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Does Decentralisation Help to Fight Poverty? The Case of Community-based Pasture User Committees in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

The paper explores the introduction of community-based pasture management in post-socialist Central Asia. It looks at the implementation of a new law “On pasture” that was enacted in Kyrgyzstan in January 2009. The law shifts management authority for 9.2 million hectares of pastures to community-based Pasture User Committees. The paper studies how these Pasture User Committees are being established and which mechanisms of exclusion affect the participation of the poor and vulnerable in these groups.

The paper draws on a comparative case study conducted in three different municipalities in the northern parts of Kyrgyzstan. The analysis showed that three overlapping processes of Pasture User Committee establishment occurred during 2009. First, local level administrators had crafted rules based on their interpretation of the new pasture law, second, rules were being established by a government-mandated implementing agency. In addition also, NGOs worked on the establishment of the Committees. The analysis showed that in all study cases, regardless of the implementation procedure the poor were excluded from participation. Field data suggest that pro-poor effects of decentralisation do not come without substantial efforts for ensuring effective participation. Even if the participation of poor is forcefully supported, which was the case for the implementation strategy employed by the government mandated agency, local factors, such as perceptions of legitimacy and pressure for time-saving procedures led to exclusion of poor pasture users in community-based Pasture User Committees. The paper concludes with policy relevant recommendations for ensuring pro-poor effects of the current pasture management decentralisation strategy under way in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: Decentralised natural resource management, Kyrgyzstan, pasture, poverty