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THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF REFORM IN SOUTH ASIA



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# Forests, People and Power

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The Political Ecology of Reform in South Asia

*Edited by*  
*Oliver Springate-Baginski and Piers Blaikie*

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## Note on *Panchayats* in India

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*Panchayat* (or *gram panchayat*) is a Hindi term meaning a committee of five village elders or leaders, charged with decision-making on village affairs and dispute resolution (*gram* meaning village, *panch* meaning five). The *panchayats* were historically selected bodies, hence retaining local hierarchies, typically dominated by upper class/caste males. *Panchayati Raj* (village self-government) became a nationalist cause in India during the struggle for independence, and subsequently the state's promotion of *panchayati raj institutions* (or PRIs) in keeping with the Gandhian ideal of *Gram Swaraj* (village republic) progressed gradually. However in 1992, through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, the *panchayats* became constitutionally mandated to facilitate strengthened and more representative decentralized local government. An elections process was also mandated with reservations to ensure the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups. Two higher administrative levels were also introduced: *panchayat samitis* at *tehsil* ('block') level; and the *zilla parishad* at district level. Below the *gram panchayat* there is another level, the *gram sabha*, the customary village forum where all members of each hamlet or village are expected to deliberate and hold their representatives accountable. Incidentally the term *panchayat* is also used to refer to local village committees that are not part of *panchayati raj*. *Van panchayats* for instance are village forest committees created in the 1930s in hill areas of Uttar Pradesh (now Uttaranchal) to manage village forests there.

# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Programme
ANSAB	Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APO	annual plan of operations
APP	Agriculture Perspective Plan
Ausaid	Australian Agency for International Development
BC	backward caste
BINGO	big international non-governmental organization
BISEP-ST	Biodiversity Sector Programme for <i>Siwalik</i> and <i>Tarai</i>
BIWMP	Bagmati Integrated Watershed Management Project
BZCF	buffer zone community forest
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBNRM	community-based natural resource management
CBO	community-based organization
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics (Nepal)
CEC	Centrally Empowered Committee ( <i>otherwise known as</i> National Level Committee on Forestry)
CESS	Centre for Economic and Social Studies (India)
CEW	community extension worker
CF	community forest/community forestry
CFDP	Community Forestry Development Project
CFM	collaborative forest management
CFMG	collaborative forest management group
CFUG	community forest user group
ChFDP	Churia Forest Development Project
CIAA	Commission for Investigation into Abuse of Authority (Nepal)
cm	centimetre
CollFM	collaborative forest management
CPM	Community Party of India
CPNUML	Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist and Leninist
CSE	Centre for Science and Environment
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
dbh	diameter at breast height
DDC	district development committee
DFCC	district forests coordination committee
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DFO	district forest officer (Nepal)/divisional forest officer (India)
DFPSB	District Forest Product Supply Board
DFRS	Department of Forest Research and Survey (Nepal)
DoF	Department of Forests (Nepal)

EC	executive committee
EFEA	Environment and Forest Enterprise Activity
EIA	environmental impact analysis
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FCA	1980 Forest Conservation Act
FD	forest department
FDA	forest development agency
FDI	foreign direct investment
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal
FINNIDA	Finnish International Development Agency
FMUDP	Forest Management and Utilization Development Project
FORESC	Forest Research and Survey Centre
FPC	forest protection committee
FPDB	Forests Product Development Board
FRI	Forest Research Institute (Dehra Dun)
FSCC	forest-sector coordination committee
FSI	Forest Survey of India
FUG	forest user group
FWC	Firewood Corporation (Nepal)
GB	general body
GCC	Girijan Cooperative Corporation
GDP	gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GO	government organization
GoI	Government of India
GoWB	Government of West Bengal
GPS	global positioning systems
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for Technical Cooperation)
ha	hectare
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal (as of 2006, Nepal government)
HP	Himachal Pradesh
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IBRAD	Indian Institute of Bio-Social Research and Development
IFA	1927 Indian Forest Act
IFI	international funding institution
IFS	Indian Forest Service
IGA	income-generating activity
IGNFA	Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IIFM	Indian Institute of Forest Management
ITDA	Integrated Tribal Development Agency (India)
ITK	indigenous technical knowledge
IUCN	World Conservation Union ( <i>formerly</i> International Union for the Conservation of Nature)
JBIC	Japan Bank for International Cooperation
JFM	joint forest management
JFMC	JFM committee
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JPC	Joint Parliamentary Committee

JTRC	joint technical review committee
KBK	Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi districts
KFC	Kathmandu Forestry College
kg	kilogram
km	kilometre
km <sup>2</sup>	square kilometre
KMTNC	King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation
LAMPS	Large-Scale Adivasi Multi-Purpose Society
LFP	Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (DFID-Nepal funded)
LHF	leasehold forestry
LNGO	local non-governmental organization
LPG	liquid petroleum gas
LSGA	1998 Local Self-Governance Act
m	metre
m <sup>3</sup>	cubic metre
MAI	mean annual increment
MAP	medicinal and aromatic plant
MC	management committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIS	management information systems
MLA	member of the legislative assembly
mm	millimetre
MoAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests (Government of India)
MoF	Ministry of Finance (India)
MoFSC	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (Government of Nepal)
MoLD	Ministry of Local Development
MoPE	Ministry of Population and Environment
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MP	member of parliament
MPFS	Master Plan for Forestry Sector
MTO	mass tribal organization
n	total population sample size
NACRMLP	Nepal–Australia Community Resource Management and Livelihood Project
NAEB	National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board
NAP	National Afforestation Programme
NARMSAP	Natural Resource Management Sector Assistance Programme
NBSAP	Indian National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCA	National Commission on Agriculture
NCS	National Conservation Strategy
NEPAP	Nepal Environment Policy and Action Plan
NFAP	National Forestry Action Plan
NFC	National Forest Commission
NFP	1988 National Forest Policy
NGO	non-governmental organization
NGSP	non-government service provider
NP	national park
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRC	Nepal Resettlement Company
NRM	natural resource management

NRSA	National Remote Sensing Agency
NSCFP	Nepal–Swiss Community Forest Project
NTFP	non-timber forest product
NWDB	National Wasteland Development Board
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (UK Government)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFD	Orissa Forest Department
OFDC	Orissa Forest Development Corporation
OFMP	Operational Forest Management Plan
OP	operational plan
PCC	project coordination committee
PCCF	principal chief conservator of forests
PESA	<i>Panchayat</i> Extension to Scheduled Areas
PF	<i>panchayat</i> forest
PFM	participatory forest management
PIL	public interest litigation
PMC	project management committee
PPF	<i>panchayat</i> protected forest
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
PRI	<i>panchayati raj</i> institution
PRSP	poverty reduction strategy paper
RCDC	Regional Centre for Development Cooperation
RD	revenue department
RDRC	Resources Development and Research Centre (Nepal)
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (Thailand)
RF	reserved forest
RFCC	regional forests coordination committee
RO	range officer
RP	range post
RRAFDC	Rural Region Agro-Forestry Development Centre
RUPFOR	Resource Unit for Participatory Forestry (India)
RSU	regional support unit
SAMARPAN	Strengthening the Role of Civil Society and Women in Democracy and Governance project
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SATA	Swiss Agency for Technical Aid
SDC	UK Sustainable Development Commission
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SF	social forestry
SFP	Social Forestry Project/Programme
SGVY	integrated village afforestation and eco-development ( <i>Samanvit Gram Vanikaran Samiriddhi Yojana</i> )
SHG	self-help group
SICFPG	Self-Initiated Community Forest Protection Group
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SIFPG	self-initiated forest protection group
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
SPWD	Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (India)
ST	scheduled tribe
TAL	<i>Tarai</i> Arc Landscape project

TCFDP	<i>Tarai</i> Community Forestry Development Project
TCN	Timber Corporation of Nepal
TDCC	Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation
THED	Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation
TII	Transparency International India
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
US	United States
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VDC	village development committee
VFPC	village forest protection committee
VIKSAT	Vikram Sarabhai Center for Development Interaction
VP	<i>van panchayat</i>
VSS	<i>Vana Samarakshyan Samiti</i> (forest protection committee)
WBFD	West Bengal Forest Department
WBFDC	West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited
WBSG	West Bengal State Government
WIMCO	Western Indian Match Company
WLPA	1972 Wild Life Protection Act
WLR	Wildlife Reserve
WTLBP	Western <i>Tarai</i> Landscape Building Project
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature ( <i>formerly</i> World Wildlife Fund)

