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"Representation through Privatisation: Regionalisation of Forest Governance in Tambacounda, Senegal"

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Government officials, development agents and scholars showcase Senegal's 1996 regionalization reforms as a step towards the deepening of decentralisation. Yet this article shows that the reforms narrowed down local democracy via neoliberal processes. The reforms defined the regional councils as development intermediaries, to serve as a space for the negotiation of public-private partnership contracts between local governments and business interests. Focusing on Tambacounda Region of Senegal, the article analyses the effects of the reforms on forest governance at regional and rural-community scales. First, using two project case studies, it illustrates the use of forest management plans and project-based environmental committees in enabling privatisation of rural community forest governance at the expense of democratic processes. Second, it examines how the intermediary role of the regional council compromised its ability to represent the substantive interests of base-level rural communities and helped instrumentalise the council to promote different privatisation alternatives offered by "community-based" projects. This role was facilitated by a public-private development agency of the council. The discursive analysis of a regional council meeting illustrates that rather than offering a deliberative and participatory forum, council meetings were used to make representation claims about the "local people" and to push a market-based neoliberal rationality. (Text from author's abstract)

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