

## CHAPTER 15

**Exclusive, moi? Natural resource management, poverty, inequality and gender in Asia**

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**Introduction**

Writing about CBNRM these days brings to mind the musician Van Morrison's comments on love: 'There are no more words to say about it.' Yet plenty of poets and singers keep writing about love. So what else can be said about CBNRM?

A lot is known about the dynamics of CBNRM. However, this chapter takes the discussion one step further by analysing exclusion and inclusion across the countries whose case studies are included in this book. We have focused on the case study findings, which are supported by a literature review. First of all, this chapter illustrates some broad trends in Asia related to poverty and social differentiation, in order to contextualize challenges faced by practitioners and action researchers working on CBNRM. Then it succinctly covers relevant theories that attempt to explain issues of exclusion, poverty and inequality in relation to CBNRM. Our purpose is to analyse how far current theorizing explains the dynamics of local resource management.

The main section of the chapter ties this theory to findings at the field level and asks what these action research cases tell us about intra-community relations, poverty and inequality. After this, implications for future research, policy and practice are considered. The chapter focuses specifically on intra-community issues of social and gender equity and inequity. We recognize that inequities between different geographical communities and conflicts between communities and external actors have been driving forces in the creation of CBNRM, and continue to be significant elements of its dynamics. However, we deliberately set these latter elements aside for the purposes of this chapter.

Why did we decide to focus on socio-economic dynamics as well as exclusion and inclusion? Primarily because there are several gaps in the current understanding of what happens when CBNRM is introduced by external actors. First, much collective action literature and many cases (see 'Conceptual issues' below) which dominate the CBNRM field deal with these areas sporadically at best. Second, many government policies at least implicitly support fair societies and explicitly support poverty reduction. As well, many donor programmes,

including those of the IDRC, consider the promotion of equity as central to their mandate and vision (Ford Foundation, 2004; Gonsalves and Mendoza, 2003). But there has been little analysis of what this means in practice. Third, issues related to poverty and gender must take a higher profile in CBNRM planning and practice. We argue that even a well-intentioned emphasis on participation and collective action that fails to adopt specifically proactive measures towards gender and poverty is likely to exacerbate local inequities.

Attempting to take a pan-Asian perspective is impractical in a short chapter such as this, so here are our disclaimers. Our attention to theory is not intended to provide any new frameworks or concepts, but rather to examine what has been written about inclusion and exclusion. We have focused on the countries whose case studies are mentioned in this book, but we have included India because it has generated a substantial literature. However, we do not pretend to have anything comprehensive to say about CBNRM in these countries. Nor do we attempt to summarize significant social processes across several diverse Asian countries. What we have done is ask a number of questions about the cases as far as inclusion and exclusion are concerned, in order to provide some pointers to key areas which need to be systematically tracked.

As we note in 'Conceptual issues' below, most authors display a normative bias towards a particular perspective on CBNRM. The most common is one which goes beyond treating CBNRM as merely the decentralization of management of natural resources, such as forests and water, towards an approach which links community-based management to tenure, rights and poverty reduction. Our own perspective has been moulded by the belief that CBNRM advocates and practitioners should ensure that their interventions promote equality and reduce poverty. This means it is crucial that these people possess an adequate understanding of the society in which they intervene. We discuss some of the implications of this perspective below.

### **Trends in poverty, inequality and governance in Asia**

What has been the broad socio-economic context for the introduction of CBNRM? Here we describe some relevant trends that have affected how these interventions have played out, although there is limited scope for a detailed analysis of causes and consequences of these trends.

Although macro-level figures always need to be read cautiously, key trends are fairly clear. Quality of life as defined by the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) has improved, albeit slowly, across most of Asia over the last 10 years (UNDP, 1995; 2004). Poverty as defined by narrower measures such as the head-count ratio<sup>1</sup> has also declined through the 1990s, albeit unevenly, in most of the region and in some cases quite dramatically. The head-count poverty ratio in East Asia and the Pacific declined from approximately 27 per cent in 1987 to roughly 15 per cent in 1998, and in South Asia from 45 per cent to 40 per cent in the same period (ESCAP, 2003; IFAD, 2002). The poor in Asia can be described as being predominantly female, often part of female-headed

households, landless, indigenous and internally displaced, socially excluded as in the case of scheduled castes in India, victims of land mines, and both pastoralists and coastal fishers (IFAD, 2002). Throughout Asia they are also disproportionately dependent on the natural resource base to sustain and improve their livelihoods.

We are seeing overall decreases in head-count ratio measures of poverty. However, existing intra-country inequalities, which were already quite high in comparison with the global situation, have remained the same or increased. For example, as measured by the Gini coefficient,<sup>2</sup> inequality has increased in Laos from 0.29 to 0.36 and in China from 0.26 to 0.38 between 1982 and 2002 (World Bank, 2004; ESCAP, 2003). This partly reflects widening urban and rural

**Table 15.1** Gender-related Development Index (GDI), with ranking in brackets (out of 130 countries in 1995 and 144 in 2004)

Country	1995	2004	Change in % <sup>a</sup>
Bhutan	–	–	
Cambodia	–	0.557 (105)	
China	0.578 (71)	0.741 (71)	28.2
India	0.401 (99)	0.572 (103)	42.6
Laos	0.405 (96)	0.528 (107)	30.4
Mongolia	0.596 (67)	0.664 (94)	11.4
Philippines	0.625 (64)	0.751 (66)	20.2
Vietnam	0.537 (74)	0.689 (87)	28.3

Note: a. Calculation: (2004 figure – 1995 figure) / 1995 figure.

Sources: UNDP, 1998, 2004.

**Table 15.2** Human Development Index (HDI), with ranking in brackets (out of 174 countries in 1995 and 177 in 2004)

Country	1992 <sup>a</sup>	1995 <sup>b</sup>	2004	Change in % <sup>c</sup>
Bhutan	0.305 (160)	0.347 (155)	0.536 (134)	54.5
Cambodia	0.337 (153)	0.422 (140)	0.568 (130)	34.6
China	0.594 (111)	0.650 (106)	0.745 (94)	14.6
India	0.439 (134)	0.451 (139)	0.595 (127)	31.9
Laos	0.421 (138)	0.465 (136)	0.534 (135)	14.8
Mongolia	0.604 (110)	0.669 (101)	0.668 (117)	–0.1
Philippines	0.677 (100)	0.677 (98)	0.753 (83)	11.2
Vietnam	0.539 (120)	0.560 (122)	0.691 (112)	23.4

#### Notes

a. The UNDP 1995 *Human Development Report* features the HDI figures from 1992.

b. 1995 figures as featured in the UNDP 1998 *Human Development Report*.

c. Calculation as in Table 15.1, based on the 1995 figures in the 1998 UNDP *Human Development Report*.

