings, they must rely on coordination and soft persuasion over extended periods of time in order to make progress in building inclusive markets. Overall, our study demonstrates that the failure to adapt intermediary activities to the social context can maintain or even exacerbate market exclusion.

Thus, our study brings to light the importance of how social dynamics shape the array of tools available to intermediaries, as well as how these tools are used. This insight helps reconcile differing accounts of the activities and practices used by intermediaries to build inclusive markets (e.g., Dutt et al., 2016; Mair et al., 2016; Sutter et al., 2017). Our study suggests that a deeper look at the nature of the social context may help explain why successful intermediaries must use very different processes and practices in their efforts to build inclusive markets.
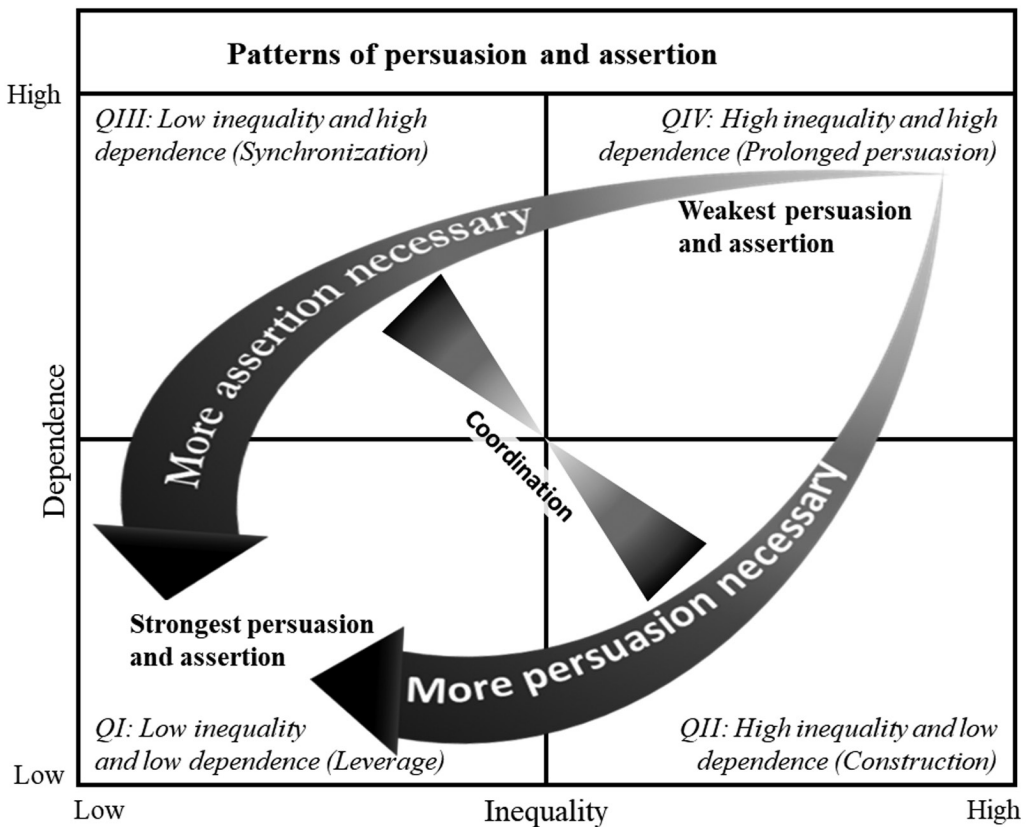
Figure 3. Patterns of persuasion and assertion. *Note*: Arrows indicate the direction in which assertion or persuasion increases. We do not imply any actual movement between the quadrants. Coordination plays a role in QII and QIII

Existing literature on intermediaries describes two primary functions of intermediaries as they build inclusive markets: 1) developing capabilities among marginalized populations and 2) reshaping the context of market activity (Armanios et al., 2017; Dutt et al., 2016; Mair et al., 2012). Our study extends this research by bringing to light the interplay between capability development and the social context. Our study shows how developing capabilities may depend on first changing the social context to be more inclusive. As a result, our study suggests that intermediaries may not always have a choice between focusing on capability development or developing market infrastructure (Dutt et al., 2016). Rather, they may have to engage in these activities sequentially, as one is a necessary prerequisite to the other. While the importance of sequencing in building inclusive markets arose in our study, it is an understudied dimension of market construction. We encourage future research along these lines. Our study also highlights how 'market infrastructure' may be intertwined with the broader social context. As a result, intermediaries' efforts to reshape markets may have much broader social implications than simply altering economic activity.

