

COMMONS FORUM *RESPONSE*

Response to: The Name Change; or, What Happened to the “P”?, by Charlotte Hess and Ruth Meinzen-Dick

Why I Came to Agree with Dropping ‘Property’ from the Association’s Name

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Until recently I was resistant to dropping the word ‘property’ from the Association’s name. My reluctance was two-fold. First, the Association has long struggled with a perception by many local community activists and field practitioners that it is overly academic and too often more interested in theory than the sustainability of common property systems designed and managed by local people. I believe it is important for the Association to maintain a creative balance and foster more productive synergy between theoretical and applied endeavors.

Second, governments have traditionally ignored and often still usurp common property owned by indigenous peoples and other local communities. As a human rights lawyer committed to the promotion of environmental justice, I feel strongly that an association dedicated to promoting more and deeper understanding of the commons should help focus attention on and meaningfully address the plight of common property systems of natural resource management that are threatened and in many instances under full-scale assault.

These concerns and beliefs endure. At the same time, I like to think that my understanding of the word “commons” has deepened. From my perspective references to the commons implicitly and invariably refer to property, albeit not necessarily only property related to natural resources. Hence, the name change need – and should – not result in any less concern for and support within the Association of traditional and ever evolving systems of common property used by indigenous and other local communities.

The final consideration that prompted me to change my opinion was the realization that some colleagues, reportedly in Europe especially, were shying away from affiliation with the Association because they felt the emphasis on property detracted from our shared focus on the commons in all its manifestations. I believe it is important for our Association to draw scholars and practitioners from as many regions and disciplines of our diverse planet as possible. As such, in the spirit of inclusion, openness and diversity I too welcome the Association’s new name. I likewise welcome all those who hopefully now feel more comfortable with the Association to join with us as members and affiliates.

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