Sources: UNDP, 1995, 1998, 2004

disparities, an effect of marketization in Asia. At the same time, as measured by the UNDP Gender and Development Index, between 1995 and 2004 gender equality improved in all the countries studied in this book. In some cases, improvement has been quite substantial and occurred at a higher rate than the HDI for all study countries

However, significant gender inequality persists in all case study countries and has been a major factor related to CBNRM, as discussed below. Although gender equality has improved, it has done so at a slower rate than in other regions.

Geographical and ethnic inequalities are also common, in particular between lowlands on the one hand, and uplands and coastal regions, on the other. For example, while countrywide poverty in Vietnam decreased from 58 per cent in 1993 to about 29 per cent in 2002, poverty in the Central Highlands remained the highest, at about 52 per cent, with ethnic minorities displaying a poverty rate as high as 69 per cent (ADB, 2004). IFAD (2002: vii) comments that:

The indigenous populations who live in the uplands – the hills and mountainous areas which cover almost half the total area of Asia – have perhaps been hit hardest by this process of de facto (at times de jure) exclusion and marginalization ... Policies for indigenous peoples have, so far, been framed mainly with a view to the benefits that can be extracted for outside economies. Whether it is for irrigation or power supply, whenever it is deemed necessary for the national interest, indigenous peoples have been displaced – with most of them losing their livelihoods – to make way for dams. What the states covet from the hill-forest areas are also their resources, like the timber and minerals that they extract from local economies. In most cases, the indigenous peoples do not own the forest and mineral resources of their economies. As a result, revenues from mines and forests accrue to the economies of the lowlands.

Conflicts arising from what has been called an economy of pillage are perhaps most vividly described in this volume in the cases depicting struggles between logging companies and ethnic minorities in Cambodia (Chapters 3 and 11).

Another key contextual feature related to CBNRM is the rollback of the state in all the case study countries, complemented by the interlocking processes of marketization, privatization and decentralization. As Agrawal and Gibson (2001: 1) comment: 'The poor conservation outcomes that followed decades of intrusive resource management strategies and planned development have forced policymakers and scholars to reconsider the role of community in resource use and conservation.' CBNRM has been part of extensive privatization and decentralization of management and in some cases control of natural resources throughout Asia. But as IFAD (2002: 52) argues: 'The emphasis of such devolution has been the sustainability of resources used by all, rather than poverty reduction through securing livelihoods for the poor.' And in several countries policy interventions leading to marketization, decentralization and privatization have led to the exclusion of the poor and increasing inequality.

To provide some examples from the case study countries, Fujita and Phanvilay (2004) discuss how the Laos land and forest allocation policy exacerbated inequities between rich and poor, and the landed and landless. Poorer households, in particular those that practise shifting cultivation and depend on forest resources to support their livelihoods, became further marginalized. This occurred after the state imposed new boundaries that differed from customary resource use practices. These restricted their access to swidden and forest resources, a pattern which has become common in other parts of Asia (Li, 1999). In Cambodia, the privatization and enclosure of state-owned but communally managed fisheries is reported to have led to increased social differentiation and conflict. When the colonial system of fishery lots was reintroduced in the 1990s, enclosure of the most productive fisheries by an elite group significantly reduced poor people's access to fish. The lots were protected by heavily armed guards and violent conflict with local resource users became common. The more unproductive fishing areas that had remained accessible experienced increased pressure because more fishers depended on them. The poorest sectors of society were most affected, including women, ethnic minorities and displaced people. After the 1997 riots around Tonle Sap Lake and heavy flooding in 2000, donor pressure forced the government to return half the fishing lots to the communities for management by the village fishery communities themselves (Tarr, 2003).

Similarly, in Vietnam, land titling has meant the problem of concentrated land ownership and landless agricultural labourers has re-emerged. In addition, customary and proprietary rights to the gathering and use of certain plants, which were often held by women, are usually not reflected in land titles registered in the name of one individual (Razavi, 2002). The Tam Giang lagoon case in Vietnam (Chapter 4), which is also highlighted in this chapter, provides an important example of how increasing privatization of lagoon resources and changes in production systems led to exclusion of the most marginalized groups, which in turn led to conflict.

Evidence from South Asia indicates that the poor's access to CPRs is being eroded by several factors. These include privatization, encroachment from the rich, government and corporate schemes such as plantations, and the commoditization of CPRs. All shift access to men and the better-off (Beck and Ghosh, 2000; Beck and Nesmith, 2001). Agricultural intensification has led to the reclamation of wastelands, pastures and marshes, the privatization or enclosure of common areas and the degradation of forests followed by stricter access controls. These authors note there is also evidence suggesting that the decentralization of NRM in South Asia has often complemented rather than halted or reversed these processes.

Less is known about the relations between exclusion, inequality and decentralization of forest management in South-East Asia, China, Bhutan and Mongolia. In part this is because decentralization has come to these areas later than in South Asia, with the possible exception of the Philippines. Social and community structures also differ. Therefore, it is uncertain if South Asian processes will be repeated elsewhere in Asia.

Initial research suggests that exclusive processes in India are being repeated in some Asian countries as a result of the decentralization of NRM. For example, IFAD (2002: 51) notes:

IFAD provided funding to CIFOR [Centre for International Forestry Research] for an analysis of various Asian experiences with the devolution of forest management. The conclusion was that the decentralization of forest management in China, India and The Philippines, has been dominated by the agenda of either the forest departments and/or local elites. The forest departments emphasized timber production; and the participation of the local elites led either to low priority – or no space at all – for the livelihood needs of poorer categories including women.

Barr et al. (2002) and McCarthy (2001) report similar findings from Indonesia; as do Resurreccion, Real and Pantana (2004) in relation to water resources in Thailand. The picture which consistently emerges is that interventions such as decentralization and privatization have exacerbated rural inequity instead of ameliorating it.

New forms of resource management are being introduced across Asia as poverty is slowly decreasing, while privatization and inequality grow, and while poor people – and particularly poor women – are being increasingly excluded from customary access to natural resources. This is the overall context in which we must examine the local impacts on poverty and inequality and the stories from these cases.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that poor resource users are merely pawns in a globalization game whose main aim is to provide resources for an elite of global gluttons. Both historical and current studies show these users display remarkable wherewithal particularly given the odds they face (Thompson, 1975; Scott, 1985). Therefore, these macro-level figures hide many local situations where the micro level does not match the macro; where against all odds, poor ethnic women have managed to achieve significant improvements in their livelihoods, or where communities in marginalized regions have organized themselves to work their way out of poverty.

Simultaneously, a sense of balance is required so as not to romanticize the resilience of poor resource users. Chances are that if you are a poor, ethnic, landless woman in an Asian coastal or mountain region, you may have experienced some improvements in your quality of life. However, you are more likely to have seen the gap between yourself and your better-off neighbours grow. In addition, you probably have the same difficulties making ends meet as you did 20 years ago, as well as being increasingly alienated from the natural resource base.