Our second contribution is the framework that we develop for understanding the social context. We build on recent literature regarding inequality (e.g., Bapuji et al., 2020; DiTomaso, 2021), by exploring the interplay between dependence and inequality. Our study shows how community interventions can play out differently, depending on pre-existing within community relationships. Recently, there has been a renewed focus on understanding the social as well as economic dimensions of communities, as part of a larger effort to address grand challenges (Berrone et al., 2016; King et al., 2011; Mair et al., 2016). While grand challenges 'are global in nature, they are instantiated within local, territorially bounded contexts' (Berrone et al., 2016, p. 1941). In keeping with this local focus, a nascent stream of work within management has begun to pay attention to the complex implications of the social context for organizations seeking to address grand challenges (Mair et al., 2012, 2016). However, the majority of research studies treat societal challenges 'as a setting or a context' (Mair et al., 2016, p. 2022) rather than a central theoretical concern. Our contribution is to build on the prior work of sociologists (Gramsci, 1971; Polanyi, 1944) and to develop a framework for analysing the social context. By juxtaposing inequality and dependence, we hope that this study provides an analytical template for scholars seeking to integrate the social context more deeply into theory.

Third, we contribute to emerging management research on caste (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Bhatt, 2022; Qureshi et al., 2018; Sutter et al., 2022) through the identification and systematic analysis of the two most important dimensions of caste-based marginalization: socioeconomic inequality and dependence. Using this framework, we identify four critical sets of activities that intermediaries can deploy to overcome such marginalization: synchronization, leverage, prolonged persuasion, and construction. Our findings provide profound insights into how intermediaries can break the vicious cycle of '*uneven dispersions in recourse endowments, uneven access to productive resources, and uneven rewards to resource contributions*' (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020, p. 533). Future researchers can extend this line of research using our framework and the measures for inequality and dependence.

Finally, our study contributes to literature on inequality within management research more broadly. Just as inequalities and dependence are salient feature of the social context in rural India, organizations also contain diverse social-economic groups, and inequality in member power or status is a reality of organizational life (Bapuji et al., 2020; Bhardwaj, et al., 2021; DiTomaso, 2021; Suddaby et al., 2018). Organizational research has long recognized the importance of how different members or units depend on one another (e.g., Thompson, 2017). Our research helps bridge these insights with more recent research in organizational contexts that explores how gender, class, caste and race-based inequalities shape organizational relationships (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Leigh and Melwani, 2019; Maurer and Qureshi, 2021). This work highlights how these inequalities and relationships are institutionalized through exploring the role of employers, organizational processes and discourses (Cobb, 2016; Hamann and Bertels, 2018). Our insights are particularly important for contexts where inequality is tied to durable characteristics of individuals or groups. When inequality is based on more transient factors, such as experience or training, then the best way to promote inclusion would likely be to

increase opportunities for professional development. However, in contexts that are similar to our study, where inequality is tied to enduring characteristics such as race, gender, or caste, then reshaping the social context is the only pathway for building more inclusive markets.

Thus, insights from our study may generalize to these organizational contexts. For example, the role played by the dominant group in our research context is akin to strategies adopted by powerful actors in organizations. One recent study highlights how managers maintain their exploitative position over workers through adopting forcing and freeing as strategies (Hamann and Bertels, 2018). However, as noted by Newbert (2018), this stream of research lacks any prescriptive advice. Our research lays the groundwork for providing guidance on understanding and addressing these inequalities through varying degrees of persuasion and assertion. Our research provides support for previous work that suggests organizations need to create climates of inclusion (King et al., 2011; Leigh and Melwani, 2019) to manage inequalities and dependence adeptly so that certain groups of employees are not marginalized and totally cut-off from the meaningful participation.

