



The co-production of land use and livelihoods change: Implications for development interventions

Edward R. Carr^{a,*}, Brent McCusker^b

^a University of South Carolina, Department of Geography, Columbia, SC 29208, United States

^b West Virginia University, Department of Geology and Geography, 330 Brooks Hall, Box 6300, Morgantown, WV 26506, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 October 2008

Received in revised form 11 April 2009

Keywords:

Land use

Livelihoods

Co-production

Development

South Africa

Ghana

ABSTRACT

In a previous paper [McCusker, B., Carr, E.R., 2006. The co-production of livelihoods and land use change: Case studies from South Africa and Ghana. *Geoforum* 37 (5), 790–804], we argued that land use and livelihoods could best be understood as co-produced, where land use and livelihoods are not separate objects of knowledge related to one another through abstract processes, but different manifestations of social processes through which individuals and groups come to understand the challenges facing their everyday lives, the various resources available to them to negotiate these challenges, and the strategies by which they can conduct that negotiation. In this paper, we examine the theoretical basis for “co-production” with the goal of using this approach to inform development interventions.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In a previous paper (McCusker and Carr, 2006), we engaged ongoing discussions about the connection between land use and livelihoods outcomes by arguing that such outcomes could best be understood as co-produced. For us, the co-production of land use and livelihoods rests upon the idea that land use and livelihoods are not separate objects of knowledge related to one another through abstract processes, but different manifestations of social processes through which individuals and groups come to understand the challenges facing their everyday lives, the various resources available to them to negotiate these challenges, and the strategies by which they can conduct that negotiation. In that paper, we left the process of how land use and livelihoods are co-produced at the level of empirical exposition.

In this paper, we examine the theoretical basis for “co-production” with the goal of using this approach to inform development interventions. We feel a theoretical explication is necessary because a co-productionist approach to the connection between land use and livelihoods is a departure from the bulk of work on this subject, especially that which relies upon “driver-feedback” models of causation. A “driving force” is often conceptualized as a process or event external to an object of knowledge, such as a community or a socio-ecological system, that is both necessary

and sufficient to explain a change in that object of knowledge. Where other research has focused on various biophysical or socio-economic “drivers” to explain linked land use/livelihoods outcomes, we argue that such research has identified manifestations of social processes that shape linked land use and livelihoods outcomes, not the processes themselves. What is necessary and sufficient for understanding the relationship between changes in land use and livelihoods is an engagement with the relations of power and knowledge in particular places that produce/are produced by both the meanings behind particular economic, ecological or social changes (for example, whether or not they are defined as problems) and the material outcomes that both shape, and are shaped by, those meanings.

In our previous paper, we argued that to understand how change is affected, the central point of analysis must be the identification of who has the capacity to decide whether particular shifts in economy, ecology or society are threats or opportunities, and the discourses through which they apprehend and evaluate these shifts. This opened co-production, as we presented it, to a critical problem – a (mis)reading of discourse as totalizing, creating a land use/livelihoods nexus in which change only comes from outside, stripping local actors of agency. This was not our intent. Instead, we see the co-production of land use and livelihoods change as a specific outcome of more general, constant *effort of individuals and groups in society to rectify the imperfect mapping of discourse and materiality in particular moments, places, and activities*. Simply put, we argue that discourses of both land use and livelihoods, the words, meanings, framings and practices attached to

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: carr@sc.edu (E.R. Carr), Brent.McCusker@mail.wvu.edu (B. McCusker).

each, do not always lead to expected outcomes, or outcomes that can be explained from within that discursive framing. Similarly, the materiality of livelihoods outcomes often fails to live up to expectations, or presents challenges to the discursive framing of those livelihoods. When such events occur, individuals and communities seek to resolve this mismatch by adjusting their discursive expectations of a particular strategy, shifting their land use and livelihoods practices, or a combination of the two. We explicitly avoid the privileging of either discourse or materiality as the lever of change. Therefore, we reject the isolation of a singular, ultimate source of change. Whether intentional or otherwise, both materialist and poststructural approaches hegemonize singular sources of change by seeing either discourse (poststructural) or materiality (materialist) as the “last moment” upon which change rests. We argue that such an approach takes our focus from the *process* of negotiating the tension between discourse and materiality that better reflects the sources of change in linked land use and livelihoods systems.

