A new rural social contract: water, land and political economy in the Maghreb

Conference: A new social contract for MENA countries: Experiences from Development and Social Policies

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Based on a paper written jointly with Zakaria Kadiri and Lisa Bossenbroek, Université Mohamed VI, Rabat/Morocco
1. Introduction: the „rural social contract“

2. Three trends challenging the rural social contract
   2.1 Resource degradation challenges established patterns of use/benefits/redistribution
   2.2 Agricultural policies further marginalize small farmers
   2.3 New rural actors challenge established relationships

3. Conclusion
1. Introduction: the „rural social contract“ in the Maghreb

Agriculture in the Maghreb:
- 10- 20% of GDP
- 10-40% of jobs, often 80% in rural areas

But: water & land resources
- **Overexploited** (loss of 1% of GDP yearly)
- **Unequally distributed** (majority of smallholders; Tu 53% of farmers cultivate 9% of ar. land)
- **Highly politicised**
1. Introduction: the „rural social contract“ in the Maghreb

- Semi-arid climate

- But important role of agricultural production for employment, rural livelihoods, food production and economic development (TU, MA)

- Access to water and arable land are of enormous strategic value in the region, both at national and local level
1. Introduction: the „rural social contract“

- Social contract as a sensitive balance between the regime’s redistribution of gains in exchange for the populations’ loyalty in a context of very limited (if at all) democratic governance, strong elite capture, fear and coercion

  (Heydemann; Al-Razzaz…; Kamrava: diversified econ. basis)

- But: rural dimension neglected!
  (exc: Ayeb et al; Paciello et al; Gana)

  - Although rural concerns were at the origin of many revolts such as in Tunisia
  - And the problems at their origin persist
1. Introduction: the „rural social contract“

- In non-oil/gas countries (Maghreb), benefits from NR/agriculture important economic basis of the social contract/power relations (Leveau, Pascon, Waterbury, Pérènnes)
  - Gvts consolidated authority over rebellious countryside through water & land allocation
  - Elites monopolize access to water and land (before & after colonialism)
  - Regimes in non oil/gas countries were even less able to financially compensate growing discontent and lacking socioeconomic development

- Term of the „rural social contract“ to analyze and address persisting political economy of water and land use
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2. Three trends challenge the social contract: (1) resource degradation

Resource degradation challenges established patterns of use and redistribution

- **Availability of water and arable land is decreasing**: high environmental degradation, over-exploitation and climate change

- **But demand** for water and land is **still increasing** (irrigation, tourism, industry, urbanization…)

![Image of agricultural field and cracked earth](image-url)
2. Three trends challenge the social contract:
(1) resource degradation

Results in

- **Higher competition over land & water, growing inequalities** (access to irrigation water and systems, type of agric. production…)
- … further reinforcing env. degradation
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2. Three trends challenge the rural social contract: (2) agricultural policies

Agricultural policies favor financially strong and politically influential agricultural entrepreneurs

- **Promotion of export-oriented agriculture** (accessible mainly to rich farmers)
- **Privatization and concentration of land**: many state cooperatives privatized (MA), public land leased to private investors, PPPs mostly benefit elites
2. Three trends challenge the rural social contract: (2) agricultural policies

Goal of agricultural policies is mainly to boost private returns on investment and the national economy; not rural development/ small farmers‘ concerns
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2. Three trends challenge the rural social contract: (3) New rural actors

a) **Political and economic elites investing in agriculture**
   (politicians, business-men)

b) **Well-educated young people returning to the 'douar',**
   involved in local development (access to subsidies, national
development plans etc … but less to social networks of notables:
not -yet- politicians)

New leaders demonstrate

- More **independence** from state-controlled **sources of income**
- More **independence** from traditional **social networks**, notables
- **Renegotiation of the social order** (but mainly at local levels)
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3. Conclusion: which effects on rural social contract?
3. Conclusion

„Social contract as a sensitive balance between the regime‘s redistribution of gains in exchange for the populations‘ loyalty“

- Water and land still matter for the political economy: distribution of benefits (incl. laissez-faire)
- Term of a ‚rural social contract‘ to understand how these dynamics evolve
- This rural social contract is eroding/ being re-negotiated
3. Conclusion

The rural social contract is eroding/ re-negotiated

- **Economic basis changes**: less redistribution of benefits from natural resource use bc of land and water concentration/scarcity

- **Social basis changes**: increased role of private sector/businessmen but also of new local leaders

- ’Contract‘ questioned since states neglect their responsibilities towards the rural citizens

- **Common vision for a new rural social contract?**
  - Perspectives for rural development beyond private benefits?
  - Broader social mobilization in rural areas?
  - Environmental sustainability?
Thank you for your attention!

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