

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Beyond aid in the Ecuadorian Coastal Rural Communities' Development

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The critique of development cooperation focuses on state intervention and foreign assistance's negative outcomes. However, few analyzes include popular sovereignty as an integral factor in the effects of development cooperation. This analysis reveals positive outcomes emerging from international cooperation, through national programs, in collective territories on the coast in Ecuador. The manuscript argues that popular sovereignty, expressed through collective decisions, agreements and mediations has become a key factor for long-term local development. The comuneros, as native people living in communal territories in Ecuador are known, have drawn their own path within constant negotiation and mediation processes with NGOs, national and local government, private companies, etc. After twenty years of state intervention toward conservation and development, currently, rural coastal people are tourism entrepreneurs and family business owners. Under a post-developmental view, this research reveals that assistance is not negative as long as it allows peoples' self-determination in local development decisions. The ethnographic analysis combined with collaborative participation methods shows that the communal decision and the attachment to collective territory influence long-term outcomes of foreign cooperation for local development.

KEYWORDS: cooperation, popular sovereignty, local development, rural coast, tourism