

CBNRM course: some notes about theoretical perspectives (for Module 1)

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There are several ways to define and think about the 3 core concepts of CBNRM: Community-Based –Natural Resource --Management. These ways or conceptual frameworks (or even theories) share commonalities with those current in development studies, e.g., structural-functionalist perspectives including political economy and (common property) institutional economics oriented perspectives, post-modernist perspectives, and social actor oriented perspectives.

This Introductory CBNRM course is not about delving into these different perspectives, but a quick reference to them is considered useful, because the practical implications of using any type of perspective can be considerable.

Political ecology perspectives build on neo-Marxist thinking and on radical development geography. These perspectives pay attention to the diversity of local environmental/ecological contexts, the role of the wider economy and the state in shaping environmental change, the centrality of poverty as a cause of ecological deterioration, and to the diverse responses of decision-makers.

Post-structural political ecology perspectives build on political ecology, but pay much more attention to issues of access and control of resources. Discourse analysis and discourse deconstruction are central features. A common feature is also the focus on resistance (movements) to development discourse and policies.

Social actor oriented approaches (many of them inspired by the work of Norman Long and colleagues) provide another perspective, although still relatively few studies in CBNRM have fully embraced them.

All these perspectives have in common the notion that, although natural resources (and environment) have clearly physical attributes, management and related notions of use, abuse, degradation and conservation, are socially constructed concepts and hence influenced by power dynamics including contestation and conflict. An analysis of power is therefore important (and thus, for example, one needs to look critically at the meaning of “community”), as well as the need to pay attention to different reactions to change and patterns of social differentiation.

Useful reference

S. Jones and G. Carswell (eds.) 2004. The Earthscan reader in environment, development and rural livelihoods. London: Earthscan.