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The Equitable Forest: Diversity, Community, and Resource Management, edited by Carol J. Pierce Colfer

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Equitable Forest: Diversity, Community, and Resource Management. Edited by Carol J. Pierce Colfer. Washington, D.C: Resources for the Future, and Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research, 2005. Pp 335. \$35.95 paper.

Forests conservation, once thought of as focusing on a broad notion of the public good, has increasingly paid attention to the distribution of costs and benefits among different stakeholder groups and social segments such as women and ethnic minorities. Even while governments have shifted the management of forests to communities, power differences among these groups have led to inequitable participation and benefits. The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) began an effort in the late 1990s to bring together two ongoing research projects—one on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management and one on the devolution of forest management (the transfer of formal authority from higher government levels to local governments and NGOs)—into a larger participatory action research project on Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM). *The Equitable Forest* reports on the resulting effort, which took place at 30 sites in 11 countries, and had a focus on gender and ethnic diversity. The book consists of an introduction, and 14 case-study chapters organized geographically into sections on Asia (Indonesia and Nepal), Africa (Cameroon and Zimbabwe), and South America (Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia), and a brief conclusion.

The action research agenda focused on diversity (grounded in gender studies), looked for win-win solutions or opportunities to manage conflicts, and had a practical version of a postmodern stance that emphasized polyvocality and rejected universal truths. In particular, the project explored eight promising approaches to strengthen equity in forest management: 1) training in transformative learning (cf. Paolo Friere); 2) devolution of community-level authority to even smaller groups; 3) multi-stakeholder workshops to develop common visions and plan joint activities; 4) multi-stakeholder visioning activities that used future scenarios to facilitate sharing of perspectives and identifying of interests; 5) collaboration with NGOs; 6) criteria and indicators; 7) participatory mapping of territories; and 8) cross visits among sites to share understandings.

The resulting book provides rich documentation of the processes that ensued in different research sites, with particular attention to processes of negotiating gender and ethnic diversity. True to the project's postmodern orientation and preference for local action, there is

wide diversity in the approaches used in different regions and research sites. There is also significant variation in the content of the chapters, ranging from detailed case studies, comparative studies, to more theoretically oriented and reflective chapters. In the end, the chief contribution of the book is as a compendium of reflections on the results of this effort by CIFOR and its collaborators.

The chapters in the Asia section emphasize processes of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that used stakeholder involvement and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques such as mapping and pebble-sorting to bring out different perspectives and manage conflicts among different stakeholder groups. Some of the authors go to great lengths to differentiate these techniques from research in the positivism tradition, suggesting that the techniques they used are more responsive to local conditions and less likely to be driven by ideas derived from social science theory, and therefore will result in more practical and participatory research activities that raise consciousness among, as well as empower, marginalized groups. The descriptions of the processes and activities in the research sites are clearly interesting and useful, but the results also show that the PAR activities at best only began a long process of change and empowerment, and that researchers' goals were not always shared by local people. The PAR efforts to challenge local culture, bring about rapid change in forest management processes, make informal boundaries clear, and change social relations at times seem to repeat many traditional patterns of research and development, and the chapter authors should, perhaps, have been more circumspect in their criticisms of other approaches and more tempered in extolling the expected virtues of the PAR methods. Nevertheless, many of us believe in the value of increasing representation and benefits for marginalized groups, and detailed descriptions of the efforts undertaken are extremely valuable.

Specifically in the Asia section, Anau et al. discuss the use of participatory boundary mapping as the beginning of collaborative management, highlighting both its usefulness in widening participation and the tenuous benefits of making historically changing and often ambiguous territories explicit. Hakim emphasizes the use of PAR and social learning to gradually increase stakeholder involvement and communication and start long-term processes of social change. Dangol provides an important discussion of the use of devolving community-based activities to the hamlet level as a way to increase the involvement of disadvantaged groups. Diaw and Kusumanto show how they facilitated a more plural awareness and "learning diversity" in Indonesia and Cameroon, and provide thoughts on the mutually beneficial

relationship that can occur between science and participation—with each strengthening the other.

In Africa, greater attention was focused on empowering marginalized ethnic groups and women. Chapters address this in several different contexts. Oyono discusses the importance of providing Pygmies access to resources and authority, which they have as yet been denied, and of bringing them into the forest management systems rather than driving them back into the forests where they will illicitly fell trees and hunt. Tiani et al. show how different resource use patterns and livelihood systems in two communities lead to very different options for women in response to globally driven conservation and resource extraction programs, and make some suggestions for implementing multi-level actions to promote involvement and collaboration. Nemarundwe provides rich descriptive detail on the formal and informal ways that women are involved in forest management in Zimbabwe, highlighting the importance of wider social processes and suggesting ways to organize projects to provide for greater involvement of women. Sithole similarly emphasizes the informal ways in which women assert power in resource management projects. Mutimukuru et al. describe their use of tools for social learning, and show how they used concrete techniques such as Training for Transformation workshops and experimentation.

Gender divisions are the main focus of the chapters in the South America section, with attention given to both household and community levels. Campbell et al. use linear programming and longitudinal ethnographic and survey data to unpack the household, discussing changes in agroforestry with the household life cycle to show how the distribution of benefits and incentives for agroforestry change with household composition and gender. Two chapters (Pokorny et al. and Porro and Stone) use women's experiences to reflect on issues and questions related to their participation in forestry projects. Cronkleton takes a more practical approach, detailing techniques used to broaden community participation, focusing on gender, in a forestry project in Bolivia. Bolaños and Schmink provide detailed analysis of women's and men's views about various aspects of the same forestry project, emphasizing the way in which community forestry is embedded in larger social communities.

Colfer ends the book with two discussions. The first provides some tips for forest managers and for policymaking, and is a very useful distillation of the practical implications of the cases presented in the book. The second provides some initial thoughts on two recurring issues in the book, power and cultural relativity. Regarding power, Colfer suggests that social scientists endeavor to shift their notions of power

from fixed structures and cognitive interpretations to a more interactive approach that emphasizes the role of human agency within structured systems, thereby bringing the focus on processes of change. Colfer has less to say about cultural relativity, but acknowledges that the focus of the larger ACM project on equity is a value that the researchers shared and to some extent were imposing on their research sites. Although brief, this acknowledgment is welcome, because many of the chapters leave the reader with a slightly unsettled feeling as they skim over the paradoxes inherent in outsiders facilitating collaborative processes and seeking to alter social relationships in local communities. In this regard, Pokorny et al.'s highly reflective chapter was very welcome for making many of these tensions explicit.

This is an important and useful book, primarily for its detailed case studies that span research and practice. Practitioners and community-based researchers will find the case studies thought-provoking and informative, as they will also find the examples of specific techniques for initiating processes of adaptive collaborative management of forests. More theoretically oriented scholars will find reading the same material very stimulating, as it reveals many tensions and conflicts between outside intervention and local empowerment, and collaborative approaches and science. Students of development and community-based forestry will benefit by having an opportunity to see how more general principles and ideas play out in real-world situations. There are no easy answers or quick solutions in collaborative management of forests, and this book respects the reader's intelligence (as well as the recipients of these interventions) by not trying to provide them; instead, it welcomes the reader onto a new platform for thinking about and discussing key issues, processes, and techniques.

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