## *Introduction*

# Setting Up Key Policy Issues in Participatory Forest Management

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*Piers Blaikie and Oliver Springate-Baginski*

### **A guide to this book**

This book examines the issue of reform in forest management policy in India and Nepal, considering in detail three major Indian states (West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh) and two regions of Nepal (the mid-hills and the plains, or *tarai*). A central issue of reform on which much current policy debate revolves is the role of local people in forest management. Participatory forest management (PFM) – a label used to describe a range of policy reform measures related to this issue – is examined in detail in this book. The term is employed here as a focus of debate, and we use it to refer to any policy that *claims* to be participatory in whatever terms and that applies whatever criteria the user chooses. Thus, the authors make no prior claim to what constitutes ‘*genuine*’ participation, although the concluding chapters outline the purposes of participation in different contexts and the obstacles and facilitative forces that shape the policy outcomes of ‘participation’. It will quickly become apparent that many claims to ‘participation’ are made for many different reasons. Assessments of these claims have been made by numerous different actors, including policy-makers; activists; politicians; international funding agencies; forest users of all kinds, from landless tribal people to village elites; and functionaries of the forest administrations at different levels.

There is a large and lively literature on PFM in Nepal and India, and although some very interesting data and innovative analyses have been presented, much of it covers similar ground in the sense that, since the mid 1990s, there has been a pattern of rather pessimistic conclusions that the promise of PFM reform has not been fully realized. Indeed, it is difficult to escape the well-trodden path of rehearsing an historical analysis of the colonial origins of forest management policy, especially in India, and its longevity and durability; of considering the limited changes that have occurred; and once again of rehearsing the continuing case for reform to bring justice and democratization for local forest users. This book follows this path some of the way, but also seeks to take different approaches. It makes the central argument that participation in forest management is primarily justified on the basis of social justice and common law because forests have, until relatively recently, provided major support for rural livelihoods before this was gradually undermined by patterns of state aggrandizement of the forest estate at the expense of local people and their customary rights of access and usufruct. This process of states undermining local rights still continues – indeed, in some places even under the guise of PFM. The later chapters in Part I (especially [Chapters 2 and 3](#)) address why policy broadly continues on this path and why reform (with

PFM at its centre) continues to be so difficult. [Chapter 4](#) outlines in theoretical detail the issue of rural people's livelihoods and how PFM should, and actually does, affect the livelihoods of different people. Part II consists of detailed studies of the three Indian states and two Nepalese regions (the middle hills and the *tarai*), including an examination of the regional policy genealogy and the emergence of PFM in comparative context. Quantitative analysis of the forest's contribution to the livelihoods of different groups (men, women, wealthy, landless, tribal people and so on) in different ecological conditions is presented, with a focus on the differences that the introduction of PFM has made to these disparate groups. Finally, in Part III, policy conclusions are drawn, and the political, economic and administrative feasibility of reform is assessed.

This chapter is a summary of our approach to this complex subject and reports the main findings in outline. The basis of our approach rests on the assumption that all statements about forests and forest lands are intrinsically political. The policy process simply cannot be understood or reformed (either radically or piecemeal) without understanding this. The approach of political ecology is introduced and promoted to reach this end. A brief summary of the established arguments concerning the direction of the struggles over forests and forest lands – pessimistic and optimistic – is provided later in this chapter in order to set the scene for the rest of the book and to point out the well-trodden discursive paths referred to earlier. For the busy reader, the last part of the chapter outlines the main research questions and findings. For the *very* busy reader, key words and concepts are italicized throughout the text. Key references only are given in this chapter, and fuller referencing can be found in subsequent chapters.

## Issues of 'people and forests' in India and Nepal

There has been a *long struggle* between the state and different sections of civil society and local people over the control, management and use of India and Nepal's land resources, particularly over what have been officially classified as forest lands and forest resources. Indeed, the state's right to control forests is asserted in the earliest South Asian texts on statecraft (see Kautilya, 1992). Over the last century, particularly due to colonial and economic expansion, these struggles have intensified. Certain issues constantly re-emerge: the appropriate role of the state in managing what has been defined as a national resource; environmental justice; and rights and entitlements, especially for populations who rely substantially on the forest for subsistence or small-scale commodity production. In some areas these issues are particularly relevant to indigenous peoples since forest management engages with issues of resource rights and ancestral domains, livelihood systems and cultural identity. Additionally, the issues of environmental conservation and protection (of watersheds, soil and water), biodiversity, vegetation and forest cover, and wildlife conservation have all become either subsumed by or at least overlap in complementary or contradictory ways a broadly defined forest policy. All of these issues emerge at different scales (the federal, state, district and local levels).

Insofar as the management of forests is partly a 'war of words' and partly policy argumentation between different protagonists, the formal institutions of state have exerted a powerful influence on the outcome of these struggles through the production and deployment of powerful and persuasive policy narratives. The present circumstances of these struggles are, in part, new, as well as being of long historical standing. They are, as always, *highly political*, even if certain parties wish to define them as technical (and under the control of those formal institutions that claim a monopoly of technical – and authoritative – knowledge). For example, the imposition by a forest department of an 80-year rotation of specified commercial species in a working plan is both a technical choice and a socio-political one

since it asserts one group's priorities while displacing those of existing users' and rights-holders' preferences for a different (probably shorter rotation) management system and a different and broader species mix. The working plan may also restrict access to the forest in specific ways and therefore reduce access to forest products that support people's livelihoods. Indeed, local users may not necessarily be interested in any kind of rotation at all, but only in selective needs-based extraction from natural growth. During the 19th century, the promotion of teak 'improvement planting' for British shipbuilding and export was a political decision. In the post-independence period, the deforestation of extensive areas of Dandakaranya area took place (now occurring in forests in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) in order to rehabilitate large numbers of refugees from East Pakistan. More recently, during the 1970s, it has been claimed that politicians encouraged local people to cut forests for economic gain, in this way seeking to win their votes. To take another example, socio-political choices over forest use have often been made in the name of national development, rather than promoting sustainable public use of the resource. In Nepal, the ejection of *Sukhumbasi* (literally squatters, but commonly historically settled tribal people not granted legal rights to their land) from forests in the *tarai* has been encouraged by politicians who used forest land and the trees on it as patrimony for favoured clients (Ghimire, 1998). These political issues also intersect with broader concerns, such as the formation of new states in the Indian union, tribal politics, an inequitable political economy, non-inclusive political representation, and armed struggle in a number of forested tracts in India, as well as the Maoist insurrection in Nepal.

*New issues* have also appeared in forest policy reform debates over recent decades, championed by international agencies, intellectuals within both India and Nepal, and the increasingly politicized and vocal marginalized sections, including Adivasis, Dalits and scheduled castes in India and Nepal. Albeit with different emphasis, all have focused on the assurance of providing basic needs from the forest, the participation of local forest users (especially poorer groups) in forest management (hence, participatory forest management), gender equity, the democratization of environmental knowledge, and a sharper poverty focus on social and environmental justice. PFM has been the main focus of official policy reform although, in different guises. The idea is not new, as the historical account of policy in [Chapter 1](#) shows. PFM policy often coexists uncomfortably with local people's informal and customary forest management practices (most explicitly, as we see in [Chapter 8](#), in Orissa's self-initiated forest protection groups). In India, PFM is known as joint forest management (JFM); in Nepal the terms used are community forestry (CF) and the less widespread models of leasehold forestry (LHF) and collaborative forest management (CollFM).

Different policy actors, international funding agencies, activists and other commentators make a variety of claims of PFM. Calls have been made for environmental justice and environmental equity for forest fringe and forest dwellers, and for women; for more effective management of forests to achieve various conservation objectives, as well as improved income streams, especially for the poor; and for the improved provision of a range of forest products that underpin the livelihoods of local people. Furthermore, in much of the international literature, the process of participation itself is claimed to empower people, increase their sense of becoming citizens rather than remaining subjects (to use Mamdani's phrase in Mamdani, 1996), improve their political and organizational skills, and bring the advantages of more coordinated collective action that uncoordinated individual effort could never achieve. However, more recent critiques of participation have also been made, which are discussed and elaborated on in the context of PFM in Part III of this book. Participation for some implies accommodation of local people's wishes in forest management; but for others (usually forestry professionals), it implies a loss of centralized control, a dilution of management objectives at a national scale, and a disregard of scientific knowledge and research in making informed and sound technical decisions. The latter group is often observed to favour

what might be called the ‘I decide, you “participate”’ interpretation of participation whereby local people are marshalled to achieve predetermined objectives in exchange for some promised share of benefits as an incentive. Thus, the issue of PFM is central to forest policy in India and Nepal, and informs a wide range of policy debates.

