



Comparing community forestry actors in Cameroon, Indonesia, Namibia, Nepal and Germany[☆]



Carsten Schusser^{*}, Max Krott, Mbolo C. Yufanyi Movuh, Jacqueline Logmani, Rosan R. Devkota, Ahmad Maryudi, Manjola Salla

Department of Forest and Nature Conservation Policy, Georg-August University Goettingen, Buesgenweg 3, 37077 Goettingen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Current research on community forestry worldwide is starting to question whether community forestry programmes can fulfil their goals towards the empowerment of the local forest user. Apparently, the driving forces behind the programmes are actors who are very powerful within the hierarchies, and devolution of power to the local level is not taking place. Several research efforts have investigated the issue and have identified different internal and external actors as important players.

However, said research seldom analyses actor involvement directly, and in addition leaves open the theoretical definition of the term “actor”. The lack of this definition makes impossible the comparison of different findings. If further research intends to compare community forestry worldwide, there is a need for a theory-based actor model.

In order to contribute to the general discourse on community forestry, this study has defined the term “actor”, and also introduces an actor classification model that is theory-based. The model, together with an actor identification method, was applied to selected community forestry case studies in five different countries around the world (Indonesia, Germany, Cameroon, Namibia and Nepal). The results provide an answer on the question: who are the main actors involved with community forestry? At the same time, the empirical findings also demonstrate that the model is applicable in practice.

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1. Introduction

Poteete and Ostrom (2004) analysed literature that addressed issues related to the collective management of common-pool resources. Their article highlights the existence of a huge amount of publications that addresses this issue. Community forestry appears as one approach to the management of common-pool resources. It aims to improve the livelihood of local people as well as the condition of natural resources on which they depend for their living (Agrawal et al., 2008). According to Maryudi et al. (2012), the core policy objectives of the programme are: empowerment of direct forest users, improved livelihood of the direct forest users and improved forest conditions.

It appears that community forestry delivers on its promise of achieving positive ecological outcomes (Brendler and Carey, 1998; Chakraborty, 2001; Dietz et al., 2003; Thomas, 2006; Charnley and Poe, 2007; Adhikari et al., 2007; Singh, 2008; Wollenberg et al., 2008; Devkota, 2010; Vodouhe et al., 2010; Maryudi, 2011; Pandit and Bevilacqua, 2011).

On the other hand, its contribution to the empowerment of forest users and to the improvement of their livelihood still remains

questionable. Maryudi (2011) analysed community forests in Java, Indonesia and concluded that local forest users were benefitting significantly neither in empowerment nor in livelihood improvements. Devkota (2010) and Schusser (2013), presented similar findings, and according to Edmunds and Wollenberg (2001:192), it is likely that the poorest forest user is worse off now than before. Shackleton et al. (2002) conclude: “The way in which local people realize the benefits of devolution differs widely, and negative trade-offs, mostly felt by the poor, are common.” In addition, Wollenberg et al. (2008) conclude that neither the co-management nor the local government model have met the high expectations of the community forest programme. A number of researchers (Ribot, 2004, 2009; Larson, 2005; Blaikie, 2006; Dahal and Capistrano, 2006) have analysed common practice and have shown that decentralisation policy is seldom followed by genuine power devolution to the local users. Edmunds and Wollenberg (2001) report similar findings, i.e., that local institutions are vulnerable to external powerful actors and that these powerful actors are more likely to dominate the processes. Agrawal & Gibson (1999, p. 629) suggested that it would be “more fruitful” to focus on “internal and external institutions that shape the decision-making process” and that it is important to know what the multiple interests of the actors are, and how they make decisions regarding natural resource conservation. The same is suggested by Shackleton et al. (2002, p. 1): “More powerful

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^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: cshuss@gwdg.de (C. Schusser).

actors in communities tend to manipulate devolution outcomes to suit themselves”.

Considering this, the question could be raised of whether community forestry programs are suitable for the achievement of empowerment and livelihood improvement for the local resource user. [Shackleton et al. \(2002, p1\)](#) therefore points out, in her conclusion: “A sheared framework, more accountable to local livelihood needs and people’s rights to self-determination, is required...”. [Charnley and Poe \(2007, p. 325\)](#) who compared community forestry (CF) in four different countries, state: “Further research is needed to better understand the working of “community” in community forest projects, including who participates and who does not, why, and how power and benefits are distributed and captured at the community level.”

What should a shared framework or further research look like and of what should it consist? [Shackleton et al. \(2002, p 1\)](#) observes that the different actors involved have “...different visions of devolution and its mode of implementation”. [Charnley and Poe \(2007\)](#) clearly state that the actors themselves should be analysed, as well as power and the benefit distribution.

For [Krott \(2005\)](#) the actor is a basic factor in forest policy analysis. [Hermans & Thissen \(2009, p.808\)](#) state that “[...] policy analysts could benefit from the analytical reflection on the actors [...]” Consequently, community forestry researchers are interested in incorporating methods which explain multi-actor policy processes ([Hermans and Thissen, 2009](#)). To contribute to the discourse, this article addresses actors involved with community forestry in Nepal, Indonesia, Namibia, Germany and Cameroon. In order to determine who the main actors involved with community forestry are, the article will present a method for the identification and comparison of the actors involved. In addition, it will present the actor-country related results and a comparison between the countries.