### **Conceptual issues**

In this section we examine hypotheses provided by recent theory in relation to conflict, inequality, exclusion and poverty. Much CBNRM theory is marked by

three characteristics: it is directed at other theorists; it is couched in somewhat obscure language (e.g. 'articulated space'); and it is earnest in tone. Despite our reservations, we think theory can be very helpful to practitioners if it provides an explanation why things happen at a local level. By 'local' we mean the actual location of the village, commune, or even district and region.

Most theorists agree that inequality, exclusion, conflict, gender and ethnicity are important to CBNRM. Johnson (2004) has divided common property theorists into two schools. One consists of 'collective action' scholars, such as Ostrom, Baland and Platteau, and Agrawal. Their primary interest is in rules, regulations, incentives and management structures supporting collective action for NRM. They have also been called new institutionalists, because of their focus on how institutions that can sustainably manage natural resources are formed and maintained. Agency, as viewed by collective action scholars, mainly concerns group formation and dynamics (Ostrom, 1992).

The other consists of 'entitlement' theorists, including Ribot, Agarwal and Peluso (Johnson, 2004: 415), who are 'centrally concerned with the problem of inequality, and with the ways in which formal and informal rules create and reinforce unequal access to common pool resources (or CPR). Implicit (and often explicit) in the entitlement literature is the normative assertion that socio-economic equality or, at least, a reduction in poverty, is desirable.' Agency for entitlement theorists mainly concerns ways in which the resource-poor are excluded from or include themselves in access to resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

Johnson argues that there is limited intellectual interchange between these two schools. However, we suggest there is a middle ground between them currently being occupied by research such as that of the Collective Action and Property Rights Initiative (Meinzen-Dick and Di Gregorio, 2004).

There are two main areas of disagreement between these theorists that are relevant to this chapter. The first relates to how conflict over natural resources is understood. Johnson notes (2004: 418): 'Conflict, of course, does play a role in the collective action literature, but it is most commonly understood in terms of a bargaining scenario, in which individuals and groups negotiate and pursue strategies that will best meet their individual and collective interests.' Incentives for collective action, the effects of heterogeneity of groups and, increasingly, market and technological influences are all analysed in detail (Baland and Platteau, 1999; Varughese and Ostrom, 2001; Ostrom et al., 2002).

In the entitlement literature, conflict and bargaining between classes, men and women, and different ethnic groups are central elements related to individual and group identity as well as the control of natural resources. From this perspective, power relations heavily influence access to and control over resources and benefits, and are essential to understanding how institutions govern the use of natural resources. However, Ostrom et al. (2002: 471) note that we do not know enough about CBNRM and conflict. 'The need for least-cost methods of conflict management has long been recognized in the resource

management context ... but little research has been given to this aspect of institutional design.'

Understanding intra-community conflict, which we examine below in the section entitled 'Inequality, poverty and gender: evidence from the field', and how it is or is not resolved, is important. It allows us to understand why certain groups are excluded from resource management and use and to design action research, policy and local interventions. If we conceptualize conflict mainly in terms of incentives or class struggle, then our solutions to natural resource issues are likely to differ quite dramatically. But what is often missing is how those involved in CBNRM view conflict. Their perspectives might differ radically from an outsider's viewpoint; which is why research such as that carried out by Tuyen et al., Ykhanbhai and Bulgan, Tubtim, and Nong and Marschke (Chapters 4, 6, 7 and 8 respectively), as discussed in the next section, is important in terms of understanding how to design policies and programmes that fit with local realities.

The second area of disagreement among theorists is whether CBNRM leads to greater or less inequality, and related to this, an increase or reduction in poverty. Collective action scholars tend to think that collective action structures support equality. However, for the most part, in their work they appear to be referring to customary, or pre-CBNRM initiatives. Two quotes illustrate this point (emphasis added).

With detailed historical and contemporary evidence, scholarship on the commons has shown that resource users often create institutional arrangements and management regimes that help them allocate **benefits equitably**, over long time periods, and with only limited efficiency losses. (Agrawal, 2001: 1649).

Most [collective action studies of the commons] have an implicit sense of successful institutions as those that last over time, constrain users to safeguard the resource, **and produce fair outcomes** ... Their focus on local institutions and resources is understandable in light of their objective: to show that common property arrangements can result in efficient use, **equitable allocation**, and sustainable conservation. (Agrawal, 2001: 1650).

Several important examples tell us that egalitarian access to village CPR can exist in differentiated societies. When irrigation allows land to be cultivated, communities that have a highly asymmetrical social structure sometimes ensure that new land is distributed to all members (Baland and Platteau, 1996: 310).

Equally, Guha (1989) argues that historical and relatively equitable forms of resource management existed in the Garhwal and Kumuan regions of the western Himalayas in India. Agarwal (2001) stresses that historical forms of communal resource management in India typically recognized the rights of all villagers.

Entitlement scholars focus on inequality and exclusion, but mainly with reference to recent state or donor agency supported CBNRM initiatives, such as the joint forest management in India:



The literature is replete with cases of groups using the state and other forms of authority to recognize and enforce their claim over natural resources. (Johnson, 2004: 418).

**Our evidence ... suggests that unless management regimes are specifically designed to include poor people, and particularly poor women, then 'community'-based natural resource management may be externally supported control by elites.** (Beck and Nesmith, 2001: 130, emphasis added)

There is a growing body of evidence illustrating that participatory approaches included in CBNRM lead to exclusion for some groups (Menzies, 2006; Agarwal, 2001; Cornwall, 2002; Sarin, 2001; Sundar, 2000; but for alternative views see Johnson, 2001; Foster and Rosenzweig, 2001). Such evidence suggests that the development of formal institutions for CBNRM such as user groups often does not support meaningful participation by women, poor and marginalized groups. Most of the evidence on either side of the argument, however, comes from a limited number of cases; for example collective action scholars are fond of McKean's (1986) research on Japan. Entitlement theorists have relied heavily on studies from India. Much research has been carried out in those locations which prove that CBNRM leads to greater exclusion of the poor, in particular poor women, who are most dependent on natural resources (Kumar, 2002; Agarwal, 2001; Beck and Nesmith, 2001; Leach, Mearns and Scoones, 1999; Sarin, 2001; Sundar, 2000; but see the section above for studies from elsewhere in Asia which arrive at similar conclusions).