Issues of justice, equity between classes, ethnic groups and gender, sustainability, human rights and the purposes of forests are expressed in all manner of ways – as policy statements for public consumption, as laws and circulars, as manuals of standard operating procedures for foresters, as media items, and as verbal dialogue between local people and other actors at the village level. The individual words used and the argumentation are interwoven and used inter-textually, meaning that the same words and ideas may be employed by different actors to draw different and sometimes contradictory conclusions. As we discuss later, the term ‘forest’ itself has different meanings for different people, as do other terms, such as ‘scientific forestry’, ‘forest protection’, ‘participation’ and the involvement of local people in decision-making and activities. ‘Participation’ as used in PFM can be advocated in the service of competing – and sometimes contradictory – narratives. For example, participation can be said to be desirable *instrumentally* because it reduces management and policing costs on forest lands and, hence, reduces the responsibilities of the forest administration without undue risk of over-harvesting of an unprotected resource. At the same time, participation may be advocated *as an end in itself* on the grounds of social criteria such as empowerment, social justice and the development of social institutions. Alternatively, it can be *pragmatically* argued that the participation of forest users in forest management may be beneficial in some circumstances for sustaining forest quality, whereas – this argument goes – without the participation of forest users in planning, managing and protecting the forest, it becomes an open-access resource and forest quality will (continue to) decline. Thus, the different meanings of specific words used in policy argumentation is one of the central ideas of the book, returned to mainly in [Chapter 3](#) (see Roe, 1994; Hajer, 1995; and Apthorpe and Gaspar, 1996, for a more abstract discussion, and in an applied Indian context, see Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2001)

The variety of meanings attributed to participation has been encouraged as a result of the wide variety of actors who use the word in forest policy debates. There have also been convergences of their concerns. To use Hajer’s term, ‘discursive coalitions’ (Hajer, 1995, p13) can be identified around the term ‘participation’, in which different actors connect formally and informally with forest policy groups around specific storylines even though they may never have met and strategized together, and even though they may have, in other aspects, divergent agendas. Pressures and incentives have come both from the *international sphere* (multilateral organizations, bilateral donors and international groups of foresters), and from local social movements and in-country *activists and intellectuals*, often with good access to senior policy circles, and have been pressing for similar things developed in a variety of narratives for many years.

The debates over participation *per se* have now evolved into wider debates concerning forms of government, democratic decentralization, devolution and other governance issues. Therefore, participation has become a broader matter of contesting exclusive state ownership and control of forests, rather than simply their management with or without ‘participation’. However, the forest narratives from within and outside India and Nepal cross an important political divide. Sovereign countries do not have to listen to, or at least take seriously, those narratives and policy styles promoted by international funding agencies (IFIs). They can pick and choose to incorporate those aspects that suit them for a wide variety of political and fiscal purposes, but may only acquiesce to these narratives of participation or pay lip service to them in order to attract donor funds. Here, the relative leverage of different international and bilateral institutions in India compared to Nepal is important in helping to explain how policy is formulated and implemented. The challenge

in making sense of all this is that forest management is political and subject to many different and changing representations by different parties. 'Facts' are malleable and often fiercely contested, and there is a remarkably wide gap between rhetoric, the intention of the law, guidelines, policy documents and what really goes on in the field. As with some other state initiatives, (e.g. education, health provision, metropolitan plans, transport and irrigation developments), the outcomes are similarly difficult to agree on and have been highly contested. In all cases, it has been difficult to build a consensus on what monitoring criteria for participation in forest management might be. This is particularly so for forests where there has not been a consensus over the role of the forest sector in rural development and poverty alleviation, on what 'participation' actually means and is supposed to deliver, and on where the definition of 'participation' is enforced (i.e. whether the 'I have decided that *you* participate' model or some other more democratic one is the norm).

## Our approach

Our approach may not be as straightforward as many readers might like. A book about forest policy, in many people's view, may best be carried through by first identifying the problem clearly, and second, by presenting new and unequivocal evidence, seeing beyond and discounting political posturing, interrogating existing evidence and presenting facts, and then making a list of policy recommendations. In other words, the book should assume that 'truth can talk to power' (Wildavsky, 1979). On the other hand, as mentioned above, there has been a stream of publications following this model that have attempted to 'talk to power', but whose appeals to reason have had limited impact due to the entrenched position of the forest administration establishment (Gadgil and Guha's *Ecology and Equity*, 1995, being one of the most cogent). An alternative route, in view of the limited purchase of the above approach, may appeal more to academic than to professional audiences. This is the post-modernist route, involving deconstruction of different socially constructed legitimating narratives around the claims of the powerful to the forest and their divergence from different everyday practices of coercively enforced control of the forest (similar to Sivaramakrishnan's *Modern Forests*, 1999, for example). However, the authors of this book believe that there is a pragmatic middle way that combines a discursive approach (focus on words, narratives and argumentation and, essentially, political in nature) with empirical evidence and reasonably rigorous hypothesis testing. There are crucial assumptions in many of the competing narratives which *are* amenable to evidence-based testing – for example, changes in forest condition following the start of PFM in an area, different people's access to the forest before and after PFM, and whether species choice in the micro-plan for a village took account of local people's preferences.

All of the questions asked in this book are political, and the framing of hypotheses is clearly shaped by a particular political stance. However, at the same time, hypotheses can be tested in a clear, positivist manner. Therefore, analysis is not all about talk and meaning, but also, in a carefully circumscribed way, about proof and what is 'true' or 'false'. To take further examples, what are the impacts of different kinds of official restrictions on the future livelihoods of poor people and on forest quality? How do different land tenures, both *de jure* and *de facto*, impact on forest conditions and on the distribution of access to different groups of people, particularly the poor? These questions can be answered in fairly straightforward ways. The key issue here is the *impact of forest policy on poor people*. In the Indian case, many entire indigenous communities, not all of whom were originally deprived, have been made poor through the disenfranchisement and appropriation of their ancestral resources by forest administration (see, for instance, Singh, 1986). There are counterarguments that do not deny these historical processes but consider them necessary and unavoidable in the drive towards a modern society (which is discussed later). The book takes responsibility for

choosing this issue as central in framing the research questions; but we have to acknowledge that it may not be the way in which other parties in forest management frame the 'problem'.

The title of the book includes the word 'power'. The preceding discussion has introduced the idea of *discursive power*. The rhetorical weight of policy argumentation, the presentation of evidence, persuasive language, claims of scientific authority and so on are key aspects of discursive power, but they are linked to other aspects of power. The first is the means by which knowledge is produced and disseminated. Therefore, large and relatively well-funded institutions such as the Indian forestry administration or the bigger IFIs can finance and undertake research and dictate their terms and objectives, while local forest users have their own knowledge and management techniques concerning their local forest, but do not have the means to represent them authoritatively as a feasible alternative to 'official' knowledge (see Banuri and Marglin's book with the self-explanatory title, *Who Will Save the Forests? Knowledge, Power and Environmental Destruction*, 1993, and, more recently, Sundar's 'The construction and destruction of indigenous knowledge in India' in Ellen et al, 2000). Our book has many examples of what we term the politics of forest knowledge, and it follows through its implications for forest sustainability and people's livelihoods.

