

Daniele ROSSI-DORIA, [Researcher](#), Technocratic approaches, hybrid governance and spaces of participation of the case of an irrigation-based community development project in Southern Morocco

Participatory approaches are widely applied in rural development projects to “give voice” to the needs and ambitions of local populations, to design locally-rooted solutions, and to implement projects cost-effectively. However, community-based development programs are often subjected to the negative effects of the local elite’s role in the process, resulting in elite capture over decision-making and over project benefits. This paper argues that elite capture is possible because the technocratic approaches are often applied in rural areas without a full understanding of the social contexts in which the programs are set and without a formal control over the local elite’s powers.

Several community-based programs have been launched in Southern Morocco recently. This paper shows how under the ambiguous socio-political conditions that surround such programs, hybrid forms of dominance are allowed to emerge. These consist of a mix of modern forms of deliberation and traditional modes of governance which partially or fully compromises the achievement of the participatory goals of the projects.

Using Tighdouine Municipality in the High Atlas mountain area as a case study, the aim of this work is to explore the World Bank’s (WB) Irrigation-Based Community Development (IBCD) project’s unintended outcomes that resulted from the clash between a technocratic model of irrigation management used by the aid-agency and the traditional forms of deliberation held by local power structures.

The proposed paper is the result of two months of field work conducted in 2012 during which the participatory aspects of the Irrigation-Based Community Development Project financed by the World Bank were analyzed. By exploring the beneficiaries’ perception of project design, implementation and outcomes, this paper examines both how donor-induced modes of governance and participation interact with already existing ways of decision-making in rural villages, as well as how they influence people’s perceptions of the project and in turn how this process may have changed their agency as well as local power relations.

The paper concludes that one main unintended outcome of the program is the strengthening of the elite’s role in rural development.