



Explaining the *de facto* open access of public property commons: Insights from the Indus Delta mangroves



Junaid Alam Memon, Assistant Professor^{a,*}, Gopal B. Thapa, Professor^b

^a Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, PO Box 1091, QAU Campus, Islamabad, Federal Territory 44000, Pakistan

^b School of Environment, Resources and Development, Asian Institute of Technology, PO Box 4, Klong Luang, Pathumthani-12120, Thailand

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 February 2015

Received in revised form 30 August 2016

Accepted 31 August 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Public property commons

Mangroves

Indus delta

Policy analysis

Institutional analysis

Natural resources management

ABSTRACT

Public property common pool resources in many developing countries are often portrayed as being in a dismal state, allegedly due to their governments' inability to manage them sustainably. While this explanation may have some merit, it is certainly inadequate. Instead, we argue that public property commons degrade partially because governments, in their attempt to obtain an overall societal balance, sometime accord low priority to some resources and bestow their ownership to an agency that may lack the appropriate mandate. While for many governments, this tendency is deliberate, it results in a *de jure* public property commonly exhibiting *de facto* open-access status and creates a situation where anybody may benefit but nobody feels responsible for the conservation and management of such resources. Based on the policy and institutional analyses of mangrove management in the Indus Delta of Pakistan, we propose such a case for theoretical debate on the issue. We conclude that instead of packaging and allocating rights to a single entity, rights in complex CPRs may be defined and allocated separately to different entities to produce socially desired goods and services. No matter how complex it seems, such an arrangement is necessary to deal with the complexity inherent in various socio-ecological systems like mangroves.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The intergenerational well-being of humankind requires prudent use of the earth's finite resources. Societies often establish property rights institutions to conserve important common pool resources (CPR) to fulfill the requirements of both current and future generations. Scholars generally agree that effective CPR conservation requires stewardship (Agrawal et al., 2008; Gibbs and Bromley, 1989; Hardin, 1968, 1998; Ostrom, 1990), but noticeably disagree over the effectiveness of different forms of property in this regard. For the last few decades, theoretical debates and empirical research have attempted to define various concepts related to CPR situations (Dietz et al., 2002) and their outcomes when managed under private, communal or public property arrangements (Ostrom, 2009; Schlager and Ostrom, 1992). Subsequently, researchers undertook many studies of CPR outcomes under different property arrangements, and they drew conclusions about one property regime's supremacy over the others (e.g., Ahmed

et al., 2012; Andersson et al., 2014; Bonilla-Moheno et al., 2013). Findings are converging on the point that, regardless of any forms of property, "successful" CPR management largely depends on the effectiveness of the compliance mechanism underlying any property regime (Agrawal et al., 2008; Coleman, 2009; Ostrom, 1992; Schlager and Ostrom, 1992).

Nonetheless, the conceptual, analytical and prescriptive clarity that comparative research on property-rights regimes provides is helpful until one assumes that different owners (e.g., individuals, communities, or government agencies) of a resource system (e.g., a forest) may be pursuing a generic objective (which can be anything, including sustainably using resource system for subsistence and/or profit-generating purposes). We contend that in real-world CPR situations, it is not necessary to hold this assumption consistently, as owners may have varying concerns for their resource endowment. Thus, they may take good care of some resource system components more than the others, depending on the importance they place on different components within that resource system.

Thus, it is easy to conceptualize a private forest owner losing his/her interest in forests and favoring other land uses, showing more concern about the land than the vegetation covering it. Examples include the *Doi Moi* policy in Vietnam that gave

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +92 18126060012.

E-mail addresses: memon@gmx.us, memon@pide.org.pk (J.A. Memon), gopal@ait.asia (G.B. Thapa).

mangrove parcels to individual households in order to conserve them. Conversely, this policy furthered mangrove loss, as many households preferred using forestland for aquaculture, considering that they owned the property and they could use it the way they wanted (Hong, 1993). The same is possible, even for common property, if the community can build such a consensus, which may be difficult due to intra-group inequalities and conflicts (Agrawal et al., 2013; Andersson and Agrawal, 2011), but certainly not impossible. A similar possibility also exists regarding public property, but is not that obvious because scholars often deal with this form of property as a monolithic concept. However, our argument is not only valid but also most crucial in the case of public property primarily for two reasons, which we will proceed to explain.