Finally, other aspects of power concerning forests are exercised by different people. These involve other actors with particular interests in the forest, such as both international and indigenous conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individual conservationists who have, at various points, had a significant influence on forest policy and practice. Overall, interests in the forest across the range are usually exclusively material and specifically pecuniary. There are struggles over who defines the value of forest land and its constituent parts (for example, timber of different species, fodder and non-timber forest products, or NTFPs), who controls them and who can capture them. There are forest contractors, local landlords and their clients, and organized crime and corruption, together with politicians for whom forests may be part of their means of funding election campaigns, exerting control and getting people to do what they want, including using coercion, threats and acts of violence. There are other civil society actors such as the press, the insurgents in many parts of our study area, and formal institutions (e.g. the judiciary). The latter, in the form of the Supreme Court, has been especially influential in its public interest litigation judgments on forestry matters in India. Finally, there are also forest dwellers for whom the forest is home, culture, habitat and the material basis of their livelihoods. There is nothing specific to South Asia about these aspects of power – they are widespread internationally; but an effective analysis of forests and people must take account of them. Otherwise, analysis is confined to the debating chamber, where the written word, usually found in formal policy documents, becomes the focus of discussion and the messy reality of policy on the ground is overlooked.

This book sets out to answer some of the key questions about how and why policy is made and implemented, and about the impacts of PFM on forests and on different groups of people. It provides evidence and analysis and makes an effort to outline transparent argumentation in such a way that readers can make their own judgements. Nonetheless, no analysis of social and political issues such as forestry can successfully claim to be neutral. As we have already said, this book is political in the sense of prioritizing certain issues for investigation, being watchful of arguments and key words that carry heavy baggage and rhetorical statements aimed at non-participant audiences rather than at those who affect and are affected by what actually happens on the ground.

Throughout this book the issue of the power wielded by the forest administrations is central. It must not be assumed that this power only derives from the dominance it enjoys in policy argumentation. It also derives from a range of other factors. In India at least, the forest administration is one of the most well-established, durable and powerful clusters of civil

institutions in South Asia. The forest departments have enjoyed long-established control of huge areas of forest land or 'land designated as forest' (over 22 per cent of the land area in India and 39 per cent in Nepal), and have constantly sought to extend and deepen that control ostensibly in order to fulfil their goal of conserving forests, halting their degradation and diminution in the name of the national interest, providing materials for national development, and, until recently, providing revenue generation. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the historical antecedents and present the implications of this state of affairs. Territorial control is a major objective in its own right for the power it provides, and in India and Nepal the forest estate even includes large areas of 'forest' lands that neither have trees growing on them nor are suitable for growing timber in the future. Examples include high mountain areas above the tree line, such as Spiti district, Himachal Pradesh, or Ladakh in Kashmir, India, Mustang in Nepal and grasslands adjacent to villages throughout India.

We also examine the extent and nature of the forest services in India and Nepal on the ground, and here the picture is much more complex and, in some cases, surprising. Many of the works published during the late 1980s and early 1990s project the forest administration of India as a powerful entity able to enforce its stringent rules and regulations (Shiva, 1987; Gadgil and Guha, 1992). Recent literature on forestry shows that the forest administrations are not simply autonomous and powerful agencies, able to enforce their agenda unambiguously. Their policies are significantly constrained and altered by powerful political parties, leaders and other departments, not least the revenue department (Saberwal, 1999). Local elites also exercise a powerful influence on the nature of forest policy outcomes. Although a huge number of forest staff are notionally in place for the entire notified forest area, an increasing number of posts now remain vacant due to fiscal limitations on fresh recruitment. In many areas, there are severe constraints to even minimal surveillance, policing, extension and forest management. Thus, the territory formally under the management of the forest administrations may not demonstrate the power of the administration as it may seem when viewed through the lens of a map in a district office. The forest administrations of both India and Nepal (or, in some cases, individuals acting in their own informal capacity within them), and also often communities, have powerful *local* allies, such as forest contractors, sawmillers, manufacturers and traders of wood-based and other NTFPs, and the building, medical and aromatic plant industries. However, as Part II will show, these alliances have an equivocal role in the exercise of power by forest administrations. Usually, they have diverse interests in obtaining access to various forest land products that are not necessarily congruent with the objectives of official forest management policy. Furthermore, policies such as PFM provide new opportunities and constraints to improving access to these products, and their different strategies to improve their position may not necessarily assist in reaching official policy goals at all.

While the power of the forest administrations to implement policy on the ground as it is written in policy documents is often equivocal and dissipated, their discursive power (particularly in India) is dominant. They have control of the production of official knowledge about forests. They have a number of distinguished colleges to train forest officers and undertake technical research. They can map forests, claim new territories, decide on the criteria for designating forest land, and control the drawing-up of forest working plans. In India, these are *only* prepared by the forest administration, and in the case of PFM micro-plans, they are usually dominated by the divisional forest officer. All of this can be argued by forestry professionals to be entirely necessary, requiring prudent and carefully thought out plans in the name of modern, sustainable and scientific practice, and it remains a central part of the official policy narrative. Perhaps this is a central claim of *all* official policy narratives!

Examining these claims and the overwhelming bureaucratic power that both draws on and constructs them requires that the authors of this book interrogate these powerful policy narratives, including other narratives from forest dwellers and activists. For example, Nepal's

forest administration is different from that of India because although historically based on the Indian model, the forest department has never been able to establish effective control of forest areas in remote hill and mountain regions even though it has had a strong presence in accessible areas of the *tarai* and areas surrounding the main towns in the hills. It has been more accommodating to ideas from civil society and international donors. Government budgetary pressures in Nepal, particularly in recent years, have meant that donor-funded projects have a less troubled passage from conception to implementation on the ground. For these reasons therefore, the power to enact legislation, write manuals and shape the practice of forest management on the ground is more diffuse and less concentrated in Nepal's forest administration than it is in India. Other narratives from both national and local institutions are heard clearly in Nepal, as in some instances in India, too.

Since the late 1960s, both countries have been characterized by the spread of insurgencies, particularly in the impoverished forested areas and more remote rural areas, involving a range of groups that have become known as *Naxalites* in eastern and central India, and the more unitary *Maobadi* in Nepal (which has spread across Nepal since the 1990s and is currently destabilizing the state structures). This has precipitated a renewed crisis in state governability. The insurgent's cause is viewed with varying levels of legitimacy by rural communities in whose name they act, particularly where armed conflict has descended into a dismal cycle of tit-for-tat brutality and opportunistic gangsterism or has brought repressive onslaughts by state security agencies. Nevertheless, the various groups' manifestoes generally involve demands for revision to iniquitous land and forest rights regimes, as well as redress of the alleged corruption of the forest administration. Their relations with existing NGOs, bilateral forestry projects and community-based organizations (CBOs) have brought about a variety of outcomes (elimination, accommodation, 'business as usual' and adaptation). These, too, are examined in this book. Here again, other political considerations, not primarily centred on forests and people, impinge strongly on forest policy and its outcomes.

Finally, in the discussion of our approach, there is the issue of accounting for policy impacts. A *diversity of policy and outcomes* in terms of forest management and livelihoods operates on a number of different scales and is familiar to statisticians, geographers and other social and natural scientists. There is also a diversity of policy in both space (different policies in different states, or across other jurisdictional borders) and time. Policies are not set in stone, but are dynamic. They resemble an amoeba, slippery and mobile, and without clear and definable boundaries where the policy effect can be unambiguously differentiated from other causal factors, background noise and contingencies. It is therefore usually difficult to identify and measure the policy effect (see Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989, for a generic discussion on policy, and Blaikie and Sadeque, 2000, for examples in the Himalayan region). This book engages continually with this problem. Spatial and temporal diversity also have troublesome implications for policy-makers everywhere. Universalizing and reductionist blueprint policies and laws are generally applied to stabilize policy-makers' expectations and make complex realities apparently understandable and governable (see Roe, 1994, and Scott, 1998, for analyses of the ways in which bureaucracies handle and govern complexities and uncertainties). However, they inevitably cause mismatches with local conditions that produce unintended outcomes over a variable political and ecological terrain. Indeed, this difficulty is one of the arguments for decentralization of forest management and PFM, where local conditions can be matched to locally appropriate management plans overseen by those who have a strong interest in their being effective. For example, Nepal's *tarai* have a completely different forest ecology, settlement history and socio-economic structure, as well as disparate politics, than the hills. To take another example, the political environments of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh are profoundly different and the same (or similar) forest policy may mean completely different things and have different impacts in each of the state capitals and on the ground. There are varying settlement histories, local agrarian political

economies and forest types, all of which combine to produce different outcomes and different impacts. Even differences between the personality of one district forest officer (DFO) and another, and a transfer of personnel between a division, district or different supporting bilateral donor-supported projects and NGOs at the local level, can lead to major differences in outcomes for the condition of the forest, as well as for livelihoods. The very existence of diversity has policy implications, too, in terms of blueprinting or flexibility in policy and manuals for daily practice (e.g. the writing of a micro-plan for a local forest) and the discretion wielded by local officers in writing and implementing such material. The literature promoting the decentralization of environmental management by local communities is extensive; a few key references are given here and others are discussed throughout the book, especially in Part III (Berkes, 1989; Bromley, 1991; Cleaver, 1999, 2002). The other side of the decentralization coin is the increasing expropriation of indigenous common property and locally managed forests over the past 150 years (Singh, 1986).

