

**Karin Gaesing, Dietwald Gruehn and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert (eds.): Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Needs in Protected Area Management in Asia.** – Dortmund International Planning Series : Vol. 62. – Essen: Klartext Verlag 2018. – 236 pages, numerous color illustrations. – ISBN: 978-3-8375-1756-9. – € 24,95

The volume is edited by scholars from the Department of International Planning Studies of the Technical University of Dortmund. It provides a number of interesting case studies on co-management and socio-ecological transformation in tropical Asia. The edited volume compiles the results of a transdisciplinary summer school on biodiversity conservation and rural livelihoods organized by the editors and held in Nepal in 2016. It focuses on Asia's tropical forests. These are home for a number of endangered species such as tigers, elephants, rhinos and orangutans, an important source of income for the rural population and provide locally and globally relevant ecosystem services. However, despite of the designation of new protected areas in recent years many forest ecosystems in Asia are increasingly at risk as result of logging, mining and agrarian expansion. Co-management of protected areas and concepts such as community-based conservation gained traction in the 1990s and should contribute to better biodiversity conservation by giving rural communities a key role in forest conservation. Ideally, co-managed protected areas contribute to poverty reduction and rural development by conserving natural resources and creating alternative income sources. Key elements of co-management concepts are an integrated zoning concept, participatory governance structures and the general assumption that "a combination of protection and management is a good basis for economic and financial sustainability of protected area management" (p. 2).

A strength of the volume is the diversity among contributors. It is one of the few transdisciplinary volumes involving conservation practitioners, staff of governmental agencies, development practitioners, staff of NGOs and academics on conservation policies in Asia. The different authors, some of them involved in designing protected areas, in implementing them or in observing their implementation provide insights on the recent history of protected area management in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, USA and Germany. The chapters of the book deal with important challenges for conservation and livelihoods such

as land tenure (conflict), failed or successful community involvement, agrarian change and benefits and trade-offs of ecotourism initiatives.

The introduction is written by *Schmidt-Kallert* (co-editor). He argues that co-management does not work as a blueprint, it has to be "customized" (p. 2) to local conditions making it difficult to draw lessons across cases. He stresses that socio-ecological conditions and historical trajectories differ from place to place and consequently require different interventions. I strongly agree with his diagnosis but the introductory chapter and the edited volume would have benefited from a more extensive overview of the current conservation scholarship and in particular from political ecology. Political ecology as the "study of ecological distribution conflicts" (*Martínez-Alier* 2012: 52) provides a number of concepts and theoretical approaches which the editors could have used to develop a more compelling analytical framework for the 17 chapters of the volume. In the following, I will briefly introduce those chapters that I consider, from my personal perspective as human geographer and political ecologist, as interesting and relevant readings.

*Sharma* for example shows how the modernization of agricultural practices in Nepal induced biodiversity decline. He highlights that biodiversity conservation should not stop at the national park border. Agroforestry systems, used since generations by Sherpa communities, he argues, provide habitats for endangered species, stabilize land slide-prone slopes and are an important income source. *Swaminathan* provides an empirically rich account on the impacts of agricultural transformation and protected area designation on the livelihoods of indigenous Soliga communities in southern India. Based on a mixed method approach he unravels tensions and conflicts among state authorities and the Soliga caused by the recent expansion of protected areas. *Swaminathan* argues that the lack of formal tenure has several implications leading to further marginalization of the Soliga community. *Rana* provides an interesting genealogy of conservation in Sundarbans of Bangladesh. He illustrates that the history of mangrove conservation in the region is a history of rigorous land use restrictions and commercial extraction of natural resources denying the rights of the local population. Only very recently co-management approaches gained political traction to solve conflicts between forest authorities and the population. However, *Rana* stresses that the involvement of "one or two community representatives" (p. 107)

is not sufficient to solve complex and long-lasting conflicts.