Implications for Practice

Our study has important implications for practice as well. First and foremost, our study suggests that intermediaries seeking to build inclusive markets should invest time in understanding the social context. This is no small feat. Often, as rigid as the social context may be, the outwardly visible expressions may be subtle, despite their profound consequences. Moreover, dominant social actors are rarely naïve as to outsiders' potential influence and intentions. These dominant groups are often adept at manipulating outside organizations for their own benefit (Platteau, 2004; Rigon, 2014). Investments in developing a deep understanding through long conversations, seeking out marginalized perspectives, and careful observation, are likely to create a much stronger foundation for inclusive efforts. However, they also take significantly more time as intermediaries must invest in developing these relationships and understanding. The time required for such initiatives has significant policy and grant-making implications, as building inclusion is a matter of decades rather than months or years.

Second, our study suggests that building inclusive markets requires interaction not only with lower-status groups, but also with dominant groups. Failing to negotiate with the dominant group can create serious consequences (Bhatt, 2022; Still, 2017). However, social programs are often designed to primarily serve marginalized groups while ignoring more dominant groups (Bedford, 2007). For example, microcredit programs often focus on benefitting marginalized women while neglecting men. While women are often more marginalized than men, and more in need of support (Kalpana, 2016), neglecting men entirely may lead them to take advantage of benefits intended for women (Bedford, 2007). Furthermore, in deciding how to interact with the dominant group, intermediaries should consider the relative inequality and dependence of the groups. In areas with higher inequality, dominant groups possess more power. Furthermore, when dependence is higher, dominant groups have more

opportunity to exert control over lower status groups. As a result, the mix of assertion and persuasion used by the intermediary should be calibrated to the realities of the social context.

Finally, our study has implications for organizations more broadly, as they seek to negotiate inequalities within and across their boundaries (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Bapuji et al., 2020). Organizations are designed with intended inequalities in terms of compensation, power, and status. Furthermore, interdependencies within organizations are an important part of how they operate (Thompson, 2017). Managers should be aware of the implications of inequality and dependence, and how these attributes influence the lived experience as well as the contributions of employees. This is especially relevant now as the workforce has become increasingly diverse over the past few decades (King et al., 2011). Our research implies that managers can either ignore the diversity (by treating workforce as homogenous) or engage with it by pursuing policies that ensure that the organizational diversity matches/represent the community diversity. The later approach is more inclusive and lead to social cohesion.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that also suggest avenues for future research. First, our study has important boundary conditions that could be explored through future research. For example, we focused on settings where low inequality only occurred when everyone was quite poor. The dynamics of intermediation might be very different in areas where lower inequality was associated with economic wellbeing. There were also specific features of the context that could create boundary conditions. For example, all of the intermediaries in our study were following the same basic method for video production. While this consistency in the overall method allowed us to home in on how intermediaries managed the social context, we encourage future research to study a broader range of inclusive efforts. Furthermore, our study was focused on village-level inclusion. If we had shifted the analysis to inclusion at a regional level (i.e., seeking to build inclusive markets across villages without regard to internal village dynamics) the conclusions would be very different. As discussed above, if the only goal were geographic expansion, it would be much faster and easier to simply work with dominant social groups and ignore marginalized groups. Our analysis was quite different because we focused on village-level inclusion, which was linked to a normative perspective regarding the desirability of including the most marginalized groups. However, we encourage future research to continue to explore trade-offs between social outreach and economic efficiency, including the extra time required to build inclusion.

Our longitudinal qualitative methodology was appropriate given the exploratory nature of our study and the need to understand the nuance and complexity within the social dynamics in a rural Indian context. However, we encourage future researchers to combine rich qualitative insights with other methodologies, such as field experiments, surveys, and historical analysis, to explore how social contexts affect intermediation activities. We also encourage future research to explore the

generalizability of our findings to other contexts. We selected rural India as an extreme case of social inequality, though we expect that many of the same mechanisms would also be important in other contexts. However, there may also be other relevant features of the social context that should be considered in other contexts. For example, within our sample, mobility across social groups was very difficult, given the rigidity of the caste and gender hierarchies. However, the extent to which individual mobility is possible could potentially alter the social dynamics in important ways. Thus, while we expect similar relationships in other contexts, we encourage future research to explore how the social dynamics shift exclusionary strategies in other environments.