The relation between CBNRM and poverty reduction is not well covered by scholars from either school. Reasons remain unclear, although it may be that NRM is still often defined as a technical sphere, which excludes detailed attention to socio-economic dynamics. We define poverty reduction broadly here to mean not only an increase in incomes but also an improvement in a household's asset base and in livelihoods in general.<sup>3</sup> First, we need to understand the impact of devolution in general on poverty reduction. Ribot (2002: 17) argues:

Central governments tend to be more generous toward the poor than local governments. In decentralizations concerning natural resources, inequitable local decision making and benefit distribution is frequently observed. Local elites may be more prejudiced against the poor than those at higher levels. Dominant ethnic groups can use their new powers to take advantage of weaker ones. Yet, poverty alleviation is often assumed to be one of the positive outcomes of decentralized governance. On the contrary, a very important comparative study of decentralization and poverty alleviation concludes that 'responsiveness to the poor is quite a rare outcome,' and 'positive outcomes are mainly associated with strong commitment by a national government or party to promoting the interests of the poor at the local level.

A review of evidence from 19 case study countries (OECD, 2004: 7) also found that:

an unambiguous link between decentralisation and poverty reduction cannot be established. In some of the poorest countries characterised by weak institutions and political conflicts, decentralisation could actually make matters worse. Interestingly, the poverty impact of decentralisation would appear to depend less on the physical country setting, for example a country's size or quality of infrastructure, than on the capacity and willingness of policy makers to ensure a pro-poor devolution process.

This points to the need for strong central policy direction, as discussed in the conclusions to this chapter.

There has been some recent attention to this issue from a theoretical perspective. Thorp, Steward and Heyer (2003) hypothesized that the chronic poor participate less in groups because of a lack of assets (education, capital, social status); a lack of access to markets and networks; a lack of rights (citizenship, territorial claims), and because 'the chronically poor are disadvantaged in group formation, and this may form a significant part of the vicious circle and dynamics of chronic poverty' (p. 1).

Di Gregorio et al. (2004: 3–4) comment on the lack of research in this area. This is surprising given the attention of governments and international agencies to poverty reduction. The authors note:

Much recent work on property rights and collective action focus on their roles in natural resource management (NRM), rather than on how they can contribute to poverty reduction ... Despite the importance of property rights and collective action for poverty reduction, there is still a knowledge gap regarding exactly how the poor are affected by changes in the property rights regime. Further research is required to directly address the question of how poverty shapes men's and women's incentives and abilities to engage in collective action ... and maintain claims to resources on the one hand, and how different property rights and collective action institutions affect the poor, women, and marginalized groups on the other.'

From what we currently know, we must ask whether CBNRM processes are likely to lead to more or less poverty reduction. This question is especially pertinent when we broadly define poverty reduction as an improvement in livelihoods of poor women and men. For instance, what happens over a five- or 10-year period when a new form of resource management is adopted? Do everyone's incomes rise while inequality stays the same? Or is there some other shift in income patterns? And perhaps more importantly to some poor people (or so some of them have said when asked what they think is important): do their relative bargaining power and respect improve within the household or between households?

Clearly these are not arcane intellectual questions but are central to the daily experience of the inclusion and exclusion of poor resource users across Asia. If,

as many entitlement theorists have suggested, the introduction of CBNRM leads to the exclusion of the poor and in particular poor women from participation and decision-making, CBNRM presumably also excludes them from benefits. And given the importance of CPR to poor women across Asia (Chapter 7; IFAD, 2002; Beck and Nesmith, 2001; Ireson-Doolittle and Ireson, 1999), this must contribute to decreased income and depleted livelihoods.

Therefore, more action research is required that analyses who has an influence on decisions and who benefits from resource use, so that interventions can be designed better to support gender equality and improvements in the livelihoods of the poor.

### **Inequality, poverty and gender: evidence from the field<sup>4</sup>**

#### ***Poverty, exclusion and intra-community conflict***

IDRC's research programme selected project sites in marginal environments, in particular, coastal and upland zones, in order to work with poorer communities reliant upon the natural resource base, and whose access to it was probably declining. Research sites were specifically chosen from among the poorest regions of the countries. A key aim was to help poor communities improve their livelihoods by ensuring they have a stronger role in planning and decision-making regarding the natural resources on which they depend.

However, it is important to remember that geographical targeting does not necessarily mean that the livelihoods of the most marginalized in specific communities are being supported. The case studies suggest that in some cases IDRC partners recognized that intra-community equity issues were important, but that such efforts were not universal and were generally at an early stage of execution. These partners were able to present only limited evidence.

Although not always obvious in these case studies, in order to support local capacity during their action research several project teams took what might be termed a livelihoods approach to their work. In addition to supporting local user groups for the management of natural resources, project teams also responded to local needs and requests by taking a holistic view of their action research. In several cases the local resource base was overexploited. Because of this, either alternative sources of livelihoods had to be developed or innovative technologies adopted to increase productivity. The researchers' approach to CBNRM rapidly spread beyond strictly resource-based activities to a range of other collective initiatives that were often conducted in a participatory fashion. Some of these initiatives were specifically targeted to support poorer households.

Examples discussed in the cases that supported the livelihoods of the poor included: women's income-generating groups in Mongolia; pig production and home gardening in Hong Ha in the Vietnam uplands; peach and strawberry production in China; and mangrove replanting in the PMMR case in Cambodia. Three cases noted improvement or development of a drinking-water system as a key intervention. This will probably be of considerable benefit to poor women

who usually have to carry water, as long as they retain access to the resource. It will be important for researchers to track and further document the impacts of these livelihood interventions to relate how they, in association with the development of user groups, affect the marginalized over the longer term.

One of the strengths of the case studies in this volume is how they bring to light the complex interactions between people and their environment. Exclusion, inclusion and conflict and its resolution are central to this. Unless an attempt is made to understand this complexity, outsiders will usually misinterpret issues when trying to intervene. These cases bridge the chasm between the complexities of rural life and the need for policy and programme planning that is capable of following these communities' unique internal and often much simpler logic.

In this section, drawing on the case studies, we highlight some of the main intra-community issues arising from the action research. In the next section, we discuss gender and participation, bringing in the wider literature where appropriate. The case studies reveal contradictory findings in terms of who gains and who loses from the introduction of CBNRM. This is not surprising given the range of countries, cultures and resources involved.

Tubtim's Laos case (Chapter 7) delineates some of the subtleties of the trade-offs villagers must make when resource management regimes change and CBNRM is introduced. In the Nong Bua wetland, villages that were excluded from what was previously an open-access resource were willing to accept exclusion. This was in part because Kaengpho village used the enclosed resource for collective purposes and redistributed benefits to poor people. As we noted above, it is relatively rare for case studies to examine the poverty reduction effects of CBNRM, but in this case Tubtim concludes:

In fact, some of the village's poor gained a larger proportion of the benefit, especially the women. After Nong Bua was exclusively fished by Kaengpho people, these women could catch some shrimp and buy fish from the other fishers in the village for trading. The women were able to sell them to Kaengpho families who did not often fish and to outside communities without any competition from the excluded villages ... At the same time, according to the village head, he and other wealthier members of the village gave up benefits because the new rules prohibited the use of their gill nets. These decisions added to the village committee's good reputation and their claim demonstrated their commitment to collective benefit.