First, public property is inherently an aggregate concept, since it stems from the concept of a “government” consisting of nothing but a set of diverse institutions, organizations and agencies designed to achieve an overall societal balance (social, economic and environmental) within and outside its national boundaries. Therefore, under the caption of “public or government property,” different state agencies may own different patches of a forest, rangeland or other resource system. In view of the bundle of rights associated with different positions (see, Schlager and Ostrom, 1992), a government agency that retains a public property may be termed a “proprietor.” However, we prefer the term owner here, following Sabatier (1987) and Staudt (1991)’s argument that not only private, but also government agencies and ministries compete with each other for resources and jurisdictions in the pursuit of meeting their vested interests. Depending on such agencies’ primary mandates, their actions may complement, overlap or contradict the national objectives of sustainable conservation and management of different types of renewable natural resources. In Thailand, for example, despite being under the same ministry, the Forest Department had been restoring the degraded mangroves,

while the Fisheries Department was granting mangrove concessions for aquaculture development (Huitric et al., 2002). Secondly, the diversity underneath the concept of public property is important in the case of forest, rangelands and wetlands due to the amount of these resources that the government owns. For example, FAO (2010) reported that about 80 percent of the global forestlands are state-owned. Given the size of government ownership and number of owners/subcontractors who actually maintain the lands, the concern over public property is proportionately high.

A general explanation that governments in many developing countries lack adequate resources to effectively manage and conserve their CPRs may still hold, but it is certainly inadequate. Our explanation postulates that public property commons are in a dismal state partially because governments, in their attempt to obtain an overall societal balance, sometimes accord them low priority and transfer their ownership to an apparently unconcerned agency. This is particularly true for land-based resources like forests, including mangroves, rangelands and wetlands, where many agencies would be interested in owning the land but not necessarily in caring about the grass, trees and mangroves or other parts of the property. In such cases, the *de facto* open-access status of public property CPRs is deliberate and conceptually different from “management failure,” an idea only relevant when an agency or owner officially subscribes to the objective of sustainable conservation and management of a CPR.

Accepting our explanation of the *de facto* open access of *de jure* public property commons lead to a great deal of complexity into our analyses because it poses broader research questions, such as why some governments are able to bring better outcomes for their CPRs than others while attempting a balance among social, economic and environmental choices. Normally, our narrow disciplinary view and training does not allow for the holistic but messy analyses required for answering such broad questions. To

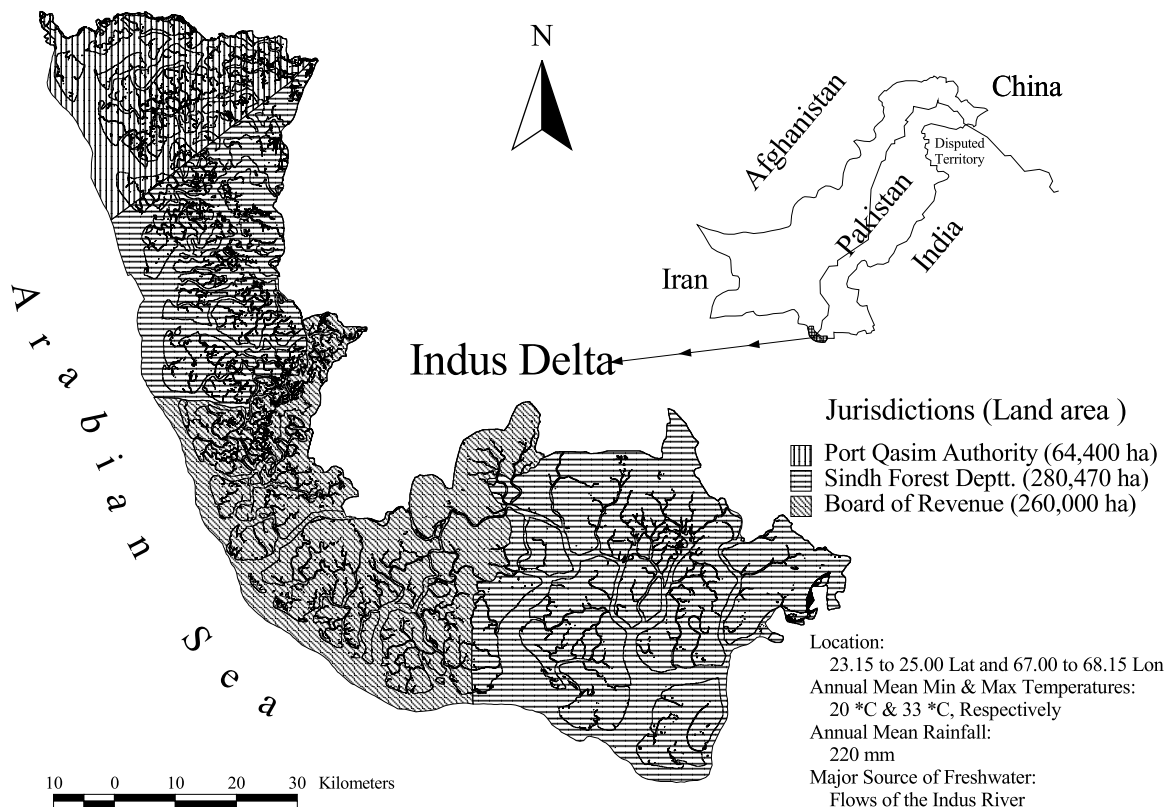


Fig. 1. Location of the study area showing the boundaries of the PQA, SFD and SBR.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7466538>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7466538>

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