

Dr. Janis Alcorn, Director Asia & Pacific/PcFoR BSP/WWF
3508 Woodbine Street
Chevy Chase, MD 20815 USA

Fax: (202) 293-9341

Email: janis.alcorn@wwfus.org

Discussant's Comments, Multiple Commons Stream

Papers in the *multiple commons* stream focused on two broad types of cases -- fisheries management and biodiversity management. Papers addressed situations where:

- 1) ecosystems are crossed by many administrative and cultural boundaries;
- 2) property rights are being claimed by local, national and global interests;
- 3) national administration and policy are influenced and distorted by donor funds donor competition; and
- 4) sectoral agencies fragment ecosystem management responsibilities.

We heard examples of local common property institutions that have maintained local ecosystems over the long term. But the papers only provided examples promising initiatives for larger scale ecosystem management, and those examples included stories of conflict and uncertainty.

Institutions described from the larger scales have different goals and priorities from those at more local scale. They maintain different information for management decisions. And they tend to recognize different property rights over the resources.

I recommend the set of papers on the Mekong Basin. Together they provide a picture of management institutions at both the larger and smaller scales. At the local level, management priorities are to maintain fish which is a very important food source and which requires ecosystem management to maintain fish migratory routes and flooding for nurseries. But higher level management (at the national level and Mekong River Commission level) have prioritized water management for irrigation and hydropower. The MRC undervalues fish, and has poor information about fish and their ecological requirements.

In the case of biodiversity management through protected areas, higher level institutions value biodiversity reserves for the future and wilderness for recreation. Local level institutions, on the other hand, value livelihoods which, in the cases presented, require management of local biodiversity. Global and national level institutions have legitimized eviction or restriction of local property when protected areas were formed. But cases described in papers in this stream show how, years later, states are having to acquiesce to social justice demands for compensation of co-management.

In these sessions, there was general agreement that efforts to manage natural resources at larger scales must involve appropriate linkages with existing local institutions. Beyond acknowledging that a mix of property rights would be important, the case studies provided no blueprints or models, only principles and flags of potential problems.

Three different models were discussed: Ostrom's "nested" model, the Harvard PONSACS/Weatherhead Center Program's "vertical" model, and what I'm calling the "co-existence" model which is a more horizontal model. Some people expressed concerns that the nested model requires an enclosure of the commons that can lead to cooption of local common property regimes and subsequent failure to maintain natural resources. The vertical model was felt to require imposition of hierarchies and boundaries that could be counterproductive for sustainable management. The third option was coexistence of ecologically defined administrative units within nation-states that have created an appropriate policy environment that supports sustainable management of natural resources. This was the vision of experiments in Tanzania, Laos, and British Columbia after the Delgamuk decision.

In conclusion, there were no proven solutions to the multiple commons problem. In the future, careful study of local common property resources management regimes will remain important, but much more work is needed to understand how local common property systems can be successfully integrated in larger systems.