

Bridging the Formal-Informal Gap? Changing Institutional Arrangements in Communal Forest Management in Thailand

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Abstract

One of the reasons that many developing countries had failed to conserve their natural resources is that they had been unsuccessful to construct effective formal institutions in the process of rural development. On the other hand, many, though not all, local informal institutions had successfully managed their communal resources and livelihoods in certain conditions. Policies on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), in many cases, can be understood as measures to narrow this great formal-informal institutional gap. To what extent and in what sense did it succeed? How had the evolutions of both formal and informal institutions created harmonies and contradictions? Such historical (if not, dynamic) perspective of institutional change is important in addressing possibility and limits of current modernization process of resource management. In this presentation, I try to answer above questions by exploring evolution process of formal and informal institutions in communal forest management in Thailand. The brief history of the formal institutions on forest management is firstly explained. Then the competing logics of local collective action are shown in order to understand local institutional changes. Finally, some of the composite effects on resource management and people's livelihoods are pointed out from the viewpoint of the development of "sustainable biosphere".