### **Political ecology: Understanding the politics of the environment**

Political ecology is a useful and rapidly developing conceptual approach, and here we briefly introduce how it is used in this book. This section is not intended as a full literature review of the burgeoning field. It provides an outline of the ways in which political ecological analysis may contribute to progressive, just and technically sound forest policy and practice, and gives some key references.

This book follows *four main strands of political ecology*. *The first strand* concerns the contested ways in which biophysical ecology is interpreted and negotiated. We are specifically concerned here with the ecology of ‘forests’, the inverted commas here are used to imply that the category itself is socially constructed and contested, and not intrinsically self-evident. The two words in the term ‘political ecology’ suggest two rather different approaches to knowledge and, more specifically, to truth (that is, what can be proved and disproved and what we can know). On the one hand, ecology and, more generally, environmental science are conventionally assumed to be separate and epistemologically different from politics. According to this assumption, ecology is objective, rational and empirically justified through experimentation, wherever possible, and politics is subjective and socially constructed by different persons or groups with their own beliefs, cultures and strategies. To return to the rhetorical question ‘what is a forest?’, there are a number of contending definitions. To tribal women, the word has a specific connotation, involving habitat, identity and, in material terms, specific products. For strategic planners, on the other hand, the category of forest is an administrative category implying a desired land use and it need not include any trees at all, but is useful in making claims to extend the control of the forest service over new areas in order to fulfil its mission of achieving a national target of a minimum percentage of green cover (see Robbins, 2003, on the politics of a seemingly technical issue of land categorization in Rajasthan). Different actors put different values on nature (Kothari et al, 2003); but these tend to be overlain in official, formal and policy arenas by the rationalist claims of scientific forestry and the research that informs it. Agrawal (2005) has coined the term ‘environmentality’, which traces the connections between power, knowledge, institutions (particularly those of the state) and subjectivities, with field examples from forest policy in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas.

Thus, political ecology (re-)integrates environmental science and politics, and acknowledges that there is a politics of science (in this book, ‘scientific forest management’), as well as of other forest knowledge, such as indigenous forest knowledge, popular knowledge in the media and so on (Stott and Sullivan, 2000, pp15–116; Forsyth, 2003, pp1–23). Two books with the same title discuss this issue (Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2001, with case studies from India; and Castree and Braun, 2001, focusing on more theoretical issues and a wider

geographical spectrum). Saberwal and Rangarajan (2003) provide a number of case studies of the political ecology of ecological science and the conservation of fauna and flora, with an emphasis on India. The issues raised in these and other publications will be returned to later.

Our approach therefore develops a critical stance with regard to *all* competing accounts of the forest given by people who are in some way or another linked to it. It treats with scepticism the assumption that policy develops when new scientific evidence is presented to policy-makers who accept the new truth and adapt or adopt policy accordingly – in other words, when ‘truth talks to power’. Thus, political ecology combines issues of power, the construction of knowledge, argumentation and the narratives in which these are embedded. It does not take for granted powerful and (for some) attractive narratives that are seemingly based on a single truth. Political ecology also has a wider focus on the ways in which natural resources (forest, grazing land, etc) are understood and represented in policy and civil society arenas. Nor does it leave unexamined populist assertions of the virtue and truth of other knowledge, such as local and indigenous knowledge. This, therefore, implies that the book focuses on the claims made by different actors and their resort to truth as verified by scientific testing, to natural justice, to equity, human rights or other means of persuasion. New narratives about forest, based on what Foucault called ‘an insurrection of subjugated knowledge’ (Foucault, 1980, in Forsyth, 2003, p157) should be acknowledged and given space, but also critiqued with the same rigour as dominant accounts. There are many explorations into what the production of subaltern knowledge might entail in terms of learning, syllabi of forest officers, new institutions, spaces for deliberation and so on (Campbell in Hobley, 1996). Back in the (more abstract) academy, Escobar (1998) calls for new and sometimes hybrid accounts of life and culture (and, in this context, forests and people). Peet and Watts (1996) describe their approach as ‘Liberation Ecologies’, in which they call for subaltern peoples to be allowed to speak for themselves, to be free to talk about their experiences – in this case, of forests and the politics of control and use – and to be heard by other more powerful actors who have a near monopoly on the production and dissemination of knowledge about the environment (and, in this case, forests). [Chapters 2, 3 and 4](#) discuss the different actors engaged in forest management and their narratives (by now the list will be familiar, even to those new to forest management: scientific management, participation, cultural survival of forest dwellers, and livelihood needs of forest-adjacent and forest-fringe people and ‘distant’ forest users).

*In the second strand*, political ecology provides more structural explanations of the ways in which different groups gain access to the ‘forest’: who becomes marginalized; who gains and who loses; how (that is, strategies of interested parties, and who succeeds in carrying them out); and why (e.g. the exercise of differential economic power, coercion and violence). In this book, understanding access to natural resources, especially the forest, is central to understanding how forest policy and the current state of forests impact on society. Forest policy does not work itself out on a blank canvas, but is embedded in state, regional and local political ecologies. A particularly unequal agrarian political economy with marginalized and vulnerable forest users will shape the impact of a forest policy in a different manner from a more egalitarian and politically aware agrarian society subject to the same forest policy. Following some political ecological studies, we have considered more strictly political economy issues of class and social stratification, capital accumulation and the role of the state (see Blaikie, 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Watts, 1993, for a more structural approach). This has been termed the ‘environmental politics’ or the ‘politicized environment’ aspect of political ecology (Zimmerer and Bassett, 2003, p3).

*In the third strand*, political ecology addresses the dialectic relationship between ecology and society. A constantly evolving dynamic is at work. Forests shape people (their habitat and material practices, technology, identity and culture), and, at the same time, people shape forests – through ongoing livelihood use, as well as policy development and formal

management practices, and their intended and unintended outcomes. For example, one might examine forest-dwelling refugees expelled by dam construction and follow through the environmental consequences of these refugees in terms of forest use and their adaptation to new patterns of earning a livelihood. Another example would be high-value monoculture teak forests planted to replace natural forest – a political decision taken over a century ago – which has created valuable single-species forests from which the state is anxious to exclude all livelihood uses. In this case, today's exclusions result from the political ecology of more than a century ago, but result in very contemporary and immediate environmental and social consequences.

Thus, political ecology, with its strong historical sense, explains present-day relations between the agrarian political economy and the forest (distribution, composition, quality, commercial value, diversity, etc) in terms of settlement history, class structure and local nexus between the forest service, local elites and politicians. These explanations put agrarian political economy and its interactions with forest policy into a context of spatial variation through time, and emphasize the variations of people's relations with the forest and forest land. It is useful to characterize a number of political ecological zones in each state since these relations between people and trees vary, sometimes markedly. For example, central West Bengal has little, often very degraded, forest, and limited interest is shown in current standing timber by commercial actors. However, opportunities for plantations with longer rotations will obviously attract attention from commercial and industrial actors in the future. In contrast, North Bengal has plenty of commercially very valuable timber, high levels of cross-border activity, some smuggling, old tea estates with particular timber demands, and many very poor out-of-work tea estate workers who rely on the forest for subsistence – a different policy challenge altogether. But in the south-west of the state (studied in detail in [Chapter 7](#)), there are large forested tracts and concentrations of tribal people, which presents a particular set of socio-economic relations between the agrarian political economy and forests. In conclusion, an historically rooted political ecology makes sense of variations in people-forest links and of the outcomes of forest policy by understanding how policy outcomes are mediated at lower geographical scales.