We discussed in the previous section Baland and Platteau's (1996) point that egalitarian access to village CPR can exist in differentiated societies. While Tubtim does not argue egalitarian access, she analyses a kind of patron-client relationship that involves the redistribution of resources. The inequities of such a relationship are another matter. But Tubtim ties the success of the redistribution to the culture of socialism in which collective benefits have become normative social values. Powerful local elites may accept new and more equal institutional structures if the outcomes are consistent with such values.

Similarly, in their case on Cambodian community forestry (Chapter 11), Kamnap and Ramony found that one community forestry committee organized a pool of finances and supplies to allow the poorest five families to construct housing. As well, in recognizing the importance of forest resources to the poor, one owner of a private forest allowed poorer households access to this resource. Perhaps this is a case of what Beck and Nesmith (2001: 120) mean when defining CPR as: 'an indigenous system which works through unequal power structures to provide significant benefits to the poor'.

In studying access to resources, training and technologies by different social and gender groups in Hong Ha commune, the researchers found that it is usually richer farmers and those who have higher or better social status in a community who participate more in, and have better access to, donor or government extension projects (Sen and An, 2006). There were similar findings from parts of the Tam Giang lagoon in Vietnam, discussed below.

A further theme from the case studies is intra-community tension and its resolution. Entitlement theorists tend to conceptualize natural resources as a central axis of class, gender and ethnic conflict. This is particularly true in the context of rapidly industrializing societies. While we feel there is much truth in this conceptualization, the case studies point to a complex situation where communities must come to terms with changing resource regimes either among themselves, or with outsiders' support. Findings from three of the case studies discussed below suggest that external facilitation, which has the specific purpose of reducing inequalities and resolving conflicts, will be required to ensure that changes in resource regimes do not lead to the further marginalization of poorer groups.

Central to assessing inclusion and exclusion processes is the determination of who actually participates in resource management committees or user groups, including who participates over time. Throughout Asia, governments may sign co-management agreements with the community or decentralize the management of resources. However, often there is no analysis of who controls the governing committee, and hence, who has the formal power to decide on rights governing the access and use of resources (Agrawal, 2001). Members of such committees are often those more politically powerful, wealthier, of the dominant ethnic group or caste, and often men (Ribot, 2002). Membership rights, in the case of forest management and water user committees, often require land ownership and are limited to heads of households who are permanent residents (Sundar, 2000; Zwarteveen and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). This effectively excludes other resource users, particularly the poorest, from having any voice or decision-making power in the management of the resource. Those people who are excluded may be pastoralists and shifting cultivators, poorer residents who do not own land, or women who are not usually either heads of households or owners of land titles (Sundar, 2000).

Consequently, participation in local institutions and decision-making concerning resources are heavily influenced by and embedded within community social and power relations. Supporting community processes for

collective action does not automatically address issues of equality and inclusion, and may or may not exacerbate inequities. Hence, it is important 'not to romanticize the concept of collective action, but rather to understand group formation, group dynamics and power relations, and to examine how decisions are made in terms of participation, making, monitoring and enforcing agreements, and who benefits and loses from these processes' (Di Gregorio et al., 2004: 23). In the following case studies, the model that has been promoted by IDRC and partners involves bringing together as many stakeholders as possible for participatory discussion in order to overcome some of the more common problems with CBNRM.

A detailed account of intra-community tensions is given in the case of the Tam Giang lagoon in central Vietnam, as analysed by Tuyen et al. (Chapter 4). Covering two quite distinct ecologies in the same lagoon, this case illustrates that privatization of common property resources hurts the poor. It also shows how external intervention aimed at conflict resolution may be central to enabling all groups to participate, and thus at least ameliorate the effects of privatization and decentralization. Most households around the Tam Giang lagoon rely on aquaculture and fishing for their main livelihoods. However, approximately 1,500 households live on boats and rely on fishing using mobile gear, rather than fixed nets or traps in the lagoon. These people comprise the poorest of the poor and are heavily dependent on aquatic resources for food and income. This supports our hypothesis, noted above, that it is usually the poorest who are most dependent on the natural resource base to support their livelihoods. Moreover, this is the group most likely to be affected by changes in resource regimes.

*Doi moi* reforms in Viet Nam did not include policy direction for lagoons; instead these were privatized in an ad hoc fashion. In the middle lagoon at Tam Giang, new technologies and policy support led to an increase in net-enclosure aquaculture. In addition, the numbers of households participating in aquaculture increased and the numbers of net-enclosures and fish pens rapidly expanded. One consequence was the exclusion of poor mobile fishers from their customary fishing grounds when resources came under the direct control of wealthier users. Although smaller-capacity fishers had to compete for lagoon resources in the past, the intensity of competition and conflict now increased, with mobile fishers relying on the narrow waterways between net-enclosures. Government attempts at conflict resolution only exacerbated the situation. Without third-party intervention specifically aimed at managing this conflict, the livelihoods of mobile fishers were in decline and conflict increased.

However, in the northern lagoon, the research team played a central role in supporting interventions aimed at conflict resolution. The case argues against much of the literature cited in this chapter, demonstrating that CBNRM may indeed promote greater equality and the shared control of resources.

In Quang Thai, one of the poorest communities in the northern lagoon, the researchers supported a targeted pro-poor programme, providing training and technical advice in cage aquaculture and subsidies for the poorest households.

With trust having been developed after a history of working in the village, the researchers were able to promote participatory planning processes. A new user organization, a Fishing Coalition, was created for the management of the lagoon, and included all members of the fishing and aquaculture households, both fixed- and mobile-gear, rich and poor.

The research team then facilitated a consensus among the key stakeholders, including respected villagers, the Fishing Coalition, village leadership, the commune government, and representatives of district and provincial departments who were in charge of lagoon management. User groups were formed and helped refine, govern and enforce access and fishing practices, which met many of the resource planning purposes. Ninety per cent of village households participated in these user groups. Members of these user groups, including the mobile-gear and most marginalized fishers, were able to play a role in identifying and discussing problems, planning solutions and monitoring results on a more equal footing. The case concludes that the research team has been successful in engaging very poor households in the planning process and securing their access to lagoon resources. However, as we note below, including women and marginalized groups remains an ongoing challenge.

As part of their case study, Nong and Marschke (Chapter 8) relate a particular instance of conflict and its resolution during their research of in-migrant fishing villages located in and around Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary (PKWS) in Cambodia. They raise the important issue of the relationship between CBNRM and local politics, which, while rarely assessed in CBNRM studies, often play a major role in determining if new resource management regimes work for the poor or not. In addition, most of the case study countries are newly democratizing. That is, all are promoting local democratization in one way or another, even if several remain one-party states. In this sense, democratization has opened space for new village institutions. However, the CBNRM literature rarely addresses the implications of poverty reduction and inequities in establishing new resource management institutions parallel to political reforms.

