

## **Part IV. Conclusion**



# Chapter Ten

## Concluding Remarks on the Future of Natural Resource Management in Borneo

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The strength of this volume, as mentioned in the Introduction, is in its comprehensive focus on the island of Borneo (both Indonesian and Malaysian sides) as a complex and dynamic case study in natural resource management, devolution, antagonism between central state policy and community rights, and the interrelated economic and social implications at the local level.

The idea of natural resource management as a privileged 'locus' of research, analysis, and policy advocacy is certainly not new. Nevertheless, this volume contributes important perspectives and indicates, implicitly or explicitly, some key elements that should be considered by analysts and scholars, practitioners and policy makers, in efforts to promote sustainable management of natural resources in the future.

### **'Localised' Interventions**

All the chapters reaffirm the centrality of 'locality', not only in terms of research interest (field-based 'local voices') but also as a dimension for effective political and economic reform with regard to natural resource management. The legislation granting (political and financial) regional autonomy, especially in post-Suharto Indonesia, in itself reiterates the principle that management effectiveness can be correlated positively with knowledge and recognition of local conditions, needs and solutions.

As some of the chapters of this volume in commendable ways, more attention to the local level can reveal the extreme complexity and diversity of interactions between people and natural resources: initiatives by communities to protect forest resources (Vaz, Chapter 7), viable timber-extraction schemes between loggers and swidden cultivators (Pedersen et al., Chapter 9), as well as challenges such as 'illegal' logging by communities on the border between Sarawak and West Kalimantan (Wadley, Chapter 6). Micro-level analysis allows us to determine how local factors interact with outside factors to produce particular patterns of forest use and condition. This concern with the local level can help us to deconstruct ambiguous definitions by relating the phenomenon in question

(‘illegal logging’) to specific events and policies at various levels. It also alerts us to existing ‘misperceptions’ of local practices and aspirations by the central authorities to justify large development schemes (Majid Cooke, Chapter 2). The understanding generated by micro-level analysis can thus help identify appropriate solutions.

After all, it is the ‘local level’ (the actions of the local government and local people) that can determine the success or failure of arrangements in natural resource management. As stated by Gibson, McKean and Ostrom, ‘forest management is intensely local’ (2000: 21).

Intervening locally or advocating localised management models of natural resource management does not imply that solutions are only valid for a specific site or a specific group of people, nor does it imply that everything local is necessarily good management or good for conservation. ‘Local’ solutions have to work at a local level. For example, a ‘localised’ intervention would be the drafting of flexible policies that allow for the integration of local practices and knowledge — policies based on a thorough understanding of complex local dynamics and changing local conditions. ‘Localised intervention’ could be made possible by legal pluralism and local policies that recognise the rights and claims of traditional communities (Khan 2001; Casson, Chapter 4).

The analyses in this volume also point to the importance of the political, legislative, and economic space ‘in-between’, a space not strictly regulated by the state but dominated by uncertainty, an economic landscape where multiple and conflicting claims exist. This kind of space is often rich in experimentation and local initiatives. Whatever regulations might be issued by the central state, local communities might both uphold and adapt the spirit of the law, and they might filter or ignore outside regulations. They can resist persuasion (Majid Cooke and Bulan, Chapters 2 and 3). They can also generate their own regulations. They can negotiate little-used provisions in the law to their advantage (Vaz, Chapter 7). This is especially the case with *adat* and the resilience of indigenous resource-management systems that filled a void in state legislation and managed to guarantee sustainability of large tracts of forest under stable conditions (Eghenter, Chapter 8). These studies demonstrate the need to appreciate such local-level variation, and apply or adapt solutions that would work at the local level.

The transition to decentralisation, as well as increased opportunities for exploitation of natural resources, might have generated conflicting situations and a lack of transparency in power-sharing arrangements between communities, the private sector, and local and central governments. In Malaysia, hypermodernist ideologies of development have pushed the implementation of development programs based on plantation expansion and land estate schemes. This requires the use of persuasion — which could include intimidation (Majid

Cooke, Chapter 2). However, at the local level, at the point of encounter, other factors might intervene and persuasion may end up working in favour of government or, on occasion, against it, and in favour of local communities (Bulan, Chapter 3).

