

# Local Land Use Strategies in a Globalizing World Shaping Sustainable Social and Natural Environments

Report >  
General

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**D**uring the last decade, a number of developing countries first experienced rapid economic growth and were then faced with even more rapid economic decline, particularly countries in Southeast Asia that fell victim to the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Meanwhile, in some places, increases in state power have placed greater constraints on local peoples' livelihoods. Declining state power elsewhere has fostered local autonomy, but has also increased outside threats, mainly the threat of uncontrolled

Over the last few decades, globalization processes have taken centre stage in most development debates. Developing economies have been particularly vulnerable to these processes, and are acutely exposed when economic crises, natural disasters, epidemics, or other adversities drain local and national resources. But how do local rural people react to such events? Having been managers of delicate or sometimes hostile environments for generations, local people are no strangers to crises. How do they combine management of their land and natural resources with the challenges and opportunities of globalized economies?

resource exploitation. In sum, this has led to heightened concern among government officials, development specialists, and local peoples over the sustainability of natural resource use.

Local peoples in many areas have been faced with apparent increases in climatic variability, population growth and movement, land use change, deforestation, land degradation, and poverty. Other changes include increasing commercialization and the creation of new economic, social, and political alignments. Constrained in their economic agency by their natural and social environments, local rural peoples

(whether indigenous or migrant) have dealt with these changes by adapting their earlier local land use strategies to the new circumstances.

The globalization process may affect these constraints through, for example, land degradation, shifting opportunities for labour migration, and changing notions of household necessity. Of particular importance in how people adjust is the well-documented 'occupational multiplicity', the diverse sources of income in farming households that affect natural resource use. This multiplicity has long allowed families to remain flexible in uncertain natural

environments and changing economic circumstances, most recently brought on by intensified global forces.

At the conference, we debated issues revolving around the mission of the Danish University Consortium on Sustainable Land Use and Natural Resource Management (DUCED SLUSE). Participants in fields ranging from anthropology and geography to soil science and forestry focused on local land users and the causes and effects of their strategies and practices in the face of externally induced crisis. We gave special emphasis to Southeast Asia and southern Africa, the main regions of interest in the SLUSE programme. Among a score of topics, we addressed the relationship between resource use and off-farm diversification, as well as the social institutions that people have devised to manage their relations to the land and its resources, their strategies for managing lands under increasing pressure, and the impact on the natural environment.

Among the invited speakers were Karen Lawrence and Raymond Bryant who turned a critical eye on community forestry policy, comparing Nigeria with the Philippines in their examination of 'spaces of malpractice' whereby gaps in donor intervention and governance may reinforce destructive practices. They also found that, under the 'right' local political conditions, donor intervention may bolster local resistance to resource malpractice and thus enhance the prospects for effective, long-term local resource management.

Drawing on an example from Palawan in the Philippines, they argued that the native Tagbanua of Coron Island faced entrenched political and economic opposition to their efforts at autonomous control of their territory. Paradoxically, they were able to draw from a range of policy tools, such as the community forestry stewardship agreement and the Certificate of Ancestral

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Domain, to resist official 'malpractice' and assert their own management plans for the island. With critical support from a leading Philippine environmental non-governmental organization (NGO), diverse official policies allowed the Tagbanua to shape the terms of encounter over a conservation project under the National Integrated Protected Areas Program (and funded by the European Union). They did this in such a way that it enhanced their own ability to manage Coron Island.

NGO support was critical for this local success: it helped to prepare local Tagbanua organizations early on in the policy process, and aided them in bridg-

ing shifts in government programmes, thus ensuring that they were not dependent on government initiatives. As a result, Tagbanua leaders were able to take advantage of available, official inputs but in such a way that they never lost sight of the need to maximize local control. Thus, they activated diverse social and political resources and began to close the governance gap that had previously favoured resource malpractice on Coron Island. This case thus represents one way that local peoples have successfully combined management of their natural resources with the challenges and opportunities offered by globalized economies. ◀

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#### Info >

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