

Preface

This book emerged from our growing awareness that social scientists know relatively little about a contemporary trend to devolve political and economic power to local governments throughout the developing world. While some academic studies of the impact of decentralization in particular contexts have appeared recently, a comparative perspective on this institutional transformation has not been available. We therefore organized a conference and invited experts involved in development as academics or policy practitioners from a number of different countries that have embarked on significant devolution initiatives to describe these experiences in some detail. The May 2003 conference was funded by the MacArthur Foundation Network on Inequality and Economic Performance and was hosted by the Suntory Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines (STICERD) at the London School of Economics. We are grateful to the MacArthur Foundation and STICERD for their generous support. In particular, we would like to thank Sam Bowles of the MacArthur Foundation Network on Inequality and Economic Performance for his encouragement and Tim Besley and Kate Perry of STICERD for being such gracious hosts.

Special acknowledgments are due to the discussants of the papers presented at the conference: Oriana Bandiera, Robin Burgess, Bhaskar Dutta, Maitreesh Ghatak, Geeta Kingdon, James Manor, Paul Seabright, and Chengang Xu, whose comments generated useful discussion and helped the authors revise their chapters. Patricia Meirelles and Catherine Rodriguez provided substantial research assistance to us in our writing the introductory chapter and with the editing and preparation of the entire manuscript. Without their help, this book would not have been possible.

Pranab Bardhan and Dilip Mookherjee