

### **Third Berlin Forum "Innovation in Governance", 31<sup>st</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012.**

Abstract for a paper on Topic 2: 'practices of innovating governance'

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The proposed paper addresses topic 2 of the Berlin Forum: 'practices of innovating governance'. In my paper, I use an analytical perspective from Science and Technology Studies to develop a new understanding of political dynamics, i.e. to contest an established order. In the paper, which is based on my DPhil research at the STEPS Centre, University of Sussex, I analyse Performance-based Monitoring (PBM) of rural water supply access in Ethiopia. I contest that PBM, at least in the case of monitoring access to rural water in Ethiopia, is not what it is conventionally portrayed as, namely a rational means to arrive at robust policy decisions.

I analyse PBM of rural water access in Ethiopia based on perspectives of the STEPS' Centre's approach to 'social appraisal' (Stirling, Leach et al. 2007). Appraisal relates to the ways in which knowledge is produced through different practices, approaches and tool (Smith and Stirling 2007). Smith and Stirling highlight two distinctions that apply to any type of appraisal: the breadth of inputs, which may be broad or narrow and the way in which outputs of social appraisal "'open up' or 'close down' the formation of discursive and material commitments in wider governance" (2007: 356). The same phenomenon can be appraised in different ways and with contrasting conclusions. This suggests that appraisals are subject to power. According to Stirling (2008), agents exercise power by framing the inputs into appraisal and by influencing their outputs.

In line with the STEPS Centre's approach, I analyse different actors' framings of access to rural water supply in Ethiopia and find that, PBM, as practised, embodies only a subset of the ways in which different actors frame the notion of 'water access'. Then, I use process tracing methods to explore a specific, crucial sub-process of PBM, the calculation of water supply access. Studying this process in detail, I find that specific dynamics emerge through which some particular framings and outcomes are suppressed while others are elevated. A powerful actor with the instrumental rationale of portraying national figures as progressing towards universal access to water supply closes down the debate on access calculations by imposing a specific calculation method that is in line with his desired outcome.

My findings suggest that PBM cannot always be understood in a rationalistic fashion as a means to arrive at the most robust policy decisions in water provision. Instead, PBM may be used as a means to 'close down' appraisal of alternative structures of service such as to justify those outcomes that are favoured by powerful actors for reasons entirely independent of those highlighted in PBM itself.

I argue that my analysis, based on perspectives from STS, provides an innovative way for scrutinising seemingly rational ways of decision making such as PBM, a topic that is currently high on the political agenda, not only in Ethiopia.

### **References**

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