

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY AND NON-STATE APPROACHES TOWARDS POPULAR EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Discourses on grassroots democracy in Asia and elsewhere often focus on modes of popular participation centered on institutional avenues such as elections and local governance issues such as decentralization, devolution, and local autonomy. On the plane where countervailing forces operate, they comprise popular movements and civil society organizations intervening in the political process through advocacies and campaigns on regime and system change or devising strategies and practices that engage the state.

In all of the above instances, the state and state-related institutions are the central focus. There is, however, another dimension that remains relatively unexplored, one where the state recedes in importance and focus. The alternative dimension that this paper looks at is how poor and marginalized communities have been able to manage their own economic and political lives through mechanisms that lie outside the formal systems of governance and economics. This informal sector encompasses political, economic, social and cultural dimensions.

Utilizing notions adapted from James C. Scott's "non-state spaces" and Joel Migdal's "weak state" paradigm, and bringing these to bear on two Philippine case studies, the paper thereby explores non-state centered approaches in creating and sustaining viable and productive rural communities as models of an alternative grassroots-type democracy.