BOOK REVIEW

Adaptive Collaborative Approaches in Natural Resource Governance: Rethinking participation, learning and innovation

Hemant R. Ojha, Andy Hall and Rasheed V. Sulaiman (eds.)
Routledge, London 2013, 327 pp.

Reviewed by Danielle Spruyt[9]

Adaptive Collaborative Approaches in Natural Resource Governance: Rethinking participation, learning and innovation has been written with the intent to advance the understanding of the diverse challenges that confront practitioners of Adaptive Collaborative Approaches (ACA) and to develop appropriate responses. The book aims to explore how we can advance our understanding of learning and innovation processes and dynamics in natural resource systems and explore how we can foster more effective and cooperative actions within ACA. The book reviews the complex terrain of ACA theory, then presents and examines the "real world" (p.2) experiential stories of practitioners of ACA in various forms and at a range of sites. At the end of each chapter, and in the concluding chapters of the book, the authors and editors draw lessons and indicate future directions for ACA.

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In taking on this task, the authors do not seek to add to the established literature calling for participation, active adaptive learning and collaboration in development and natural resource management. It is assumed that the reader comes to the book with some knowledge of the intellectual foundations underpinning arguments for ACA, and some commitment to develop ACA processes and further ACA knowledge. The editors accept as given that "there is hardly an alternative road to effective natural resource governance other than to explore ways through which actors can engage with each other and take an adaptive approach to learning" (p.2). They further propose that "more and more policy actors now agree that without involving the poor living in and around natural resource systems, neither poverty reduction nor environmental sustainability can be achieved" (p.5). The practitioners who author chapters of the book come to this project with a commitment to ACA in various manifestations, premised upon a belief (in various combinations and with different emphases) that: there are limits to the ability of science and technocratic regimes to govern natural resources and to facilitate social development; the social and biophysical contexts of natural resource systems are not fully understood; the outcomes of intervention are uncertain; introduced processes threaten to disempower and alienate local users; there is a need to recognize local knowledge and management practices, and; developing a local sense of ownership and responsibility in natural resource management will improve outcomes.

However, the book commences with an acknowledgement that "despite massive expansion of participatory decentralized approaches to natural resource governance and management over the past three decades, success has remained limited" (p.1). While ACA is accepted as the way to respond to challenges of development and natural resource management, the task remains how to improve on the application of ACA by gaining insights from ACA practitioners. The book aims to advance the frontiers of adaptive learning and collaborative governance through understanding the constraints and challenges that affect ACA processes

and through drawing concrete lessons and ideas for future directions from these self- reflective accounts.

Hemant R. Ojha and Andy Hall, two of the editors, set out to map what is identified as a complex terrain of ACA and to identify the important conceptual issues that emerge from the case study chapters. They acknowledge their use of ACA as a term that covers a range of conceptual traditions and diverse approaches, recognizing that the definitions and processes of ACA continue to be debated and that contradictions emerge between various approaches. They contend that we do not need another theory of truth but a theory of learning. They identify a commitment within ACA to forging collaboration between local knowledge and science, and given the context of uncertainty of outcomes, to learn while acting and to act from learning.

The case-study chapters cover a diverse range of ACA examples. Carol J. Pierce Colfer presents the challenges experienced in adaptive collaborative management in forest governance in 30 communities in 11 countries as part of the Centre for International Forestry Research. Stephen Sherwood, Marc Shut and Cees Leeuwis examine the introduction of Farmer Field School methodology in Ecuador, with the methodology originally introduced in the Andes to address pesticide health concerns, then adapted with broader technical and people-focused objectives. Parvin Sultana and Paul Thompson, in an action research approach, document and analyse how 250 community-based organisations in Bangladesh have used an adaptive learning network to develop integrated floodplain management. Tendayi Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Frank Matose review what did and didn't work in an adaptive collaborative management approach applied in Mafungautsi State Forest in Zimbabwe, making use of reflexivity as a methodology to gain objectivity. Mani Ram Banjade provides a retrospective analysis and reflection of catalyzing adaptive collaborative approaches in Nepal's forestry sector over more than ten years, as part of action and research projects

concerned with social learning and collaborative governance. Robert Fisher reflects upon a wide variety of experiences involving action research and adaptive collaborative management over more than 20 years, emphasising the importance of a culture of critical review and reflection, and posing that action research can incorporate cycles of technical research, and does not always need to be primarily about social change or follow a standard pattern. These chapters will be more accessible to the practitioner and the non-academic reader more concerned with process than with theoretical discussion and will provide a clearer account of what ACA means in practice.

The experiences documented in the book reveal the political dimensions of ACA as an explicit project of social change. These approaches do not necessarily fit into the traditional processes and institutions of the project site, of the project sponsor or of the larger bureaucratic and political processes and institutions. For example, Colfer identifies challenges in gaining acceptance for the research project within the institutional processes and strategic objectives of a risk-averse research institution, the challenges in realizing collaborative relationships with marginalized groups, and the ongoing dependence on the good will of government. Sherwood, Shut and Leeuwis identify conflicts between project control by technical experts and advancing self-determination by local farmers. They identify a move towards people-centred designs as challenging assumptions about the underlying causes of poverty and environmental degradation and notions of what is best practice. Banjade proposes that in developing collaborative relationships, ACA facilitators will need to deal with vested interests and power dynamics at different levels and institutional milieus, challenge preconceptions of how development projects should operate and deal with frustrations and excitements internal to their team.