2. Methodology

This research is part of a comparative research study that investigates community forestry in several countries around the world. This article’s empirical findings are based on the results from completed field studies (Nepal: [Devkota, 2010](#), Indonesia: [Maryudi, 2011](#), Namibia and Germany: [Schusser, 2012a, 2012b, 2013](#); [Schusser et al., 2013](#); [Yufanyi Movuh and Schusser, 2012](#)). Around 12 case studies were selected in each country. The selection followed the criteria of best practice. That means that the study was only interested in community forests that were seen as the best community forest examples in each country. Based on this, the study applied the selection criteria of establishment stage (initial or advanced) and the production potential (low or high) of the community forest ([Devkota, 2010](#); [Maryudi, 2011](#)). The selection of the country case studies was based on interviews with experts ([Failing and Gregory, 2003](#)). Apart from this, the researchers were familiar with the regions and could speak the respective languages. In total, 57 community forestry case studies were analysed between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2012.

2.1. Theory-based actor classification

Many investigations have looked at community forestry and identified different internal and external actors as important players. But none of this research has defined its actors theoretically. [Poteete and Ostrom \(2004, p. 216\)](#) mention that “Inconsistent terminology [...] may obscure consistent patterns or suggest a pattern where none exists.” Apart from that, this inconsistency makes it impossible to compare actors identified within different studies. To overcome this problem, this article proposes a theoretical actor definition as well as a theoretical actor classification model.

The research mentioned above used the terms “actor” or “stakeholder” to examine interrelations within community forestry but none of the publications defines the terms theoretically. However, this actor-

theoretical perspective ([Schimank, 2005](#)) is needed for actor-centred research. The authors are aware that scientific literature distinguishes between the term actor and stakeholder and that both terms can be defined differently. For this study it was important gain empirically results based for the actors and or stakeholders involved. Therefore the study combines both terms as one category and names it as actors.

As [Schimank](#) points out (p. 29), “actors are source and bearer of actions”. He also observes that, in accordance with a methodological individualism, actors should be seen as individuals. According to him, this approach will not help much if research tries to cover societal issues, since individuals usually cannot accomplish much in terms of change. This is the starting point of [Scharpf’s \(2000, p. 95–107\)](#) actor-centred intuitionism approach, where he highlights the stronger position of composite actors, as opposed to individual ones. In much of the research, actors are seen through the lens of this theory. They are entities that have the possibility of influencing processes in order to achieve their own goals ([Jansen and Schubert, 1995](#); [Kooiman, 1993](#); [Maynitz, 1993](#); [Rhodes, 1997](#); [Agrawal and Gibson, 1999](#); [Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2001](#); [Shackleton et al., 2002](#); [Maynitz, 2004](#); [Schimank, 2005](#); [Hermans and Thissen, 2009](#); [Schneider, 2009](#)). [Böcher and Töller \(2012\)](#), and [Blum and Schubert \(2011\)](#) go one step further and attribute the term “goal” to an actor’s distinct interest. Particularly [Böcher and Töller \(2012\)](#) points out the importance of the actor’s interest as a determinant of how the actor acts. This is a crucial point, because an actor’s interests determine the involvement with the programme and the way he behaves. For example, [Grimble & Chan \(1995, p. 123\)](#) indicate that stakeholder groups are defined “[...] on the basis of each group having a distinct set of interests that distinguishes”. [Coleman \(1990, p.28\)](#) relates actors to resources and describes these resources as “things over which they have control and in which they have some interest”. [Devkota \(2010\)](#) and [Maryudi \(2011\)](#) see an actor as an entity that can influence CF outcomes based on its interests and power. According to [Hermans and Thissen \(2009\)](#), actors can “[...] influence the world around them, including other actors [...]”. [Schneider \(2009, p.192\)](#) defines an actor as an “acting entity which is involved in the formulation and implementation of a policy”. What these researchers all find is a situation where an actor has a distinct interest and the possibility of action. Applying this to already existing definitions, the term “actor” in the context of community forestry has been defined as follows:

2.1.1. An actor is any entity that has a distinct interest and the possibility of influencing a policy

This definition allows for the different possibilities for what an actor can be, e.g., an individual person like a sawmill owner or a composite actor, like a government institution. It strictly associates the term “actor” to a policy, e.g., community forestry, if it is possible for the actor to influence it.

[Shackleton et al. \(2002\)](#) conducted comparative research on community-based natural resource management in eleven countries around the world. She mentions government, traditional leaders, local government, NGOs, donors, the private sector, alliances and people’s organisations as actors with an interest and the possibility of influencing the programme. Other authors identified similar actors, like [Jones and Mosimane, 2000](#); [Schiffer, 2004](#); [Agrawal et al., 2008](#); [Schreckenberger and Luttrell, 2009](#); [McDermott and Schreckenberger, 2009](#). In addition, [Diop and Fraser \(2009\)](#) also identified universities and extension agents as actors. [Laroche et al. \(2012\)](#) found out that the media can have positive effects on a community.

The self-descriptions of the actors are easy to acquire empirically, but due to the high diversity between different countries and the vagueness of the terms the actors use, the self-descriptions are not sufficient for a scientifically sound comparison. The definition should be based on theory and it should describe the identity of the actor well. In this way, the diversity of actors from several studies, seen above, is simplified based on theoretical considerations. Therefore, the introduction of

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