

Youngsters and agrarian dynamics in rural Morocco: The appearance of new collective action in the region of the Moyen Sebou and of the Saiss

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Introduction

Today the rural society of Morocco can be characterized by a changing agrarian sector, in which rural youngsters play an active and important role. The changes that Morocco is facing today date back to the 90s and are partly triggered by the liberalization policies. They consist of the further encroaching of commons and publics, the privatization of resources (land and water), the integration of markets that were previously not connected and the use of new technologies. In this context the state is repositioning itself while in the meantime keeping its powerful influence. In this article we aim to show how rural youngsters, who are not considered within the public policies and rural development programs, differently integrate these changes. We aim to analyse youngsters through their individual and collective agency, considered as the range of socio-political practices through which people can increase control over resources and extend their status (Cleaver 2007). Our analysis reveals how youngsters are able through different forms of collective action that emerge in reaction to, independently from, and at the margins of the state, to take up their faith in their own hands and are able to deal effectively in contrasting and difficult conditions.

We base our analysis on fieldwork that has been carried out in two irrigated regions in the North of Morocco (the Saiss and the Moyen Sebou). The agricultural developments in the region of the Saiss are mainly possible through the access to ground water, whereas in the region of the Moyen Sebou the water is diverted from the river the Sebou. At the center of our analysis are the accounts and experiences of youngsters (men and women), who we consider as the actors of today's and tomorrow's agriculture.

Old and new forms of collective action

Our evidence shows that within the current agrarian transformations new types of collective action are emerging in reaction to, independently from, and at the margins of state action. In the region of the Saiss, the 'cooperative de la réforme agraire' were created in 1972-73. These farms, ideologically inspired by the Kolkhoz and Sovkhoz in the former USSR, were created on some of the state owned lands that the Moroccan government took over upon the departure of the French in 1956. Members of these farms, small farmers (less than 5 hectares) and labourers, received an individual land plot and obtained land use rights. In the course of time, it turned out that many of the lands of the 'cooperative de la réforme agraire' were not used as productively and efficiently as was theoretically deemed possible. This was the main reason for the Moroccan government to privatize the land in 2005. Since, we observe how the 'cooperative de la réforme agraire' are gradually dismantled and fading away. In the meantime we observe how young men are able integrate local dynamics to organize

themselves collectively in workers groups. Through this they are able to create a certain autonomy: they create networks of farmers where they work, decide on their working hours, are able to negotiate their payment and they do not have to work under the supervision of the farmer. However, parallel to these developments we also observe how young female labourers financially play a more important role in the household, but face in this region social constraints with regard to their personal and professional development (Bossenbroek et al. forthcoming).

The region of the Moyen Sebou represents collective action forced upon farming communities during the 1990s, following the international debate on participatory irrigation management. The majority of the top down reforms in the irrigation sector as well as the creation of the water users associations incorporated the rural elite (Leveau, 1976).

Today we observe how the top-down water users associations in the Moyen Sebou irrigation scheme are gradually taken over by youngsters. Through their technical and intellectual competences they became active members of these associations and are able to voice their needs and compete with the traditional rural elite. Youngsters appropriate not only the management of irrigation water, but also engage in agricultural development, the establishment of new rules, local governance and collective learning. Today they are part of the local rural leadership and transform the state imposed collective action into local development by draining resources from the government, donors and development agencies for different territorial development projects (Kadiri, 2012).

Concluding remarks

Our findings show that parallel to the imposed state collective action, different new forms of collective action are emerging, partly through the repositioning of the state and may result in the hybridisation of the models of collective action. Actively taken up by youngsters (men), they become carriers of new dynamics and competences. For them collective action is a way to realize their needs, to partly fulfil their thirst for autonomy and for more recognition.

References

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