Nong and Marschke discuss how conflict arose around distribution of water from holding tanks established by the village management committee (VMC) with support from the research team in one village located on a mangrove island. Two poorer households, active in the VMC, were selected as caretakers of the holding tanks. Several people complained to the research team that one of the female caretakers only sold water to members of a particular political party. Resolving this conflict involved the active facilitation of the research team. The team was obliged to remind all villagers publicly that resource management decisions were intended to benefit all users, and not be instruments of partisan political activity on either side.

Authors Nong and Marschke (Chapter 8, p. 165) reach an important conclusion concerning local politics and the likely impact of political bias on CBNRM:

In Cambodia at least, community-based management work often ignores the influence of local politics. It is important that CBNRM initiatives are seen as

politically neutral so that all villagers can feel comfortable to participate. It is equally important that government facilitators do not spread their political beliefs to influence who participates in resource management at the local level. What needs to be fostered is the notion that technical departments have a role in supporting local resource management institutions.

While we might argue with the need for neutrality, given our bias towards the idea that CBNRM initiatives should actively promote the interests of the poor, the authors raise a key point for consideration by practitioners who must deal with local political interests if they are to establish successful resource management institutions. This raises a conundrum for CBNRM practitioners and action researchers: in order to be respected by all parties as facilitators of conflict-ridden community processes, they need to appear neutral, something that was also found in the Hue and Bhutan cases in this volume (Chapters 5 and 10). But how does this fit with our notion that CBNRM needs to be pro-poor and pro-gender equality? This points strongly to the need for a pro-poor policy, to which we return in the concluding section.

The case of co-management of Mongolian pasturelands, analysed by Ykhanbai and Bulgan (Chapter 6), provides further counter-evidence to the view that CBNRM management committees will necessarily be controlled by the rich and powerful. In this case study, they comment:

Both rich and poor herders were interested in reducing environmental degradation and increasing economic benefits. But there were also some differences between rich and poor. The latter were the most interested in being involved in CBNRM. This is because they needed to improve their livelihoods, secure pasture, participate in decision-making, and reduce the costs of herding animals through cooperation with others.

In the Mongolian case study, the main challenge was to involve the rich and powerful who already had preferential access to the resource in engaging in dialogue with the poor. Better-off herders may have feared CBNRM initiatives would affect them negatively by reducing their access to resources. This group also might have felt they did not want to engage in dialogue because of their social status. In Mongolia, the authors tell us, the rich herders initially were unwilling to join in the community organizations and co-management system. In other words, by boycotting CBNRM proceedings, rich herders hoped for the maintenance of the status quo. After repeated discussions with rich herders, the team persuaded them of the value of engagement. They became interested in addressing the problems of degraded grazing lands. As well, they were interested in maintaining positive social relations and ensuring that they had access to hired labour for agricultural production. The researchers report a high level of community cohesion after one or two years of co-management that involves continued external facilitation.

Similar issues were found in the Bhutan case (Chapter 10) where there was conflict between the upper and lower communities of the watershed when



customary practice was highly inequitable. Communities in the upper watershed with unlimited access to the water supply did not want to jeopardize the status quo that benefited them. The research team took a normative position on the issue of equitable water rights as opposed to the narrow legalistic court rulings in favour of traditional practice. The signal of impending policy reforms, along with role-playing simulations and shared analysis of water volumes to ensure sufficiency, provided the impetus necessary to convince upstream users to relinquish some of their traditional rights.

We have highlighted four cases where action researchers have proactively attempted to engage and include diverse members of the community in new forms of NRM. Such cases demonstrate that a more equitable sharing of benefits probably will be continued, and that models of effective conflict resolution will be established. The role of researchers has been to not only guide, but, more importantly, to also increase dialogue between different factions in communities. It is important to monitor how far CBNRM groups can continue to be inclusive. As well, ongoing studies must be conducted to reveal whether CBNRM groups successfully redirect resources to the poor and marginalized, or whether even with external intervention such initiatives repeat many of the mistakes made in South Asia, as discussed in 'Conceptual issues', above. An additional question is whether this type of action research can develop models that are sustainable once researchers withdraw (see Chapter 16).

### ***CBNRM, gender equality and participation***

Communities are typically differentiated, divided, segregated, opposed, conflicting and split in many ways, and when it comes to CBNRM, perhaps no more so than by gender. As external interventions aim (and claim) to involve all stakeholders, more questions are now being raised as to who participates and who benefits, as well as how and when. Which stakeholders are involved? Are the poor included? Marginalized peoples? Women? How are they participating, in identifying problems, in planning, in designing and testing interventions, in implementing management plans, in evaluation?

These and related questions raise critical perspectives about who actually participates, but they also raise a challenge. How can participatory approaches to research and development enable these marginalized groups, including women, be more active participants and decision-makers in these programmes, in CBNRM and ultimately in the evolution of their societies? In this section, we explore these questions in relation to gender equality. While many stakeholders are increasingly aware of gender issues, patterns of gender exclusion persist, even among CBNRM interventions.

The copious literature on gender relations in Asia<sup>5</sup> highlights the region's widespread gender inequities, which are similar for issues of power, decision-making and control over natural resources. Women's participation is often limited by historic, social, cultural and political norms, which govern relations between women and men, including who should attend and speak at meetings, and how

women and men should behave in public (Razavi, 2002; Agarwal, 2001). For example, in the case of water management, governments, donors and other stakeholders often view irrigation for agriculture as a male domain, although women are active agriculturists relying on these water resources. Men are often involved in constructing and maintaining the irrigation canals; women are not seen to be involved' or to have stakes in irrigation. As a result, development interventions limit women's participation in water user groups and resource management decision-making (Zwarteveen and Meinzen-Dick 2001; Resurreccion, Real and Pantana, 2004). In this collection of cases, the research teams all faced the challenges associated with addressing the issues of exclusion affecting women.

Even where there is participation of marginalized groups, including women, is it meaningful? Agarwal differentiates between nominal participation, essentially membership in a community group for representation, and active participation, where the powerless and marginalized actually have a voice in decision-making, thus leading to equality and empowerment. On the basis of research in India and Nepal on community forestry groups and water user groups, Agarwal (2001), Ahmed (2001) and Mohanty (2004) all argue that women's participation is generally nominal. This leads to few changes being made in gender resource-related roles, as well as responsibilities and rights at the household level.

This was also the case in the Tam Giang lagoon (Chapter 4) where group membership was defined at the household level and members were primarily men. The research team faced a real challenge in supporting the meaningful participation of women and very poor households in planning processes. In some cases, women from the better-off households did participate. Generally, these are in a better position to participate in community activities since they may have more financial security and spare time. However, even if women participated in the planning discussions, they were not very active and men dominated decision-making (Chapter 5). Promoting fuller participation of women is much more difficult because of complex field conditions than is typically represented in project documents.