Through this understanding of change, we attempt to move beyond arguments about the dualities of structure and agency and/or materiality and representation in changing land use and livelihoods toward a focus on the moments in which everyday imperfect mappings between discourse and materiality are exacerbated to the point that actors make efforts to address them. This is not to say that all such imperfect mappings are understood as such. Instead, they become apparent in mismatches between such things as the discursive construction of livelihoods and the outcomes of particular livelihoods activities. While such mismappings may come in the context of external intervention, such interventions cannot be properly seen as “driving” change because they are merely catalysts for complex decision-making. If the impacts of external interventions do not exacerbate imperfect mappings of discourse and materiality in a particular place, these interventions will not result in change. Once such an impact does exacerbate these imperfect mappings, however, individuals and groups will act to resolve this issue, and these efforts are what shape the particular outcomes of such interventions.

In this light, co-production presents significant challenges and opportunities for development interventions, especially those policies intended to foster sustainability or the well-being of agrarian societies. Centrally, understanding land use and livelihoods as two manifestations of the same social relations calls into question the very idea of a development intervention targeted at particular drivers of unwanted or problematic change. If land use and livelihoods are not separate objects of knowledge that operate independently of one another, sectoral interventions are inherently unpredictable and therefore likely ineffective, as any action aimed at reshaping either land use or livelihoods will necessarily reshape the other (as well as a host of other manifestations of these social relations). A strong “rewriting” of either land use or livelihoods via a sectoral intervention will, therefore, likely result in a moment in which land use or livelihoods and the underlying social relations of which they are manifestations are out of joint.¹ The predictability of outcomes tied to interventions which are insensitive to this will be very low. Such disjoints can open up spaces for new or renegotiated social relations that will, in turn, reshape both livelihoods and land use with regard to place- and community-specific considerations. For example, development interventions that do not map to already existing social relations can cause communities to respond with reformulations of social relations that are reactions to undesired external interventions, which might be viewed as a greater challenge than the original problem the intervention was meant to address. Reworking both land use and livelihoods simultaneously cannot re-

solve this problem, as they are but two of many manifestations of these same social relations.

In this challenge, we see an opportunity. A co-productionist approach to understanding change in (rural) societies is an alternative conceptual basis from which to frame development interventions. As many critics have argued, it is not enough to add social concerns such as gender to development projects “and stir” (e.g. Leach, 1992; Pearson and Jackson, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Rathgeber, 2005). Co-production, in its argument that we must seek to understand local social processes first and *then* integrate our interventions into these processes, validates long-held beliefs that development projects need to incorporate social science expertise much earlier in the project design stage than is common at present.

We begin this article by briefly examining the key bodies of theory that inform our understanding of change in the land use and livelihoods nexus. Following this, we outline how co-production presents opportunities to rethink development policy in a manner that better responds to processes taking place on the ground, and therefore better aligns with the needs and aspirations of those most directly affected by these changes. This is illustrated, in our final section, by two short case studies that illustrate the problems with development interventions that are insufficiently sensitive to the ways in which co-production can be understood as a constant effort to rectify what we see as the imperfect relationship between discourse and materiality.

2. The conceptualization of “co-production”

The idea of co-production emerged as a response to what we perceived as a disjoint between our experiences conducting fieldwork in Ghana (Carr) and South Africa (McCusker) and trends in the land use change literature the livelihoods literature. Our principal concern with these literatures is their shared assumption about the relationship between land use and livelihoods, where changes in one are necessary and sufficient for explaining changes in the other. While studies in both literatures might consider the ways in which feedbacks return to influence the driving side of this relationship, the influence of these feedbacks is generally seen as neither necessary nor sufficient to explain changes in that driver.

This “driver-feedback” model of understanding linked land use change and livelihoods change is buttressed by highly static approaches to social process. Both literatures recognize that changes in the land use/livelihoods relationship are the product of the local social system, in that this system mediates local understandings of and responses to events and processes that transcend the local (such as climate change). However, such mediation often takes place through simplified social categorizations and roles, such as gender, that present such roles and identities as ahistorical and without local constitution (universal). As Carr (2008b) has argued in the context of gender and development, without a consideration of the local constitution of social roles via economic, political, and environmental means, we cannot fully understand how the observed timing and character of particular land use and livelihoods changes come about. In short, without such consideration, we run the risk of conflating disparate processes by only examining their outcomes or appearances.

In response to these problems, we argued for a focus on livelihoods as “not only the circulation of various resources, commonly labeled as forms of ‘capital’, but also the means by which social roles are constituted and power circulated” (McCusker and Carr, 2006, p. 791). Further, we contended, “land use is reflective of a power-laden ordering of the world, where the appropriate crops, labor, land area, and intensity for a given context are not only agricultural/biophysical facts, but important forms of knowledge that

¹ We thank Ben Wisner for this observation.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5074938>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5074938>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)