

# IASCP 2004: *Reports from Oaxaca*

## **Environmental Services**

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As a first comer to the IASCP Congress, I was pleased to see the engagement of both practitioners and academicians from the North and the South. Clearly part of this mixture was promoted by the location – in Oaxaca – facilitating much more Latin American participation, as well as a superb organizing effort by Leticia Merino and all her team. However, I also believe it has to do with the incorporation of the theme “Payment for Environmental Services”. There was a clear resonance in the introduction of the theme – for the first time in an IASCP Congress - of “Payment for Environment Services,” (henceforth referred to as “Compensation for Environmental Services or CES). Indeed, the topic of CES from the perspective of Rural Communities has tremendous potential in moving Common Property Resources (CPR) work more closely and directly to simultaneously combating rural poverty while promoting sustainable natural resources management. Currently, the stated focus of CPR work and theory is centered on improving the “institutions for the management of environmental resources” (mission statement of the IASCP, <http://www.iascp.org/brochure.html>), and while a concern for improving rural communities is present, this focus is implicit, not explicit. The adoption of CES as a ongoing thread in future CPR seminars and congresses offers a concrete way to explicitly incorporate CPR practice and theory to the dual issues of equity and natural resource management.

Despite the topics resonance in the Congress, it is still yet to be seen whether the topic speaks to the core membership of the IASCP, and continues to be of interest and developed in future IASCP workshops and Congresses. Indeed, I found that the majority of the participants on the panels and discussions around CES (and there were a lot) were, like me, participating in the Congress for the first time. On the hand, Ruth Meinzen- Dick and Brent Swallow, long time associates of IASCP, led a panel on “Property Rights and Collective Action: Determining factors underlying mechanisms of retribution for the provision of environmental services.” Similarly, David Kaimowitz in his keynote presentation was clearly exhorting the urgent need to address equity and sustainable resource management simultaneously.

CPR theory contributes new avenues of inquiry – far different from the mainstream concerns and questions generally wrestled with in this new and growing field known of CES. Generally speaking, traditional CES literature and practice has been dominated by a concern for seeking cost efficiency to address environmental degradation. When social concerns are addressed it is an add-on that often takes second fiddle to environmental objectives. This unwittingly has limited the breadth of the discussion, all too often, to over-simplified economic valuation exercises. When one focuses on the topic of CES from the lens of rural and indigenous communities one must grapple with complex landscapes. In these mosaics it is not only forests that generate environmental services, but also agro-ecosystems and other managed systems. Moreover, landscapes encompass a diversity of actors and interests. This social and ecological complexity

of landscapes is an issue that is at the heart of, and is addressed by, the literature and theory of CPR. Indeed, *the strength of CPR theory is precisely its contributions to identifying and analyzing the issues of property rights and collective action as key factors influencing natural resource management. These same issues are also critical to strengthening rural livelihoods.*

Given the applicability of the CPR framework, it is my hope that this is only the first of many IASCP Congresses and seminars that features this theme. The accumulated academic wealth of CPR theory can be a very powerful force for ensuring a greater nexus between the topic of Compensation for Environmental Services with Equity and Poverty concerns.

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