The case studies illustrate how difficult it is to work towards gender equality or even to discuss strategies to promote more meaningful and equal participation of women. Even if they are included as members of a user group, women can find it difficult to participate. Many reasons exist for this: meetings may be held at inopportune times when they also have household, farm and family care responsibilities, or at locations that are socially awkward for women. This was a challenge noted in the Mongolia case study (Chapter 6) where meetings among nomadic herding households were held at distances of up to 15 km from the households' camps during the winter season. In the Vietnam uplands study, many women said they were not comfortable attending meetings in the community centre. The researchers noted:

The centre is usually too far from their homes and is mainly used by community leaders, not by women. They stated that they were uncomfortable in this setting. Organizing meetings near their hamlets facilitated higher attendance and more active engagement.

As a strategy to increase women's participation, some projects supported the establishment of separate groups for women. This provided a space for them to meet and voice their thoughts and concerns on problems related to resource degradation and discuss strategies to address them. As noted by the female secretary of a community group in the Mongolia case (Chapter 6, p. 116): 'Women have clear roles in natural resource management. By establishing a women's group, they can join and share opinions, make joint decisions, and help each other.' Such meetings have a much wider importance for women because they derive social support and opportunities for learning. The authors note: 'During community meetings, people could meet with each other and chat, get community help when someone was sick or needed money, or learn the best practices of herding, farming, and livelihood improvements from each other.' (p. 115)

In these ways, strategies supporting separate women's groups moved beyond the direct agenda of finding space for a voice in the management of the specific resource. Processes such as these can strengthen women's self-confidence and leadership skills, and build a collective identity. Such awareness helps transform some of the social and cultural norms that limit women's participation in the public sphere (Agarwal, 2001; Cornwall, 2003; Mohanty, 2004). In this volume's Guiyang case study (Chapter 9), women joined men farmers in the planning, decision-making, design and mobilization of resources in the resource management groups. The authors noted:

Increased numbers of community groups, especially women's groups, became organized and so women's voices became more prominent. As well, self-learning groups grew in importance. Meetings became more lively community events whereby issues could be discussed. This broke with the past, when everyone simply had to listen to government officials deliver instructions, and the villagers rarely met to develop a new activity.

There were similar findings in Vietnam and Mongolia:

Women's interest groups make women feel comfortable and confident so they can explain their problems, and plan and implement solutions by themselves (Sen and An, 2006).

After one year, all initial co-management agreements were revised and re-approved in the communities taking into consideration the recommendations of the women's groups. The ideas and perceptions of women were included so as to promote gender equity. As women defined their views on co-management agreements, they started to become more actively and meaningfully involved in the community decision-making around NRM (Chapter 6, p. 118).

In these cases, women now are recognized as initiators and active participants in making decisions regarding NRM. It is important to note that through these processes, it is not only those who have been marginalized who change their attitudes and actions. As the cases show, community leaders, government actors and extension agents are now more aware of the needs and priorities of these disadvantaged groups and are changing programmes accordingly to support their needs and participation (see, for example, Sen and An, 2006). The rich are also now more willing to listen to and engage in dialogue with the poor.

One characteristic of the literature on gender exclusion is that it has tended to deal with participation in formal user groups. Yet there may be other means of participation outside user groups that are sometimes invisible to the outside researcher – in other words tacit as opposed to explicit participation. This may involve men and women in a household making joint decisions on the use of natural resources (Shah and Shah, 1995), decisions made outside actual user group meetings, or formal decisions being subverted and undermined. While patriarchal and other political and cultural norms are powerful and widespread, there are many examples of these being challenged by marginalized groups (Scott, 1990; Sarin, 2001). As Agarwal notes (2001: 1643): 'Left to themselves, women typically rely on covert and individual forms of protest (their "everyday forms of resistance"), ranging from simply ignoring the [forest] closure rules or challenging the authority of the male guard, to persistent complaining.' However, researchers often take the view that women and men have conflicting interests rather than being involved in a form of cooperative conflict where roles and responsibilities are negotiated (Sen, 1990). Therefore, researchers can miss less formal types of participation.

In the case of the Tam Giang lagoon in Vietnam, Le, Nguyen and Nguyen (2002) describe an interesting case where gender roles have been used by poor women to their advantage. In Tan Duong commune, male and female mobile-gear fishers have customarily shared fishing activities. However, after enclosure many households had to find alternative employment because they lost their claims to the fishing grounds. In those households which maintained fishing activities, women became the main fishers in narrow waterways between net-enclosures. In Tan Duong, mobile-gear fisherwomen were able to acquire better access to fishing grounds than men. Aquaculturists allowed women to fish in the waterways between net-enclosures, but denied the same right to men. They said that men might be more likely to use more powerful and destructive fishing practices, such as motorized dragnets. Female mobile fishers were able to capitalize on assumptions about the more trustworthy nature of their gender to negotiate rights where male family members were unable to do so.

While this case may appear unusual on the surface, there are very likely other unexplored examples in CBNRM of disadvantaged groups using the characteristics that marginalize them to their advantage.

## Conclusions

Action researchers and practitioners working on CBNRM are faced with a number of difficult questions: How can the poor and marginalized be included in CBNRM when they already face highly exploitive and unequal social structures? How can this be done without alienating those, including the wealthy, whose support is usually needed for user groups to work? Should interventions be politically neutral, or specifically proactive towards the most marginalized? Should separate women's groups be established, or does this work against gender mainstreaming? How long can action researchers realistically be involved in facilitating participatory processes? When is the time to withdraw? What are the indications that, in the future, CBNRM can support the rights of the poor without external interventions? How much research time and effort needs to be put into understanding social processes in order to be able to intervene?

We certainly do not have clear answers to many of these questions. Nonetheless, after drawing on the experience of the cases, we can suggest some ways of progressing towards an actively pro-poor agenda. While noting that they interlock, we cover implications for three areas: research, policy and practice.

### *Implications for research*

What are the research implications? We know that without external intervention CBNRM may support marginalization of the poor, and in particular poor women who are most dependent on the natural resource base. These represent processes already promoted by marketization and privatization in most Asian countries. This reality, combined with the many questions mentioned above, suggest that there is a need for greater action research capacity to understand social dynamics in Asia and to feed CBNRM policies and practice. It is challenging for researchers to generate field-based evidence of the equity implications of CBNRM in practice, because these can be subtle. As well, attention can be easily diverted to broad resource conservation concerns.

This section identifies some examples from the cases in this volume which illustrate how researchers can start down this path, so that they can provide analytical guidance and generate best practices which pay specific attention to questions of gender, poverty and inequality.

