

Palgrave Studies in Natural Resource
Management

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Editor

Global Forest Governance and Climate Change

Interrogating Representation,
Participation, and Decentralization

palgrave
macmillan

Editor

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Palgrave Studies in Natural Resource Management
ISBN 978-3-319-71945-0 ISBN 978-3-319-71946-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71946-7>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017961873

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Cover illustration: Getty/Anita Marks

Cover Design: Fatima Jamadar

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword

If you want to participate, please lend in a hand
do as we tell you and we'll tell you you can
if you listen look learn and do as we say
even democratization will be on its way.
We must protect forests from people like you
so that people with business will have business to do.

I wrote the above words in the 1990s while studying democratic decentralization in Senegal's forestry sector. While participation in forest management projects was meant to get local people to 'own' the projects and to shape them to their needs and aspirations, the projects all used participatory processes as a means of mobilization—a means to facilitate implementation of preconceived outside notions of forest management and use. Rather than being a means for empowering local people, participation was a means of facipulation—facilitated manipulation. Participation looked more like forced labor or *corvée* than voluntary engagement in a beneficial set of desired and locally relevant activities.

While participation is intended as a means of engaging and empowering local people, it is all too often a means to harness local people to labors of ostensibly 'scientific' (what I call *scientistical*) forest management—often for harvesting of forests, a perfectly legitimate objective,

but in the name of their conservation and protection. So, haven't we seen enough of participation and participatory processes? Isn't it time for substantive representation to evict participation, move in, and empower local people to negotiate to shape their own landscapes and to obtain their share of the wealth they produce. The 'wealth of the poor'—the great wealth of 'the bottom billion'—needs to remain the wealth of the poor. It is not a wealth to give as opportunity to the vultures of capitalism. They already extract from the rural world, leaving rural people with only a fraction of the wealth they generate by their labor and the resources around them.

Emancipation must be the new and primary procedural objective for international bodies that want to do good when implementing their operational objectives such as hectares under REDD+ (the UN program to reduce climate change by storing carbon in poor people's forests). The international community requires participation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as social protections under REDD+. This volume demonstrates the inadequacies and flaws in such 'protections'. REDD+ continues to grow its carbon sequestration aims—"regardless of crummies in tummies you know" (*The Lorax* Dr. Seuss). Carbon sequestration is important, but will never be worth the facipulated subordination of forest-dependent people. It does not justify imposition. It does not justify fascism—carbon fascism or any other kind.

We can only hope that this book is one of the last nails in the coffin of fictive social protections—those performed as spectacle rather than as substantive safeguards against domination and abuse. The means to represent and protect the interests of rural populations from international environment and development programs are legion. In forestry alone we have seen participatory, community-based, joint, co-managed, collaborative, community-driven, devolved and democratically decentralized interventions. And now we have FPIC. But, unfortunately, there is no longer any pretense that FPIC is a progressive protection since the day the World Bank played a sleight of hand by replacing the word Consent with Consultation—effectively saying 'we don't need consent; we have to consult you, and then we can impose our programs as we see fit'. If consent by the community *as a whole* is not required then there is no protection. If people cannot say no to interventions, they have no bar-

gaining position from which to reformulate them to their likings and needs. Rather than emancipation, they get ‘included’ to make the project look good and legitimate or just as labor—whether they like it or not.

Indeed, no social protection has teeth if the people being protected do not have substantive rights—starting with the right to say ‘no’ to the intervention; indeed, they need to be able to say ‘no’ to participation itself. No social protection has teeth if decision makers do not fully represent—that is are accountable to—the population concerned. And further, protections are toothless when they address so-called stakeholders who are identified at the convenience of the outside agency facilitating the process. The people holding the stakes in community-based affairs are the ‘citizens’—this means the people living in the jurisdiction of the public natural resources that are usually at stake in forest management and use programs. It does not mean the capitalist within an interest in razing the forest.

If a forest is under community jurisdiction then the timber merchant in the city and the forest service and the international environmental organizations or NGOs, regardless of the ‘stakes’ they think they hold, have zero say in FPIConsent—unless the community decides that they have a say and unless they convince the community to let them have a say. Outsiders may have an interest—the way a fox has an interest in a henhouse. But they do not and should not hold sway over community-forest use decisions. The typical ‘stakeholders’—merchants, foresters, environmentalists—cannot be trusted as the guardians of social wellbeing. Communities make decisions in the face of these outside interests—and communities should be able to negotiate with them. It is not for outsiders to decide what conditions are acceptable or to have a vote in local decisions. If communities have rights to a resource, they have rights to the resource.

Of course, there are many questions as to how rights are set and what decisions can competently be made locally to address multiple scales of interest, but if there is a decision at higher levels that a forest can be cut or that it must be reserved, then the community should be the one that decides who cuts and whether or not their labor will go into cutting or conservation. If a community forest is targeted for inclusion in REDD+, then it is the community that determines whether this is to happen and

under what terms. The drama is in the establishment of rights—for forests are often arbitrarily under national control or privatized to influential actors regardless of pre-existing historical claims or uses. These injustices in registered rights versus the claims are beyond any participatory process. They require serious higher-level deliberations that represent—in the most democratic sense—the community or other local claims.

