

***Internet Forum on Common Property Resources
Thematic Discussion #1: CPRs and Poverty Reduction***

The case studies and a literature review suggest that access to the commons is vital for the poor, who often have no security of tenure on private cropland, and no access rights to other land and water based resources such as woods and fish ponds, except to the commons. Use of common resources can make important contributions to household food security, through a mix of domestic consumption and use to generate cash income.

In addition access to CPR may have “livelihood ripple effects”. For instance, there are examples of increased school attendance where children spend less time collecting fuelwood, or where families can draw on income from commercial production of common resources to pay for school fees.

It is difficult, however, to have substantive evidence replicated in different countries to prove the level and extent of the dependence of the rural poor on the commons for their survival strategies and hence the importance of the commons in developing antipoverty strategies. In this context it is also essential to identify which type of CPR may have a higher relevance for the poor, how their rights to CPRs can be made (more) secure, and what strategies could translate rights to CPRs into poverty reduction.

Within this wider set of issues we would like to focus the next 10 days of discussion on two issues that emerge from case studies

1. Effects of elite capture in terms of sustainable use of resources and with regard to poverty
2. Effects of commercialization and economic change on resource use and poverty

Elite Capture:

Poverty does not exist in a vacuum, but is tied into the social, legal and economic context. Several cases identify where powerful elites control local resources, limiting the access by poor households to common resources. This raises several questions:

- A. ***What kinds of power asymmetries exist and how are they linked to resource access and use?***
- B. ***What are the differential effects of power asymmetries on the poor, including men, women and other marginalized individuals?***
- C. ***What strategies have been used to ensure that resource users (both powerful and less powerful) share equitably in decision making, costs and benefits of the commons?***

Examples:

- In Nepal, rights to common forests were provided to poor households through a state-sponsored leasehold program. Rich or upper caste people, however, encroached on leased lands. Some leasehold groups responded to this

encroachment by providing incentives to the encroachers to stay out of these lands, e.g., construction of new ponds and forest crops, which have led to a decrease in tension and conflicts.

- In the Kumaun area of Uttarakhand state in northern India, there are cases of local elites using connections with government authorities to avoid penalties for violating forest council rules – illustrating the difficulty in enforcing collective rules in the face of local hierarchies of power.
- In order to ensure that stronger actors perceive the need for inclusion and equity amongst different stakeholders, the Takieta Joint Forest Management Project in Niger provided training and capacity building for weaker groups, while at the same time engendering an understanding among the stronger groups of the rights and stakes for other groups. It also reassured stronger parties that collective decision making does not necessarily undermine their power and credibility.

Commercialization:

Several cases illustrate a desire by local populations to earn cash income through commercial use of **common property resources**; others illustrate the desire of states to attract investments to foster economic development (e.g. forestry concessions, ranches, etc.). This raises several questions:

- A. What kinds of commercialization are taking place? What drives these?*
- B. What benefits do poor men and women derive from commercialization? What costs do they bear?*
- C. How does commercialization affect resource use? What is the environmental impact?*
- D. What complementarities and disruptions can be found between individual and governmental strategies to foster economic development in CPRs?*

Examples:

- In southern Cameroon, new market opportunities lead to marketing of cassava and introduction of cash crops, e.g., cucumber and cocoa, through use of common resources. These largely keep existing common resource tenure and management intact. Larger scale commercialization, e.g., development of palm oil plantations, is bringing about greater disruption to the existing customary tenure system.
- State policy to encourage mining investment in Peru is generating opposition from *campesino* communities, whose rights to common lands are put at risk by mining concessions. Poverty rates are high where mining is taking place – more than 50% in the two regions where gold production is highest.