

## **CPRs and MDBs: A Contradiction in Terms?**

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### **Understanding the Issue**

This Forum addresses common pool resources (CPRs) as positioned within an increasingly global context. The announcement for the 2000 Conference enthusiastically intones: Common property institutions will be a prominent feature in the next millennium! But with continuity in change, there is also change in continuity. Thus, it continues, traditional common property institutions will need to adjust and change “in response to an ever-expanding global economy”, while new commons will be created, and “market institutions may exist side-by-side with common property and governmental institutions”. This speaks to the complexities following the current parallel global tendencies to devolve authority and decision-making to both local and supra-national levels, at the cost of the traditional nation-state, all of it taking place within the framework of an increasing globalization of trade and markets.

But what does growing complexity mean? Defining any analytical framework for CPR work is fraught with obstacles, but I would give my vote to political ecology, which is based on the recognition that “... it is not enough to focus on local cultural dynamics or international exchange relations, ...” alone (Greenberg and Park 1994:8). We need to understand how these interact, in terms of relationships between policy, politics and political economy, and over time.

### **IASCP's Worldview**

The Association's goals include an emphasis on documenting the complexity, variability and importance of CPRs. This focus on the local level, together with an emphasis on basic research, has resulted in a concern with appropriate institutional design (another key goal) that increasingly has become separated from the economic-political realities determining the survival or demise of CPRs.

The Forum question partly reflects this position, in the number of stakeholders recognized and in the relationships between them, and is thus somewhat one-sided.

### **The Changing Development Scene**

The development scene is changing rapidly. The situation is becoming increasingly complex, partly because an increasing number of categories of stakeholders are getting involved, and partly because the nature of the relationships between them is becoming complex. At the same time the relationship alluded to in the Forum question is only one facet of the overall picture, which is much more complex.

First, the number of categories of players active today, not to mention the actual number of active stakeholders, is impressive. Second, the content of the relationships between these stakeholders are changing, from simple to complex two-way causalities, and consist to a large extent of strategic information. The traditional picture of local people, governments, bilateral agencies and multi-lateral development banks (MDBs) is becoming increasingly complex with the growth of NGOs that represent local people or specific local or global interests. Southern governments are becoming differentiated themselves as

developing country ministries and line agencies vie for funds. Northern governments are progressively prone to use aid for narrow political purposes or to support the domestic private sector.

By far the most important factor, however, is the private sector. Aided by liberalization moves and increased emphasis on international trade, the private sector has mushroomed, and is increasingly determining the investment climate between the North and South and the global aid framework. The total investment by the private sector in developing countries is staggering, 13-14 times the World Bank's annual investment. While the World Bank has policies that guide its investment operations, the private sector will not have such guidelines. Because of this governments often prefer to collaborate with the private sector as, in the case of the Three Gorges hydro-power project in China.

Among MDBs, the World Bank clearly has a major impact on CPRs globally, by virtue of being a major source of funding for development. What to do about this? There are two possible avenues to follow. The first avenue would be to reform the World Bank from the outside. A good example is the Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) project in India, which led to the decision to review the whole resettlement portfolio. However, this is a slow process, and the results are not necessarily convincing.

The second avenue would be to reform the World Bank from the inside. This approach is increasingly chosen by various stakeholder groups, including both NGOs and the private sector. NGOs that earlier decried the World Bank's policies from the outside only, today engage the World Bank from the inside and also collaborate on a wide range of activities and issues. This mode of operation has become de facto Realpolitik for large segments of the NGO sector. In this they also learn to appreciate the many constraints that determine the World Bank's modus operandi.

Some World Bank supported work is worthy of criticism and some of it is good and innovative. An increasing number of projects are addressing CPRs. Three examples will serve to illustrate this: (i) Bangladesh – As a result of a long-standing involvement in fisheries management the elements of a process whereby local fishermen are achieving de facto use rights to water bodies are gradually getting in place (amounting to turning a state property regime over to local management on a lease basis), and will, guided by an overall co-management model, hopefully result in establishing local common property regimes); (ii) Ghana – The stakeholder consultation process devised for recent sector work on coastal zone management was decentralized in order to give voice to local and regional chiefs, which led to the recognition by the Government that the chieftaincy system could play an important role in devising and implementing an overall management plan for the coastal zone; and, (iii) Policy and knowledge management – The Common Property Resource Management Network (CPRNet) is a good case in point, as is the training on Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).<sup>1/</sup>

The World Bank is changing. It was, for years, alone in advocating stringent social development guidelines for its investment operations. Such guidelines have been emulated by regional development banks, OECD and some bilateral agencies. Global standards for regulatory frameworks for investment operations that affect local peoples' lives negatively are emerging.

## **What Could IASCP's Role Be?**

The present time would seem to be a turning point for IASCP. The organization is consolidated, the membership is steady, and the conferences attract more and more people.

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<sup>1/</sup> Detailed information about CPRNet is available on the IASCP website. The monthly CPRNet Newsletter, sent electronically to members, carries much relevant information. The website for the 1998 international workshop on CBNRM is at: <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/conatrem/index.htm>

At the same time there appear to be a generational shift in the leadership as well as in the general membership body. At recent conferences I have sensed an increasing undercurrent that questions accepted wisdom and dogma (cf., e.g., Carlsson 1997). IASCP may consider reviewing the past situation, its role and its emphasis, in order to prepare for the future. This would seem to be a necessary exercise in order to positioning IASCP optimally for addressing the commons issues of the next millennium.

This review might consider IASCP's past interactions with the World Bank and with CPRNet. An earlier IASCP board sent a letter through Fikret Berkes to the World Bank to explore developing a relationship and it received a positive response prepared by myself on behalf of the Bank. IASCP was a partner on the World Bank-sponsored workshop on CBNRM in 1998. The IASCP also established a liaison role with CPRNet the same year.

We need research on CPRs. However, what we need more is research on how to use and implement – in a sustainable way – the knowledge we already have. That is, the knowledge of CPRs themselves, as well as knowledge on how to integrate, adjust or change them within the increasingly important regional and global frameworks. I am convinced that IASCP could play a crucial role in an emerging global CPR network as a go-between, mediator and translator.

## **Next Steps**

The issue of the proposed collaboration between IASCP and CPRNet [Editors note: see the related “From the President” message in the announcement section] is an example of the need for IASCP to take part in the emerging global CPR alliance. We need to think of how such relationships can be managed towards increasing the flow of information and, thus, the ability to act, be it on the policy or applied level, or on the local or global level. Towards this, I propose the following combined applied research and networking agendas, involving collaboration between a broad range of stakeholders:

1. A research project on the institutional roles of all stakeholders concerned with CPRs. The point of departure would be the recognition that stakeholders have roles which are different but complementary. The applied goal of the project would be to propose ways in which collaboration between the key stakeholders could be defined and structured to create synergies; and,
2. The 2000 Conference, with its theme “Crafting Sustainable Commons in the New Millennium”, would seem to be a suitable occasion to be introspective, draw lessons and look forward to the next millennium.

## **References**

- Carlsson, Lars. 1997. Scientists, Chickens, and Other Practitioners. *CPR Digest*, No. 41 (April), pp. 1-4.
- Greenberg, James B. and Thomas K. Park. 1994. Political Ecology. *Journal of Political Ecology*, vol. 1, pp. 1-12. URL: <http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/ej/jpe/vol1~1.htm>