In Nepal, there are similar or, in some areas, even more marked variations in political ecology and the histories that produced them. The northern Himalayan region covers alpine and high altitude forests, shrubs and rangelands where population is sparse. While forests are important to livelihoods, they are linked to pastoral systems, medicinal herb collection and higher altitude agriculture. In the mid-hills, farmers are particularly engaged in forest protection and management since their livelihoods rely much more intensively on forests, which provide materials for subsistence farming and the sustenance of household livelihoods (primarily as a source of firewood, fodder for stall-fed livestock, soil nutrients for privately cultivated agricultural land, and construction timber). In the inner *tarai* (the Siwalik and Churia hills and inner valleys) and in the *tarai* proper, the situation is again markedly different. Forests have recently undergone rapid felling since standing timber is commercially very valuable, and there has been significant migration to the region from the hills. Local populations, many of whom are tribal, have been expelled by more powerful settlers and commercial fellers backed by the state itself through both legal and illegal means, often involving serious violence, killings and burning of forest dwellers' houses (Ghimire, 1998). The political ecology of the *tarai* and the rest of Nepal is so different from that of the middle hills that the book divides the case study of PFM in Nepal into two separate chapters ([Chapters 5](#) and [6](#)).

*In the fourth strand*, a political ecology approach leads to critical understanding of how environmental policy is made, the exercise of power, practices on the ground and the discourses that shape them at different levels. Such an understanding throws light on how the participation of local people in forest management, particularly the poor in an already

inegalitarian agrarian society, might be pursued – not only by policy reform ‘from above’, but via other routes taken by a variety of different actors that bypass some of the roadblocks which stand in the way of justice and a reduction in rural poverty.

### **Pessimistic and optimistic stereotypes**

Two contrasting assessments of PFM can be characterized. The first tends to radical pessimism and is often generated by a structuralist explanation in which human agency and political dynamics are given less prominence than deterministic economic and political economic forces. Pessimism also arises from activists and others with an informed historical sense, who interpret the history of struggle in which the state and its class allies have won most of the battles, and who have experienced the entrenched and well-defended positions of the Indian and, to a lesser extent, Nepalese forest administrations.

A pessimistic view sees PFM, as implemented in practice, as detrimental to the livelihoods of the poor. This is because it is characterized by the persistence of long-term state-dominated forest policy frameworks that have extended and deepened control by the forestry services through defining new tracts of land as forest and specifying expanded regulatory and exclusive management programmes. Historically, this has had the result of reducing or extinguishing local rights and decision-making control through traditional management systems, thereby criminalizing local subsistence use, which may have been an established customary practice for generations. Contrary to initial expectations, PFM has, in many cases, led to a tightening rather than a loosening of central control and has not resulted in a real devolution of power. PFM also takes place in an already inequalitarian agrarian political economy in both India and Nepal (Panday, 1999; Timsina, 2002). The economic and political power of elites in rural areas enables them to take advantage of the disturbances in established practice provided by the introduction of PFM, and to influence and benefit from ‘the rules of the game’ governing who gets what. In some cases, PFM actually *increases* the leverage they possess over the poorer section of the population – quite contrary to the pro-poor intentions of PFM.

We use two metaphors to describe the main thrusts of the pessimistic view of the impact of PFM’s policy, legal and administrative frameworks on forests and people. The first is that PFM is a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’. The appearance of democratic reform of forest management (the sheep’s clothing) belies the ‘wolf’ that lurks beneath and turns out to devour the rights, produce and incomes of poor rural people – quite contrary to the skin-deep promises of PFM. Some would say it is no more than a distraction from the real power play on forest land control, where the forest department and other agencies have been asserting monopoly control of many areas, including tribal ancestral lands. Furthermore, PFM may represent a serious risk: adopting it results in the destruction of pre-existing local institutions through hitherto unrecognized rules and regulations and, *de facto*, the exercise of new powers over the majority of local people. Lastly, PFM institutions set up by government have not been embedded within community socio-political structures, nor have they been given any legal basis. Rather, they are more akin to transient conscription or ‘company unions’ coopted to achieve local peoples’ compliance (see Holey, 1996, p245, who summarizes the ‘cynic’s view of participation’).

The second pessimistic metaphor is based on the argument that PFM has been little more than tokenistic ‘oil on the squeaking wheel’ of the remnant colonial forest management system, temporarily buying time to diffuse calls for a more drastic overhaul of forest governance. It is a discursive strategy to withstand international fashion, financial pressure and national clamour for post-colonial democratization of ‘forest’ land control. Furthermore, PFM has been a recent ahistorical and, as yet, unproved distraction of short duration compared to other processes of forest policy. PFM may therefore have served in some areas

as a Trojan horse concealing subversive elements within its apparently benign form. Any progressive policy trends in forest administration are attributed to external pressure mostly from within India, but also less pressingly from international funding organizations – so the pessimistic story goes. The only reason the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in India is now talking about ‘historical injustice’ to tribal communities in the consolidation of state forests at all is due to phenomenal pressure from the grassroots through politicians’ mass protests. But even at the time of writing, the MoEF is fighting to retain control over the process instead of letting a new actor, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, gain a recognized role in forest management in tribal areas.

The more *optimistic view* is that compared to the pre-PFM situation, there has been substantial improvement. PFM is part of what can only be a gradual process of reform in the management and use of forests in which local people, including the poor and marginalized, have, indeed, seen an improvement in the contribution of forests to their livelihoods and benefited from improved representation of their forest needs in micro-plans and working plans. PFM demands widespread and fundamental change in the work practices of forest administrations, in training, in attitudes of frontline staff, and in the financing of the forest service, its relations with politicians and its institutions. To expect reform of all these aspects in a matter of a generation is unrealistic. Moreover, there have been widely agreed on encouraging trends, particularly in forest condition:

*Nepal's community forestry [Nepal's form of PFM] has proved that communities are able to protect, manage and utilize forest resources sustainably. The community forestry approach is therefore a source of inspiration to all of us working for sustainable forest management and users' rights. Nevertheless, further innovation, reflection and modification in community forestry are needed according to local context to address the social issues, such as gender and equity. (Pokharel, 2003, p6)*

Here, difficult negotiations about the form of forest micro-plans have shifted from colonial-style timber extraction and ‘fortress conservation’ towards democratic, devolved and intensified management that still preserves production objectives, biodiversity conservation and watershed protection. Progressive developments, policy learning exercises and win-win outcomes can all be found. Progress is bound to be slow, the argument runs; but the momentum has now become unstoppable. Furthermore, forestry is being increasingly politicized and has become a matter of winning potential votes in state legislative assemblies in India. In Nepal, networking and alliances of forest user groups for different purposes have been formed. Social movements, CBOs, NGOs and new alliances (even with forestry staff of all levels who are favourably inclined towards more devolution of forest management) are beginning to shape PFM in a more accountable and democratic manner in the mid-hills of Nepal and also in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. There is considerable evidence that the adverse effects suggested by pessimistic interpretations of current trends are being officially noted and more openly discussed, and that a sustainable policy learning process has been established (Kanel, 2004).

The explanation of *how and why* these policy, legal and administrative frameworks have evolved and the possible direction of further developments requires a deeper analysis of the policy process itself and is discussed below. There are a variety of frameworks for forest management from within the forestry services in India and Nepal, from foreign donors and a variety of existing, customary or self-initiated forest management institutions that predate the introduction of PFM. All of these receive critical attention. Both the more critical and the optimistic views have implications for policy and intervention. The positive view would encourage gradualist interventions working towards reform within the general current

structures. A more critical view would suggest that the current structures are dysfunctional, often unable to resist the vested interests of the more powerful, and require drastic overhaul, which is unlikely to come from within the forest service itself. Therefore, a strategy of working for change from outside the forest service is also indicated. The view of this book is that both strategies need to be followed.

## Key research questions and summary findings

This section presents five basic research questions that the authors believe are central to the issue of forest policy reform, at the centre of which is participatory forest management. They are initially discussed here and expanded on in detail at the national level for India and Nepal in Part I of the book, and then in Part II within India for the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, and in Nepal for the Nepalese hills and *tarai*. The implications of these findings for policy reform are discussed separately in Part III.

### 1 What have been the livelihood impacts of the different implementation strategies of PFM in varying areas of India and Nepal?