FPIC/c processes are now the mode. Yet, for FPIC to constitute protection it must define its terms. The UN and World Bank do not state what 'Free' might mean in the context of programs like REDD+. Do communities have the freedom to engage or not engage? Do they have the freedom to question their governments or the forest service? Do they have the freedom to choose and challenge their leaders? Do they have freedom from threats, violence or retribution? Do they have freedom to choose alternative lives and livelihoods? Do they have the freedom, the right, to say 'no'? The term 'Prior' needs some investigation as well. In Mozambique, it can mean as little as two days—this is a scandal since it is too short for any serious public review process. Indeed, six months may be too short for a community to grasp the problems and potentials of many forestry and environmental management programs. A reasonably long time is needed—and perhaps that period should be determined by communities. 'Informed', as we have seen, is reduced to educating communities in the beliefs of the intervening agencies—training rather than empowering people with new, pertinent and complete information and knowledge. In FPIC and participatory processes people are 'informed' of all the wonderful benefits REDD+ programs will bring. They do not inform them of how much profit carbon vending entrepreneurs are making, they do not inform them of the incomes of development agents, and they often fail to inform them of the nature and distribution of risks—risks that usually fall on the community.

And then there is 'Consent', where it is not deboned and reduced to consultation. Consent is the big-ticket item. Who consents? Who represents the community? Who can say 'yes' or 'no' on behalf of citizens—on behalf of the forest-dependent populations whose lives and livelihoods and historical uses and claims are usually 'at stake'. Whither democracy? Despite most countries in Africa having elected local governments, they are rarely involved in forestry decisions. They are, as this volume shows,

circumvented for a variety of flimsy reasons: many view democracy as merely a jamboree of civil society organizations rather than as elected government. Alternatively, they circumvent elected authorities because democracy is too slow or local government is corrupt. It is true that democratic local governments are dysfunctional in much of the world. Does this mean international agencies should circumvent them? Should they just go into the local arena and operate as if these elected authorities do not exist. What if an African NGO came to Hoboken, New Jersey or Agrigento, Sicily and decided to improve a park. If they so much as went into a park and started digging to put in the pole for a basketball court or a slab on which to set a bench, they would find themselves in jail in minutes.

It does not matter if government is corrupt. You do not circumvent it. You work with it to improve it. You work with it in ways that establish checks and balances, accountabilities and transparency that make that government work for its people. You mobilize people to force representation. Corruption is not an excuse. Nor is slowness—a necessary characteristic of democracy. True dictatorship can be efficient. But it is not efficient in the long run as it veers away from investments and programs that serve the needs of the people. It is the obligation of international and national intervening agencies to support democratic process—even if (a) democracy gets them kicked out due to the word ‘no’, (b) democracy is slower than molasses and they cannot deliver the hectares under REDD+ or protection that their institutions would like to see, or (c) some of these institutions are corrupt and therefore working with them requires intensive work on transparency, accountability and guarantees. It is neocolonial hubris when international agencies circumvent government because it does not serve their objectives. This is not acceptable.

This circumvention of duly elected local authorities not only ignores the laws of most countries, but it delegitimizes effective representatives and misses the opportunity to strengthen this relatively new system of sub-national representation. Democracy is institutionalized participation. Work to institutionalize the values of emancipatory inclusion. Power asymmetries will not be overcome by recognition alone—more structural work is required to ensure that the rural poor are represented in decisions and that they retain a greater portion of the wealth they

generate. The many inequalities that protections are trying to address are part of larger histories and multi-scale structures of inequality that cannot be fought in the local arena alone. Representation is only one structural matter.

It is time to be angry about the abuses of rural communities, the structural violences that take place in the name of environmental protection, climate adaptation and mitigation, or development. This volume gives us some of the fodder for that anger. It helps us to sketch the outlines of a system that has gone awry, a system filled with well-intended operators whose intentions are still paving that age-old road. It is they who need training programs. Training in the actors, powers and accountability relations needed to support substantive democratic interventions. It is the intervening agencies that need to learn what democracy is and how to support it. If radically transformed into a progressive program that works with and through elected authorities with added guarantees that these interventions are seriously representative of local needs and aspirations, REDD+ could become a force for democracy, representation and justice in forestry and beyond. This volume helps show the way. Development agencies and practitioners, policy makers and representatives must read this—along with researchers and students of environmental policy and development.

19 December 2017

Jesse Ribot

Short Bio

Jesse Ribot is Professor of Geography, Anthropology, and Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at the University of Illinois, where he is affiliated with the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory and the Women and Gender in Global Perspective program, and he directs the Social Dimensions of Environmental Policy (SDEP) program. Before 2008, he worked at the World Resources Institute, taught in the Urban Studies and Planning department at MIT and was a fellow at the Department of Politics of The New School for Social Research, Agrarian Studies at Yale University, the Center for the Critical Analysis of

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Series Editor Foreword

Natural Resource Management (NRM)

The World Bank definition of Natural Resource Management is:

‘The sustainable utilization of major natural resources, such as land, water, air, minerals, forests, fisheries, and wild flora and fauna. Together, these resources provide the ecosystem services that underpin human life.’

NRM covers a very wide range of interwoven resource areas, management processes, threats and constraints; including aquatic ecosystems, natural resources planning and climate change impacts. Similarly, NRM professionals are very diverse in their qualifications and disciplines.

There is a significant and growing sector for NRM services and the worldwide market for this sector was almost \$30 billion in 2015, according to Environment Analyst.

This book series will have a focus on applied, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches, bringing together professionals to publish titles across the global sector.

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- Global approaches and principles
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The issues covered in this series are of critical interest to advanced level undergraduates and Masters Students as well as industry, investors and practitioners.

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Justin Taberham

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