



Hanging in the Balance: Equity in Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Asia

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Foreword

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the Asian region has seen a groundswell of interest in community based approaches to natural resource management, based on the promise of sustainable resource management together with stronger rights and more secure livelihoods for impoverished and marginal rural communities. In 2005 reducing poverty remains a high priority on the global agenda, represented most recently by the Millennium Development Goals. For those of us interested in Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) as a tool for sustainable livelihoods, it is timely to reflect critically on the extent to which this potential is being met. How equitably are benefits and costs being shared in CBNRM programs? To what extent are the voices of marginalized groups shaping the design and implementation of community based resource management systems?

A group of twelve practitioners and field researchers from Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were invited to reflect on these questions. The ‘Eleventh Workshop on Community Management of Forest Lands: Equity in CBNRM’ was co-facilitated by the East-West Center and RECOFTC and funded by the Ford Foundation. The writings in this book represent the work of the participants, providing insights to country-specific experiences and lessons learned.

If there is one emerging message from these proceedings it is that there is not a clear answer to the question of whether CBNRM programs have promoted equity in rural societies in Asia. The case studies demonstrate that equity outcomes of CBNRM programs depend on many factors, including the context of policy and governance, project design, methods for facilitating engagement by marginalized social groups, effective collaboration between government and civil society, and support for the poor to invest in long term livelihood and resource use strategies. They also highlight the need for clarity about what we mean by ‘equity’ and the need to consider equity goals in the context of the societies in which we are working.

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