

# Local Land Use Strategies in a Globalizing World

Agenda >  
General

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During the last decade, a number of developing countries have seen both rapid economic growth and even more rapid economic decline, particularly in Southeast Asia, stemming from the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Each country and region has experienced these changes differently, but all have become firmly involved in a wider process of globalization. Accompanying these recent changes have been apparently increasing climatic variability, population growth and movement, land use change, deforestation, and what some have termed ‘globalization of poverty’. Other changes include increasing commercialization, trans-border trade, and the creation of new economic, social, and political alignments. These changing conditions come along with strengthened state power in some places leading to increasing constraints on local peoples’ livelihoods. Elsewhere weakened state power has resulted in more local autonomy but also more threats from outside in the form of uncontrolled resource exploitation. All of these changes have led to heightened concern over the sustainability of nat-

ural resource use, a central issue of the proposed conference organized by the Institute of Geography at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Local, rural peoples (whether indigenous or migrant) have had to deal with these changes as the globalization process and its accompanying effects reach into their social and economic lives. Local land use strategies have undergone changes as a result, as people adapt earlier practices to the new circumstances. This might be in terms of shortened fallows in swidden systems, expanded agro-forestry, short-term cash and long-term cash cropping, or expanded irrigation of rice fields. Local peoples are continually constrained in what they can do economically by both their natural and social environments, and the globalization process may affect these constraints through, for example, increasing commercialization of agriculture, land degradation from logging and mining, expanded and shifting opportunities for labour migration, and changing notions of household necessity and luxury. Of particular importance here is the well-documented

‘occupational multiplicity’, the diverse sources of income in farming households that affect decisions and practices with respect to land and other natural resource use.

In this conference, we aim to examine the interconnectedness of global and national processes of change, and local, rural land use strategies and practices that are affected by these wider processes and that directly shape social and natural environments at the local level. We will provide comparative insights into the ways local peoples have responded to economic growth and decline, and to economic development and crisis in their uses of the land. We will also, through interdisciplinary analysis, seek to establish direct linkages between these responses and environmental change. This then concerns such practices as swidden (or shifting) cultivation, its associated fallow and agro-forestry aspects, use of forest products, intensive farming systems such as irrigated rice, cash cropping of everything from vegetables and cereals to plantation crops and paper pulp, and the relationship between resource use and

off-farm diversification. Critically important to these practices are the social arrangements and institutions that people have devised to manage their relations to the land and its resources as well as their strategies for managing lands under increasing pressure. We are particularly interested in examining how locals have adapted to the shift from the era of rapid development in the 1980s and early 1990s to the economic crisis in 1997, with its continuing ramifications on the environment today. One central goal of this conference is to consider the extent to which locals’ management of their natural resources in the face of the changes over the past decade is sustainable. <

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