This is the first and most important empirical research goal of the book. This is because there is a fundamental difference of view between many in the forest services of India and Nepal and local forest users, activists and consultants over the extent to which forests actually underpin the livelihoods of people who live in or near them, and the importance of this issue. If the forest provides negligible contributions to people's livelihoods, then exclusions and strictures on the use of forest resources in the name of forest protection and production-oriented forest management will not have a serious social or economic impact on forest-adjacent people and are therefore justifiable in the name of national economic development, modernization and environmental conservation. On the other hand, where forest use forms a significant part of livelihoods, particularly of poorer groups, the enhancement of livelihood-oriented use of forest land and forest resources by forest-adjacent people should form an important goal of forest management. A third view accepts the current dependence of forest-adjacent users, but seeks a different solution. Forest-dependent livelihoods can and should be minimized through alternative livelihoods, such as 'eco-development'.

We are particularly concerned to understand how *de facto* forest resource management and access opportunities have changed under PFM. Findings predictably reflect wide variations in both initial conditions and as influences on the implementation process due to the large number and diversity of physical, social and institutional factors, as mentioned earlier. The approach suggested is to recognize that there is a wide variety of political ecological regions that shape the outcomes of not entirely uniform PFM policies. However, although the jury is still out in areas where forest regeneration or continuing degradation as a result of PFM has had insufficient time to affect livelihoods, there *are* discernable patterns of environmental and social change as a result of the implementation of PFM in some areas.

*Impacts.* The impacts of PFM on livelihoods have been very varied, both at the local and intra-household, as well as at the regional and state levels. It is not surprising that the wealthy use the forest less for subsistence purposes and petty commodity sales than the medium-rich marginal farmers and the landless, but that they are often in a position to gain more from the new opportunities which PFM offers them regarding both access to and distribution of forest products and in terms of defining forest management priorities to suit their economic needs. The contribution of total income derived from the forest varies between about 10 per cent and over 35 per cent for sample households by village. However, it is the poor and those with little or no private land who rely on the forest most. The forest also provides essential

wild foods and income opportunities in the difficult dry season before cultivated crops mature. Tribal people with a long history of forest habitation and those who have been marginalized to the least productive lands have the greatest reliance on the forest.

Most groups have done better from PFM in terms of improved and legitimated access to the forest for their livelihoods. Off-take of the varied products of the forest (e.g. fuelwood, fodder, wild foods and NTFPs) and water security have improved overall, although at a much lower level than might have been the case if livelihood-oriented forest management systems had been introduced. Usually, access to fuelwood tends to decline for an initial period of several years due to closure for protection. This may extend to the longer term, when restrictions are placed on the quantity or quality of fuelwood that may be collected – for example, only dead and fallen twigs and branches, of which there are few in a degraded forest.

However, there are considerable exceptions to this optimistic finding, mostly concerning poorer and politically weak groups. Earlier studies, including one by the World Bank, have indicated that groups such as head loaders end up as major losers since most PFM groups ban collection for sale. Similarly, with regeneration of tree growth and the establishment of plantations, many NTFPs and fodder grasses of value to the poor may decline due to canopy shade. Many user groups ban grazing altogether, which places households dependent on wage labour at a serious disadvantage since they can hand-harvest fodder only at the cost of losing wages. Studies in Andhra Pradesh suggest that traditional grazier communities have totally lost access to their grazing lands and have often been excluded from *Vana Samarakshyan Samiti* (forest protection committee, or VSS) membership (thereby even losing wage labour opportunities and future entitlement to shares of income from PFM). There are some politically marginal groups whose access to the forest has further deteriorated (for an earlier review, see Sarin et al, 2003). In Nepal, the rural poor have been better able to position themselves in the new PFM dispensation than in India (although, again, there are some studies indicating the opposite; see Malla, 2000; Malla et al, 2003).

In both countries, these cases of improved access to the forest have far more important livelihood implications for the landless and the poor, who have little or no private land-based resources. However, the changes have been very modest compared with what might have been anticipated from earlier claims for PFM, with ‘final harvest’ benefits turning out to be minimal. There has also been a considerable loss of cultivatable land for groups in some areas due to the imposition of the ‘forest’ category on land under *de facto* cultivation, forest fallows and grazing land through PFM (especially in tribal upland areas in Andhra Pradesh). This has resulted in loss of access for livelihood uses, such as subsistence crop production critical for food security and grazing for the poor due to its perception as being inimical to ‘tree’ growth.

## **2 How do different policy, legal and administrative frameworks of forest management affect livelihoods, especially those of the poor?**

While the research answers to question 1 review the impacts of policy on livelihoods in general terms, question 2 focuses on the impacts of different policy, legal and administrative frameworks on outcomes.

*Impacts.* The findings about the impacts of different policy, legal and administrative frameworks on livelihoods tell a complex story. The official implementation of PFM in degraded areas has usually proved more effective in improving forest conditions than the pre-PFM ‘fence-and-fine’ approach to forest management, especially in India (although in Nepal this previous approach had been comparatively much less in evidence). However, contrary to this general finding, many PFM village forest micro-plans have been written without genuine and wide consultation with local people and with a lack of transparency.

The selection of tree species, rotations and protection measures were considered to be contrary to the wishes of local people, who were usually sidelined, the tree species being determined by default in the selection made in forest department 'macro' working plans. In many areas of the three Indian states, local DFOs did not take the participatory and consultative processes of writing the micro-plan seriously at all – they did not see the point of it since the micro-plan had already been written at the district level using criteria and goals consistent with the working plan. Thus, while participation in micro-planning existed on paper, it was seldom realized to any meaningful extent. Furthermore, in some (particularly tribal) areas, PFM is implicated in a wider effort by the forest service to extend and deepen controls over lands hitherto protected by Schedules 5 and 6 of the Indian Constitution or subject to ongoing filing of claims for customary rights, with the result that many, particularly tribal, people have ended up with more restrictions and less access to their customary lands and forests than before (the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' metaphor applies in these cases).

In India, the introduction of the JFM programme through administrative orders rather than through changes to the law in most states has been a major constraint. The terms of partnership between government and local communities are not based in parliamentary legal process and law, but rather in discretionary bureaucratic orders. Local forest management groups have no independent legal existence and are not, as yet, linked to the decentralized local government system. In many states, government orders have been changed several times through changes in administrative orders, leading to confusion among both forest department field staff and local communities. For instance, in Orissa, JFM groups formed on the basis of the 1988 and 1990 government resolutions were declared null and void by the resolution of July 2003 (Pattanaik, 2004). Land and forest tenure issues have been an overriding and contentious problem caused by the *de facto* precedence of forest department reservation of forests over the constitutional protection of tribal resource rights and of recognized formal processes of rights settlement.

Regarding the special issue of forest policy and legal and administrative frameworks for tribal areas, there have been serious problems of inter-sectoral confusion and coordination in the implementation of PFM (e.g. the coordination of multi-stakeholder processes, integrating PFM with local government, including *panchayats* and other departments such as revenue, rural development, the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), public works and the intersection of different PFM policies). There has also been frequent bypassing of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs by the Indian forest administration. This has resulted in the forest management objectives of the IFS being in direct conflict with the constitutional objectives of safeguarding tribal resource rights and cultures, and has skewed the policy process towards the exclusive objective of forest protection.

In Nepal, devolution of forest management has been more effective because of heavy donor support (both financial and advisory), with most donors promoting PFM, a larger cadre of reform-minded forest officers and, compared with India, a shorter history of centralized state control. There have been enabling acts and regulations that have promoted PFM (both community forestry and, to a lesser extent, leasehold forestry and collaborative forest management), with much more generous conditions concerning sharing forest produce with local forest users. However, the district forest officer still generally takes a dominant role in conducting forest inventories, writing local operational plans (OPs) and monitoring the activities of the community forest user group (CFUG). In the hills, the formation of user groups has been rapid and we can estimate that at least half, if not two-thirds, have remained active despite the decline in field support due to *Maobadi* activities in the majority of districts. Forest condition has improved in the hills in the majority of CFUGs, and income from the sale of forest products has been spent on infrastructural improvements and has provided the capital for CFUGs' own credit provision. However, with a few exceptions, the sums involved were small per group. There has been some exclusion of poor

people from membership of the newly formed CFUGs, and executive committees and local management are firmly in the hands of men (not women), the literate and the wealthy. Forest management in the *tarai* has been beset by malpractice, encouraged by the high commercial value of timber there, the high rate of immigration and forest clearance for agriculture, and competition between forest conservation and clearance. Distant users of the forest and, again, the poor and members of marginalized groups have been heavily penalized and excluded from both access to the forest and arrangements for the sale of timber through CFUGs. Relations between the district forest officer and CFUGs are significantly more difficult and tense than in the hills, where the former is restricted to a protection role often supported by firearms. There is evidence of widespread illegal felling with the connivance of CFUGs and the forest service.

