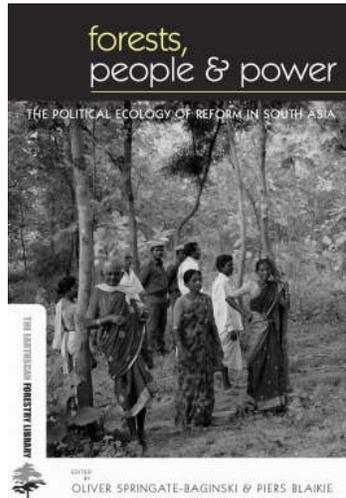


Forests, people and power: The political ecology of reform in South Asia

Edited by Oliver Springate-Baginski and Piers Blaikie



The book examines reform in forest management policy in India and Nepal, in particular focussing on the three major Indian states of Orissa, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh and the mid-hills and plains or Tarai area of Nepal. Much policy debate revolves on the role of local people in forest management. 'Participatory forest management' or PFM refers to any policy that claims to be participatory and some of the concluding chapters examine the purposes of participation in various contexts. Many claims to 'participation' are made for many different reasons, whether by policy-makers, activists, politicians, funding agencies, forest users - who range from landless tribal people to village elites.

Since the mid 1990s there has been much literature about how the promises of participatory forest management reform has not been fully realised. The book argues that participation in forest management is justified on the basis of social justice and law because forests, until recently, have provided major support for rural livelihoods before being undermined by state control at the expense of local people and their traditional rights of access and use. The process of the state undermining local rights continues and even sometimes under the guise of PFM. A couple of chapters in the book address why policy continues along this path and why reform is so difficult.

The book describes how there has been a long struggle between the state and different sectors of civil society and local people over the control, management and use of India and Nepal's natural resources, especially over what are classified as forest lands and resources.

New issues have emerged in recent years in forest policy reform debates, supported by international agencies, intellectuals and the increasingly marginalised sections of society such as Dalits and castes in Nepal and India. All focus on how basic needs can be provided for from the forest and the participation of local forest users (especially poorer groups) in forest management. PFM has been the main focus of official policy reform in different guises. The policy also often coexists uncomfortably with local people's informal and traditional forest management practices.

The authors have taken a less conventional approach by adopting a middle way between the academic and professional, combining a discursive approach with empirical evidence and

hypothesis testing. All of the questions raised in the book are political and the framing of hypothesis are shaped by a particular political stance.

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