NR29 / The Decentralisation of Natural Resource Governance in the Global South

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

To translate decentralisation from theory to practice, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the concept. Outcomes of decentralisation in terms of democracy, efficiency, accountability, regional and local development primarily depend on the way decentralisation policies are designed and implemented. Decentralisation is accepted as a common as well as a variable practice in different parts of the world to achieve a wide range of governance and public-private management reform objectives. In recent times, the idea of decentralization has been adopted by political actors, private corporations, policy analysts and makers, non-government organizations, and international financial organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP). Since the 1960s, decentralization policies have been adopted across the world. After India's independence, in December 1992, the Panchayati Raj Bill was passed by both the upper and lower houses under the 73rd Amendment Act. This legislation, thus, legitimized local government institutions and the mandatory provisions provided the choice to the state to extend its power to different levels of Panchayats . Eventually, the 73rd Amendment Act became the basis for decentralized local democracy. In due course, the Panchayats (Extension of Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996, was enacted to empower the Gram Sabha in the scheduled areas mostly inhabited by disadvantaged social groups. The Gram Sabhas were further strengthened by the 2006 Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) (FRA) Act. PESA and FRA have deepened the local democracy and decentralized village governance in rural India.

Research Questions:
How have decentralised policies shaped democratic institutions and local governance practices in the Global South?
What factors influence the decentralisation processes at the village level of governance?
How effective are local institutions in exercising decision-making power?
What factors enable informal institutional arrangements to shape democratic outcomes, efficiency, accountability, and local sustainable development?
What is the role of informal institutions and local public and private spaces in the realisation of formal decentralisation processes?

CALL FOR PAPERS

Decentralisation has emerged as a critical governance reform strategy worldwide. This panel examines recent developments of decentralisation in India and the Global South. In addition, it is also interesting to understand how decentralisation policies deepened democracy in rural India, in particular, and in the Global South, in general. It aligns with the conference theme by exploring how formal and informal institutional arrangements shape democratic outcomes, efficiency, accountability, and local sustainable development—exploring the significance of collective social capital in terms of knowledge and identity in achieving grassroots democratic processes with respect to natural resource management. Why is it important? While the top-down approach has been widely criticised, the support and acknowledgement of decentralised alternative systems of community-owned/community-based natural resource management do not find adequate space in public policy. Such an inclusion, which extends beyond participation in a more engaged process of dialogue and respect, can pave the way for sustainable development and challenge the Western paradigm of development and knowledge production from a Global South and decolonial perspective. Extensive scholarship highlights the gap between decentralisation's promise and its actual implementation. This panel seeks papers that critically examine how decentralised policies have deepened democracy, specifically for marginalised communities.