*Hidayati* focuses on a controversy related to the attempt of local governments to construct an 'evacuation road' through Kerinci-Seblat national park on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. The case illustrates that conservation conflicts do not only occur between state authorities and the local population but also within the state and its different apparatuses. The envisaged road would connect an enclave inside the national park with the road network of Jambi provinces. Proponents of the project (e.g. district and provincial governments) argue that the road would provide an urgently needed additional road connection facilitating the evacuation of the population in the case of an eruption of Mount Kerinci and would create socio-economic benefits (e.g. reduced transport costs). The opponents (conservation NGOs and departments within the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, indigenous communities) stress that the road would endanger the integrity of the national park and would facilitate large-scale illegal logging by powerful extra local actors backed either by the military or organized crime. The author concludes that the planning process should carefully consider environmental impact assessments and should be conducted in a participatory and collaborative manner.

The contributions of *Goh* (Malaysia) and *Serrano* (Philippines) focus on benefits and trade-offs of 'nature-based' tourism for biodiversity conservation and rural development. *Goh* argues that tourism is a "double edged sword" (p. 176) creating additional income but also additional risks for natural habitats.

The other chapters focus, for example, on national park management, protected areas and conservation governance. *Gruehn* compares national park management approaches in the USA and Germany. A cooking stoves initiative in the buffer zone of the Chitwan national park in Nepal is the subject of the contribution by *Thapa* and *A. Adhikari*. While *Jumpathong* and colleagues describe the zoning of Khai Kho National Park in Thailand, *Arpornsilp* analyses joint management in Thailand's Phu Toei national park. *Ali* discusses biodiversity, conservation and livelihood needs in mangroves of Indus Delta in Pakistan; *Reyes* investigates protected area management in the context of climate change on Rasa Island in the Philippines and *Bogati* and *Bista* describe shifts from species to landscape level conservation in Nepal. *R. Adhikari* unravels how

Nepal's forest and conservation governance deals with conflicts among forest users and governmental agencies.

The chapter of *Nguyen* and colleagues is not published in the volume. The volume only includes its abstract and informs the reader that it has been published in the journal *Conservation and Society*. The chapter of *D. Adhikari* differs from the other contributions as it provides an introduction to vermicomposting.

The well-structured final chapter written by the editors summarizes the key lessons of the volume along nine threads which include among others the role of land tenure, indigenous knowledge, poverty and conflicts. The authors reaffirm that "there can be no blueprint for the ideal co-management project" (p. 215) and that "general guidelines are of limited value" (p. 216) for developing more successful conservation approaches.

However, from my perspective a weakness of the book is that editors and authors relate their work only to a very limited extent to the existing literature on conservation, livelihoods and conflicts written by political ecologists, human geographers and anthropologists. Our libraries, using the editors' words, are not only full of success stories, they are full of failed conservation projects and of highly problematic initiatives where indigenous communities and peasants have been displaced in the name of conservation (e.g. *Duffy* 2016; *Fairhead* et al. 2012; *Hein* 2019). Moreover, the case studies focus mainly on the population living adjacent to protected areas and on local drivers of biodiversity loss. Extra local drivers of deforestation and biodiversity loss and powerful actors responsible for destruction of large forest areas such as agrobusiness and mining companies have only a minor role in the edited volume. Finally, the volume would have benefitted from a more critical engagement with some of the key elements of the new conservation paradigm (p. 2) outlined in the introduction. Especially the assumption that "protected areas would be financially self-sufficient" (p. 2) is questionable as many attempts where 'nature should pay for itself' such as REDD+ have mostly failed (e.g. *Fletcher* et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, the book provides very interesting and diverse case studies from ten countries written by scholars, activists and practitioners. The diversity of contributors is one of its main strengths as most volumes on conservation policies are written by academ-

ics and not by actors with direct 'hands-on experience' in implementing and managing protected areas. I can recommend the book to scholars and practitioners interested in how co-management approaches across Asia have 'worked out on the ground'.

Jonas Hein (Kiel)

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