

Abstract

Rights-based approaches to development promise to deliver many development goals, particularly in terms of creating a political environment conducive to development. As citizens become empowered through rights-based approaches to make increased demands on the state, it is envisaged that good, more accountable governance will emerge, as states fulfill their obligations to citizens. It is not clear, however, that the promotion of rights-based approaches by NGOs is likely to achieve this. Although processes of state and citizenship formation are critical for development, the sequencing of such processes and their outcomes, and the patterns of causality between them, remain historically and contextually specific. This paper reveals both the potential and the problems that arise when certain rights-based approaches engage with the politics of promoting progressive social change. It explores this challenge of transformation through a case study of a participatory rights-based programme that seeks to assist a marginal pastoral group in North West Cameroon to be empowered citizens. The programme has been relatively successful in catalysing underlying processes of sociopolitical and has improved the quality of local governance. However, the programme's explicit, often confrontational engagement with the power relations underpinning exclusion and exploitation has been both a strength and a liability in advancing progressive social change. This raises critical challenges for the strategic, theoretical and philosophical dimensions of rights-based approaches.

Keywords:

Rights, pastoralists, ethnic minority, Cameroon, social justice.

Jeidoh Duni is the chief paralegal coordinator for MBOSCUDA.

Robert Fon is a lawyer and human rights activist who runs his own chambers in Bamenda, Cameroon and acts for MBOSCUDA.

Sam Hickey is Senior Lecturer in Development Studies, Institute for Development Policy and Management, The University of Manchester

Nuhu Salihu is Africa Programme Coordinator for Village AiD, a development NGO based in Derbyshire, UK.

Acknowledgements

This paper is to be published as Chapter 4 in the forthcoming book: Hickey, S. and D. Mitlin (eds.) (2009). *Rights-based Approaches to Development: Exploring the Potential and Pitfalls*. Washington, DC: Kumarian Press. The authors thank Kumarian Press for permission to publish the paper as part of the BWPI Working Paper series.