For all these reasons, ‘optimism in locality is not misplaced’, to paraphrase an expression on community by Agarwal and Gibson (1999). ‘Localised’ remains the appropriate dimension for reform to promote good governance and equity in natural resource management.

## **Relevant Research**

Although none of the authors explicitly deals with the issue of the relevance of research, the question of whether their analyses might be useful, lead to good legislation, or help to defuse conflicts in natural resource management, is, I believe, an unexpressed yet strong concern of all the authors. For one thing, many of the chapters end with explicit recommendations on what ought to be done (Wadley, Vaz and Eghenter, Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

What is the role of research in identifying appropriate solutions in natural resource management? And what kind of analysis is most needed? The divide between critique and engagement — between, on the one side, scholars content with placing a critical gaze on policies and models of natural resource management, and, on the other, practitioners having to negotiate a difficult course of action to promote better natural resource management — has only sharpened recently. The divide is not only one of ‘position’ between those situated in the field (working for local, national or international NGOs, or for government agencies) and those based in academic institutions, but also one of methodological approach and priorities, language and definitions.

The analysis that is needed is indeed one that can break down barriers and provide a bridge between research and management. The researchers needed are those who can easily straddle critique and engagement, and who can link critique to the formulation of viable solutions, and influence engagement with detached assessment. The research should ask good questions and adopt an open and exploratory mode to produce results that help policy makers, practitioners and analysts to understand the situation and exercise ‘good judgment’ about possible solutions (Sayer and Campbell 2004).

It is important, however, to avoid assuming that such an exercise is simple or linear. The approach needs to consider the complexity of the situation of dynamic landscapes where different groups of actors have their stakes or claims. It might require an initial assessment of the situation to identify existing policies, relevant actors, interests and structural factors. It might also require a high degree of flexibility and a multiple-entry (or multi-hypotheses) strategy whereby several lines of inquiry may be pursued (Eghenter 2003). Policy-oriented research

requires a methodological approach that enables the formation of context-specific generalisations; that is, explanations or descriptions of the causal interactions of various factors that obtain within the specificities of a given situation.

There is still an information gap about accepted, scientific understanding of which variables are the primary causes of deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and so on (Gibson, McKean and Ostrom 2000). The purpose of research and analysis with regard to natural resource management is ultimately to try to understand complexities rather than aspire to produce complete explanations (Sayer and Campbell 2004).

## **Multi-stakeholderships**

Tenure insecurity and vulnerability, overlapping claims and volatile situations, over-exploitation of resources and degradation, unfair distribution of benefits and other problems regarding natural resource management cannot be addressed unless all stakeholders are equally and equitably involved. This calls for more than a generic commitment to participation or an attempt to work with stakeholders (Brosius and Russell 2003). It implies building partnerships and strengthening the constituencies upon which the legitimacy of partnerships is based. Clear 'rules of engagement' should frame the roles, responsibilities and rights of each party. Often, statements of principle such as 'community forestry' or 'collaborative management' might remain empty slogans unless there is political will, agreed guidelines and mechanisms to secure fair participation among partners and avoid asymmetrical relationships of power and privilege (see Deddy, Chapter 5).

One of the most commonly upheld hypotheses in good forest management is that local forest users should participate in designing, and have authority over, the institutions that govern the use of natural resources, as well as having the right to participate in modifying these rules (Gibson, McKean and Ostrom 2000: 253). These rules, however, should be based on principles of sustainability and benefit sharing, and they should be enforced. Where rules or policies are perceived as biased, unclear, or ignored, sustainable natural-resource management cannot be guaranteed. Policy reform to address key issues such as tenure insecurity and unsustainable exploitation is necessary (Wadley, Chapter 6). The example of the West Kutai Regional Forestry Program Working Group (Casson, Chapter 4) is indicative. A consultation process and forum where key stakeholders are able to participate, discuss the complexities of natural resource management, and develop appropriate strategies could facilitate the formation of enduring constituencies. It could also foster the creation of accountable and equitable multi-stakeholderships for the sustainable management of natural resources.

## References

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