### **3 How far have the claims and aspirations for PFM by different actors been fulfilled and what have been the main opportunities and constraints to their achievement?**

These are two linked key questions and answers require an evaluation of outcomes in the field according to forest administrative staff and forest users of different types, as well as a comparison with what is stated in policy documents. The successes and shortfalls of policy goals are explained in terms of factors that favour or constrain 'participation' in forest management.

*Outcomes.* Turning to India first, community management of forests has a long lineage (see Chapter 1), and although there have been a number of cases of state-supported PFM during the 1930s onwards in the western Himalayas and Madras Presidency, the roots of the recent PFM programme in India can be traced back to experiments with community participation in the early 1970s – most notably in two key experiments in the villages of Arabari in West Bengal and Sukhomajri in Haryana. Building on these positive experiences, the National Forest Policy (NFP) issued in 1988 retained the focus on forest conservation; but livelihood requirements of forest-fringe communities were also mentioned as one of the basic objectives of forest management. More significantly, the policy document stated that a 'massive people's movement' with the active involvement of women should be created to meet the country's forest management objectives. Subsequently, in 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) issued a circular that led to the formal launch of the PFM programme in the country.

The 1990 circular clearly stated that the PFM programme was to be limited to 'degraded' forests. From the 1990 JFM notification:

*The National Forest Policy, 1988, envisages people's involvement in the development and protection of forests. The requirements of fuelwood, fodder and small timber, such as house-building material, of the tribals and other villagers living in and near the forests are to be treated as first charge on forest produce. The policy document envisages it as one of the essentials of forest management that the forest communities should be motivated to identify themselves with the development and protection of forests from which they derive benefits.*

In 2000, the MoEF issued another set of guidelines stating that PFM may be extended to 'good' forests, although most states have not yet included 'good' forests under the programme. The exclusion of 'good' forests from the PFM programme makes it clear that the state's main objective has been, and continues to be, the regeneration of degraded forests and the extension of forest cover, and community involvement is seen as an effective strategy for achieving this objective. This has become even more explicit with the launch of the National Afforestation Programme in 2000, which aims to bring one-third of the country's area under forest and tree cover, mainly through PFM.

*Impacts.* The claims and aspirations of the forest administration in India regarding the introduction of PFM (specifically, the JFM programme) are difficult to gauge since the attitudes of the majority to PFM are ambivalent or, more openly, opposed. There has been little in the way of efforts to mobilize 'a massive people's movement', or to involve people in the development and production of forests other than by offering financial incentives in the longer term and (in some cases of externally funded projects) employment in forest management for a few years. However, some of the aspirations of the Indian forest administration to improve forest quality and ground cover have been achieved insofar as JFM has facilitated this. Only degraded forests have been given over to JFM by state administrations, and although it has also been the intention to make over 'good' forests, state forest administrations have been reluctant to do so despite a range of experiences. In Maharashtra, for instance, community struggles relating to forests (e.g. in Mendha-Lekha, Gadchiroli) led the state government to accept that standing forests can be given for JFM. The aspirations of local forest users in the face of JFM are frequently framed by informal institutions that existed at the time of the introduction of PFM. In some states (e.g. in Orissa, studied in Part II), there is a long history of such institutions, and JFM often undermined and confused existing arrangements. In addition, the 'deal' which members could expect was often much less flexible and generous than that given in JFM.

It is important to be able to gauge the level of practical commitment as opposed to rhetorical strategies on the part of India's forest administration. The findings throughout this book speak of ambivalence, public versus private and professional agenda, and widespread resistance to JFM within the service from the majority. On the other hand, from the state's perspective, the programme has been successful in regenerating degraded forests in many parts of the country. The Forest Survey of India's *The State of Forest Report* (FSI, 1999) in 1999 showed that the overall forest and tree cover in the country had increased by 3896km<sup>2</sup> and dense cover by 10,098km<sup>2</sup>, compared to the assessment made in 1997. One of the reasons cited for this improvement was implementation of the PFM programme (FSI, 1999). However, there is widespread scepticism of these statistics, as is discussed later in this book.

Local communities, on the other hand, have often seen PFM programmes as a means of greater access and control over forest resources near their villages; decriminalization of forest produce extraction and reduction in harassment by local forest department officials; wage employment opportunities; village development works; and enhancement of their cash income, at least in the short term. Several NGOs and activists view PFM as the first step towards the devolution of power and control over resources to the local level. Local communities' experiences seem quite varied depending on the local context in which the programme was implemented, especially in instances where pre-existing forest management institutions existed. In many places, relations between forest department staff and community members seem to have improved. There has been significant employment generation, as well as the creation of infrastructure (e.g. check dams) in many areas, especially in states where the programme was funded through an externally assisted project. However, the sustainability of this inducement to cooperate with JFM is suspect when funding stops, and many shifting cultivators expressed their intention of returning to such cultivation as soon as paid employment ceases. There have also been reports of increased intra- and inter-village conflicts due to JFM. A study reported a large number of inter-village conflicts in Andhra Pradesh due to JFM (Samatha and CRYNet, 2001). There have also been reports of forest produce being extracted by industries after forests were regenerated by the local community due to pre-existing leases (Sarin et al, 2003).

In Nepal, the Forest Policy of 1989 (revised in 2000) emphasized that the community forestry (CF) programme (the main form of PFM in Nepal) would take priority over all other forest management strategies. This policy clearly stated that the priority of the PFM programmes would be to support the needs of the poorer communities or the poorer people

in the community. The 1995 Forest Regulations made special provision for people living below the poverty line through another form of PFM called leasehold forestry (LHF). However, the impact of the LHF programme in reaching and benefiting poor people was limited because the Forest Act clearly mentioned that community forestry would have priority over LHF, and therefore the specific poverty focus was overtaken by CF, which had a much less poverty-focused brief.

About 14,000 CFUGs incorporating about 1.5 million households have been formed to date, and about 1.1 million hectares of forest area have been handed over as community forest. Despite its large coverage, the CF programme has had difficulty in addressing the needs of poorer people, especially in the *tarai* (Winrock, 2002; Kanel, 2004). One of the main factors facilitating the success of the CF programme was the 1993 Forest Act, which provided a legal basis for the implementation of CF, simplified the handover process and recognized CFUG as a self-governed, autonomous institution to manage and use community forests according to the operational plan. However, some subsequent amendments to the Forest Act and statutes and circulars issued in relation to CF since the act have contributed to widespread controversy, highlighted especially by the Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN). These included the imposition of a tax on the sale of forest products to non-users and portraying collaborative forest management (CollFM) as an alternative form of PFM in parts of the *tarai* districts. In addition, since the enactment of the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) in 1998, there have been counterclaims about forest resource management and the right to collect taxes by local government authorities (village and district development committees – VDCs and DDCs). Therefore there is now considerable uncertainty over the future of CF, exacerbated by the present political turmoil in the country.

#### **4 What have been the most important factors in facilitating or inhibiting the sort of PFM that enhances livelihoods, especially the livelihoods of the poor?**

*Factors facilitating PFM.* The most important factors regarding successful PFM implementation at the local level were found to be:

- wide and inclusive representation, combined with informed participation in decision-making by all sections in the writing of the micro-plan and the working plan, and (for local management) an understanding of overall policies, schemes and programmes;
- a long-term deliberative relationship between forest department staff and wide representation of local people (often a matter of the personality and professional motivation of the district forest officer, combined with the availability of capable leadership and public spiritedness within the membership of local forest users);
- the influence of donor involvement both in providing policy incentives for change and in acknowledging the difficulties of sustaining policy initiatives when donor funding stops;
- a favourable local ‘political ecology’ of forest, people and politics (including a useful forest for local users; political awareness and adequate representation of local users, especially the poor and poor women; a consensus on the values and desirable uses of different forest products; and the means to protect the forest from outsiders and from those in the user group who infringe on a widely accepted and understood set of rules);
- state politics that, at the minimum, do not interfere in policy and implementation for political favour and advantage; and
- long experience of local management of forests by villages and their committees in cases of customary and self-initiated village protection that predate PFM (mostly in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and in the middle hills of Nepal).