CONCLUSION

Market exclusion is rooted in social inequalities that prevent some social groups from building the capabilities or connections necessary for full participation in the market (Mair et al., 2012, 2016; Qureshi et al., 2018; Sutter et al., 2022). The aim of our study has been to explore the fit between the intermediaries' activities and the social context, and how this fit influences the extent to which more inclusive markets are established. We found that successful intermediaries adapt their activities that they use to shape the social context and develop capabilities as they seek to build more inclusive markets. Specifically, in light of inequality and dependence in the social context, we found that successful intermediaries used distinct combinations of entry modes (direct versus indirect) and approaches (coordination, assertion, and persuasion). We encourage future research that builds on these ideas and sheds further light on the construction of inclusive markets.

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NOTES

[1] Literally means a trading caste that includes merchants, money-lenders, grain traders but figuratively means one who only talks about benefits and gains.
[2] Our research team also faced difficulties in accessing data from this village. During our initial meeting, the village head indicated that the entire village was represented. We countered that the marginalized caste was not represented. We were told that everyone who mattered was present and were denied in our requests to speak with marginalized caste members. On a subsequent visit, we discreetly visited marginalized caste members first. After speaking with them, we proceeded to the part of the village where the dominant caste lived. However, we were denied entry and were told we would need to bathe first to purify ourselves before speaking with the dominant caste. We continued to have to creatively negotiate access to this village, though it did become easier several years later, following Intermediary3's interventions.

APPENDIX

INDICES FOR ASSESSING INEQUALITY AND DEPENDENCE

Indicators of high inequality:

1. Marginalized caste (MC) had practically no land ownership, dominant caste (DC) had considerable land holding (> 5acres)
2. MC house were poorly built, DC house were very well built and big
3. MC hamlets were peripheral, DC houses in the central location of the village
4. MC were not allowed to come close to the hamlet of the DC
5. MC were not allowed to fetch water from the source of water used by the DC
6. MC were not allowed near the village temples
7. MC were generally not allowed to touch the goods in the *kirana* shops
8. MC were not allowed to touch the pots from the village potter
9. MC were either not paid for their work (kind of bonded labour) or were paid without making physical contact
10. MC were not allowed to use the common road that passes through the hamlet of the DC
11. MC were not allowed to take out their marriage processions, funeral processions, celebrations of festivals through or nearby the DC hamlets
12. MC were not allowed to see the field demonstration, which always happens in the DC's field
13. MC were not allowed in the village *Choupal*
14. In the village roadside 'restaurant' MC were not allowed
15. MC were not invited in the panchayat meetings
16. MC students sat close to the exit of the classroom, far away from DC students in the primary school.
17. MC students were not allowed to drink water in the school even when drinking water was available (in some cases, the water was poured in their hands while they drank). They were not allowed to use the glasses (those were exclusively used by the DC).
18. The mid-day meal served in the school was either not given to MC children or they had to consume it in a secluded place mostly outside the school.
19. The local medical practitioner either did not treat the MC or simply give medicines without touching them
20. MC were not allowed to use the common burial/ cremation ground
21. MC women were subjected to abusive verbal behaviour by the DC men
22. MC women were not part of common self-help groups (SHGs).

Calculation of inequality index: If any village showed 20 or more indicators out of these 22 indicators, then it was assigned a value of inequality index = 1; otherwise, inequality index was calculated as (number of indicators observed/20).

Indicators of high dependence:

1. MC were not allowed to own land, they worked as labourers in the DC field
2. MC had to work at the construction sites (roads, plantations etc) under the supervision (and at the mercy) of the DC
3. MC were not allowed to sell their product in the village markets. They had to sell it through a DC intermediary
4. MC were dependent for loans from the DC

5. MC could not finish morning requirements (open toilet) until unless DC had finished theirs
6. MC were dependent on the DC to access their land records
7a. MC men needed to seek permission from DC elders for getting married
7b. MC women needed to get marriage blessings from the DC (village head or priest)
8a. MC needed permission from DC to fetch drinking water
8b. MC needed permission from DC to use river/ stream for cleaning their clothes
9a. MC were dependent on the DC to access the benefits of government schemes
9b. MC were unable to collect their ration without the approval of DC
10a. MC were required permission from DC to take part in the village level celebration of the festivals
10b. MC were required permission from DC to host celebratory events outside their home (e.g., birthday celebrations)

Calculation of dependence index: There were ten major indicators. Four of them had two sub-indicators each. Each major indicator received a score of 10 (each sub-indicator a score of 5). The dependence index was calculated as (weighted sum of indicators observed/ 100).

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