The documented projects include elements of success, recognized weaknesses in outcomes, and identify opportunities for further learning. Stated qualitative improvements include enhanced communications between stakeholders,

improved partnerships, empowerment and increased confidence of local stakeholders, enhanced leadership, new awareness of institutional processes and rights, increased equity in representation on decision-making bodies, increased responsiveness of meso-level actors to local interests, cognitive and attitudinal change, deeper learning, new insights into biological and ecological processes, and, general improvement in community capacity for management and governance. Some improved institutional arrangements to conserve natural resources follow. In practice, however, many of the project objectives were distorted by ongoing struggles over power and resources. Sherwood, Shut and Cees Leeuwis, Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose, and Banjade, all recognize a dismantling of changes as the projects progressed and at their completion. Sherwood, Shut and Leeuwis, and Banjade), recognize the role of established elites in reclaiming agendas. In addition, skills and institutional memory were lost as people moved away or sought other opportunities. The individual authors and the concluding chapters argue the ACA projects would be better served by attention to building trust, more emphasis on co-operative partnerships, increased networking and coordination of learning across projects, greater investment in education and collaborative skills building, and sponsorship and support over long term timeframes.

The book concludes with reference to a conventional economic notion of development – the importance of innovation. History and development are understood as driven by innovation. Improved learning and better knowledge is key to improving the lives of poor people dependent on natural resources. However, the editors propose that the main instruments used to promote innovation in the past serve to inhibit innovation processes and pathways emerging from practice. They maintain confidence that researchers as activists can initiate transformation. In their critical self-reflections of process and future practice, ACA practitioners of this book assume a weighty responsibility for implementing change that involves both improving their own practice and expanding the

objectives of this practice in a broader reach for social change. In addition, high level social interaction and collaborative skills are required of participants.

This book should serve to provide valuable insights to ACA practitioners. The case studies of Colfer and of Fisher cover a breadth of situations, and Sherwood, Shut and Leeuwis, Sultana and Thompson, Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose, and Banjade examine particular studies in great detail and depth.). The range of examples provides a diversity of situations from which practitioners may be able to identify parallels with their own work and draw relevant lessons. The great strength of these studies is in their sincerity. The authors appear to aim for critical appraisal and improvement rather than with self-promotion or with overtly selling ACA approaches. They demonstrate a commitment to ACA principles of learning from practice and of honest self-reflection.

For readers who are new to ACA theory or are yet to be convinced by ACA arguments, questions will remain. For conventional economists, the proposed significant extra and long term investment in human capital required for the success of ACA projects, the transaction costs of coordinating collaboration across space, the loss of outcomes without long term external support and the limited attention to market processes in considering the viability and longer term sustainability of resource use projects, may raise the question of whether these approaches are the most effective use of resources. While the authors identify collaborative outcomes, limited connections are demonstrated between qualitative improvements in communications and collaborative processes and the aims for broader development and natural resource management benefits. As argued by Fisher in chapter 8, it is important to develop robust narratives that emphasize plausible causal connections.

For those political economists who understand historical change in terms of conflicts and competing claims, and for those political ecologists who identify competing and opposing claims as an important perspective from which to view

natural resource management issues, the emphasis on collaborative approaches fails to incorporate the exercise of power and the dimensions of conflict. No real attention is paid to the complex interests and potentially competing agendas of the state in natural resource management, the ongoing and expanding claims of the globally growing economy on natural resources, or the potential of local interests to align more with conventional development objectives. While attention is paid to the internal politics of knowledge, and it is recognized that "powerful group and established institutional regimes fail to open up to learning processes" (p.315), less attention is paid to the agendas and objectives that particular constructions and applications of knowledge serve. The implications of knowledge agendas are perhaps best recognized in the chapter by Sherwood, Shut and Leeuwis in which project appropropriation by pesticide industry actors is documented and analysed. More generally, when read alone, the book suggests potential paradoxes that are not resolved. For example, what is the appropriate response where the collaborative intent and local action ideals of externally introduced ACA projects do not synchronise with local practices, ambitions and/or objectives? Can participatory collaboration be achieved where not all participants prioritise equity and collaborative objectives? (Fisher does tentatively suggest 'emancipatory action research', p.275).

For readers with a particular interest in African economics and finance, the book provides a range of experiences that may resonate with development and resource management practitioners, brief reference by Colfer and by Fisher to some sites of ACA practice in African countries that identify projects and outcomes, and an in-depth examination of forestry management in Zimbabwe. The evidence in this book suggests that attention to the dynamics of market –based processes, and analysis by economists concerned with the relationships of power (particularly institutional economists and political economists), could make an important contribution to identifying the processes and institutions that frame resource management actions and outcomes on the broader scale. It is the

Zimbabwe study that both pays the most explicit attention to market demand in considering the viability of proposed natural resource use projects, and inspires the strongest argument for attention to larger political processes. Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose's chapter recognizes that their project is an example of applying ACA in a contested resource governance situation, characterized by ongoing struggles over land, changing settlement patterns, conflicts between state body governance and forest dwellers, and real dangers involved in engaging in political activity. Their project demonstrated some short term outcomes, initially building up local community skills through empowerment training and conflict resolution and leadership skills workshops, then achieving more sustainable harvest of broom grasses and value-adding in local broom production. However, ongoing competing claims to land and changes in settlement, both as new settlers moved into the forest and as trained-up project participants left to seek economic opportunities elsewhere, diminished these gains. In retrospect, Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose conclude that they expected too much from participation and should instead have placed greater emphasis on confronting power structures and making political changes. They identify the potential benefits to arise from a multi-disciplinary implementing team.