In many development arenas in Asia, issues of social and gender equality in CBNRM institutions are colloquially termed as second-generation problems. That is, in countries such as Nepal and India where there have been over two decades of community forestry, joint forest management or water users' associations, the development focus has been on the overall community. It is only recently that issues of inequality within communities have been given more attention. One government actor in a country newer to such decentralization noted: 'First we are worrying about decentralizing governance to the community. Equity issues are "second generation" and we can deal with those later down the road.'

Postponing issues of equality as well as inclusion and exclusion to a next generation of development interventions is dangerous. In countries which are new to these processes of devolution of NRM, there are an opportunity and a necessity to learn from the bad experiences elsewhere in Asia and actively address these critical issues at the outset as first-generation.

Here, action research can play the crucial role of highlighting issues of poverty and gender equality. Explicit attention must be given to this analysis because it affects different contexts of precisely how CBNRM can strengthen the agency, rights and livelihoods of the poorest, of women, ethnic minorities and other marginalized peoples. Several of the cases in this volume provide useful examples of ways in which researchers have tailored their fieldwork, their participatory processes and their analysis to direct attention to these questions. They have made efforts to ensure that the structure of interventions addresses the priorities and constraints of these groups, and their facilitation has helped build the confidence and negotiating skills of society's weakest. Such interventions are critical because they strengthen participatory research and ensure that it generates the kinds of insights which are needed in order to expand beyond the localized level of a project, to become an integral part of policies and implementation programmes.

Successfully targeting the poor in hierarchical societies has proved extremely difficult. Most development strategies do not meet the expectations placed upon them, and very often programmes benefit the non-poor instead. However, ensuring environmental sustainability while further marginalizing the poorest sections of the population is an unacceptable development strategy. Experience in the field of CBNRM shows that unless it is proactively pro-poor, pro-gender equality and pro-ethnic equality, it will harm the very groups it aims to assist. In other words, 'If we are not for them, then we are against them.'

### ***Implications for policy***

It is critical to examine the central importance of policy. We want to emphasize that policies must consider explicitly issues of equality and inclusion at all levels of governance, and must place greater emphasis on implementation strategies that support and enable the rights of the poor and marginalized. Participatory research on CBNRM can play a crucial role in guiding and informing the development and implementation of policies which are more relevant to local realities and needs. As well, such research can strengthen the equality, rights and decision-making power of women, the poor and ethnic minorities.

One of the first questions to ask is how policies which are typically aimed at environment and natural resource management specifically address issues of poverty reduction and social or gender equality. We discussed above how policies that decentralize NRM, as well as marketization and privatization, can exacerbate inequality in a community. More needs to be understood about the role and potential of policies to support and strengthen the rights and livelihoods of the

poor and marginalized in the context of CBNRM (see Larson, 2004, for a review of 20 countries from the global south). As Di Gregorio et al. (2004: 4) argue:

Demand for research on the links between poverty and the institutions governing property rights and collective action is widespread and growing ... A wide range of policymakers (those guiding local and national government officials, non-governmental organization decisions, donor representatives) require relevant research findings that can be transformed into policies on property rights and collective action to improve the livelihoods of the poor.

In order for natural resource policies to be effective, they must draw on experiences in the field, so that they can address the diversity of local realities and situations. In several case study countries, these policies are relatively new or currently being developed. Research from the case studies is timely, enabling research results to influence policy (see Chapter 17). In addition, field-based results sometimes illustrate important equity outcomes from devolution, rights transfers and resource management policies.

Many unknowns remain regarding how such new policies and their implementation can help strengthen the livelihoods of the poor. In many cases, involvement of indigenous or marginalized groups in the official co-management of resources is new. Even for policies that aim to be equitable, little is known about their implementation and how they may play out on the ground. Research and development actors must also address the very real possibility that CBNRM policies may inadvertently perpetuate or exacerbate exclusion. Such policies must be informed by iterative research and analysis that can monitor the implementation of policy reforms and reveal gender-and poverty-differentiated impacts within communities.

### *Implications for practice*

We must also consider implications for practice. What can realistically be expected of CBNRM in terms of promoting equality and poverty reduction? Given the range of contexts in Asia, we cannot hope to be prescriptive here, but only suggest some ways forward.

Four of the case studies discussed above suggest that external facilitation is required to ensure that changes in resource regimes do not lead to the increased marginalization of poorer groups. The research teams in these cases have taken a multistakeholder, participatory approach to CBNRM. Despite constraints that limit the inclusion of some groups, these researchers attempted to create space for discussion and include all villagers, including women. This demonstrates how facilitators of CBNRM must be able to see the perspectives of different village interest groups, possess strong negotiation skills and proactively support NRM that provides sustainable benefits to the poor. These are not easy tasks. However, a multistakeholder, participatory approach is a key strategy for achieving these goals. Experience from these cases adds much to the knowledge base. Practitioners need to strengthen their familiarity with multistakeholder

tools and processes, with a particular view to ensuring that poorer groups are playing a more equal role in planning and decision-making on livelihood development and resource access. This has to include meaningful participation in village meetings, as well as representations to local and higher levels of government.

In terms of what is feasible in order to promote gender equality successfully, several of the cases (for example, in China, Mongolia, Cambodia and Vietnam) demonstrate steps towards the more meaningful participation of women. This includes incorporating women in village committees, holding meetings in places convenient for women, or setting up separate women's groups for resource management or income generation. These tentative first moves towards promoting gender equality are appropriate given the patriarchal nature of most Asian societies, and the need to build confidence and avoid any backlash. Over time, projects can work towards further inclusion of women in village committees, through quotas if necessary, in positions of power, such as the chair or secretary, and as active participants in meetings. Capacity development and training may be necessary for this.

Action researchers and practitioners need to pay particular attention to the missing voices of the marginalized. If poor people do not come to researchers and practitioners, then researchers and practitioners must go to the poor. Ongoing reassessment of the impacts on poverty, inequity and gender equality in any intervention must be conducted through planning workshops of project teams and in the villages themselves. After all, we are dealing with the most intractable of development problems.

Researchers, practitioners and policy-makers also need to consider carefully how effective CBNRM interventions actually are, from the standpoint of poverty and gender equality. The most obvious indicator of a CBNRM project which successfully addresses these questions is equitable and sustainable resource use, that is, providing more resources that will be available in the future for those who are the most dependent on them; typically, poor women comprise this segment of the population. A litmus test of whether CBNRM is effective might be to talk to poor women and see what the results have been for them. If they do not believe they are benefiting, there may be a problem.

Although this type of research is not easy, the goals emphasize that research must be directed for the most disadvantaged groups. We must be 'for them', and we must endeavour to support ways that CBNRM can strengthen the rights and livelihoods of the poor and the marginalized.

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# **Communities, Livelihoods and Natural Resources**

**Action Research and Policy Change in Asia**

Edited by  
Stephen R. Tyler



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