

Re: Session 6 readings (Roe, plus Tendler):

Dear students,

After re-reading over the weekend the Emery Roe assignment for session 6, it occurred to me that it seemed to be a “natural” parallel to the attached article of mine:

Tendler, Judith (1993). “Executive Summary,” and “Reinventing the Projects” (chap 2). In: *New Lessons from Old Projects: The Workings of Rural Development in Northeast Brazil*. A World Bank Operations Evaluation Study. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

The comparison works because there are both strong differences between the two articles, and yet there are very strong “constants” running across the two:

FIRST: the dissimilarities of the two studies (which must be matched by strong similarities, so that something is held constant):

1. the programs they study are in two quite different continents—sub-Saharan Africa, and South America (in particular, Brazil);
2. the research on which Roe draws on was carried out throughout a longer and earlier period (1980s) than the Tendler research (early 1990s)—with the caveat that the Tendler piece looks retroactively at a ten-year period of implementation of these types of programs;
3. there is a seeming difference in the type of program or, at least, the research focus—Roe focusing mainly on agricultural and irrigation programs, Tendler on “integrated rural development programs,” of which agriculture and agriculture-related programs were a central part (and hence related infrastructure investments like roads, irrigation, etc.)

SECOND, the similarities: both researched programs of a similar nature—falling under the “integrated-rural-development” rubric:

1. both focus on focus on patterns running across the between the “blueprint” (Roe’s expression) for the program and outcomes on the ground.
2. both similarly focus on the drivers of outcomes that include political, political-economic, and institutional factors—while not ignoring the role of the technology and structure of the program;
2. in both, government entities and actors—whether national or international (particularly the World Bank in the two studies)—play a major role in the design and outcomes of the project, as well as in a using a common narrative about them that is different in certain ways from the reality.

3. both studies point out striking “disconnects” between what was intended and what actually happened on the ground. The purpose is not to criticize the design and implementation, but to reveal certain strengths and opportunities hidden by the disconnect, rather than sheer ignorance or a failure to criticize. The disconnect is represented, among other places, in public program documents and statements of program managers and policy makers, as well as in the language used by higher-level actors involved—in government as well as international agencies;

4. both studies not only do not end up criticizing “the disconnect,” but they: (I) seek to reveal the kinds of organizational, political, and other factors that drive these outcomes; and (ii) try to approach the matter in a way that recognizes the constraints and opportunities of these broader influences, all of which are familiar in the organizational and political-economy literature that you have been reading so far (and will continue to read more of).

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