

Theme 2: Competing Claims on Natural Resources

Problem description

Natural resources lie at the heart of social, political and economic life in most developing countries. Agriculture, natural resources use and other land-based activities are key to livelihoods, food security, income generation and employment for millions of people. Local, national and regional conflicts are often due to changing local conditions, access to, and use of land, water and living resources. Sustainable economic development, avoiding future conflicts, revolves on negotiation of equitable means for the sustainable management of the natural resources.

In an ever globalizing world new claims on natural resources are developing, enhancing the risks of conflicts around the use of the resources. The liberalisation of the world markets, influenced by the strong position of the internationally operating private companies and by national policy makers, may favour economic activities such as mineral extraction and market oriented agricultural production, disregarding local resource potential and the effect on the livelihood of the local population. Other international drivers for changes in the use of natural resources are international development policy that attempts to target and assist the poor and disadvantaged (e.g. MDG's), and international treaties (WTO, Convention on Biological Diversity, Kyoto Protocol, etc.).

Claims on natural resources become increasingly complex because globalising forces shift the balance of power increasingly to an international level, through the strong influence on policies and markets at national and local levels. Given such conditions:

- What is the room for manoeuvre for local communities to improve their livelihood while sustaining the natural resource base?
- How do local decision makers and communities deal with these pressures and claims on these resources?
- How can international and national policy makers strengthen coherence between the actual sector approaches?
- How can international and national policies take into account the local diversity in socio-economic and bio-physical factors?

Responses at international, national and local levels depend on how social and economic forces interact, both 'horizontally and vertically'.

Goals

To ensure sustainable use of natural resources in developing countries through building capacity (both in the Netherlands and in partner countries) in multi-disciplinary approaches and analysis of complex systems. Poverty alleviation and development of novel, more equitable, local options for management of natural resources is seen as a key aspect of sustainable natural resource use and avoidance of conflicts. A methodological framework will be developed, and tested, that can be used to demonstrate the implications of policies on different stakeholders and the feedbacks as a consequence of stakeholder responses. The framework will be designed so that it can explore opportunities for harmonising of policies across sectors. Emphasis will be placed on:

- Strengthening of local capacity in partner countries to facilitate multi-stakeholder platforms connecting across levels and networks for negotiation and priority setting.
- Enhancement of the ability of stakeholders to innovate and respond to changing pressures.

- Identification of options for sustainable use of natural resources at local scale in relation to the diversity of stakeholders and their differing access to resources, rights and power.
- Understanding effects of policy at multiple hierarchical scales (global, international, regional, national, and local) and the constraints and opportunities that this gives for enabling of innovations for sustainable development.

Understanding of these effects will be used both to support local innovations for sustainable development, and to provide feedback to, and influence, the initiators of the claims who may be located elsewhere in the world. In this respect the Competing Claims theme has relevance not only for developing countries but also for Dutch society and the results will be communicated through the popular media and public discussion fora (DPRN, NCDO, etc.).

Approach

Scientific endeavours in this programme must contribute to the enlargement of innovation space (the 'room to manoeuvre'), based on a simultaneous addressing of constraints at interdependent hierarchical levels. The development and testing of methodological approaches to achieve this is one of the ambitions of the programme. Current approaches for interactive science are mainly oriented towards local levels, and tend to be weak at influencing higher scale levels. Our multi-scale action research approach aspires to fill this gap. We will work together with stakeholder groups in a continuous cycle of description, explanation, exploration, and design, with each phase feeding into and supporting the negotiation process between stakeholders. Special emphasis will be placed on identifying drivers of conflict and fields of opportunity.

Going through this cycle will be organised in an action research mode. That is: the research will be conducted in close collaboration with societal stakeholders, and the results are envisaged to play a role in ongoing societal negotiation processes at various points in time. Research will not be an isolated event resulting in policy recommendations at the end of the pipe-line, but will be organised in an iterative and interactive manner. Thus, we create optimal conditions for the tailoring and actual use of the research findings in societal negotiations at different interdependent hierarchical levels.

Partnerships

Research on complex issues such as Competing Claims on Natural Resources requires a large breadth of disciplines, knowledge and experience. Above all, such research requires firm embedding within local research networks in target countries where research will be conducted. Wageningen UR represents a wide range of expertise concerning issues related to natural resource use in the tropics, both within agriculture (crops and livestock), forestry, ecology as well as economics and sociology, rights and governance etc. The strife for inter/multidisciplinary research approaches lies at the core of Wageningen UR's priorities and ambition, within which considerable experience has already been established. Expertise within DGIS will be key to provide guidance on links to policy at different scales. Complementary expertise will be sought from other institutions in the Netherlands (African Studies Centre, CERES Graduate School, etc.) and elsewhere in the world as required. Links will also be made with international and local NGOs, and with international and local private sector enterprises to involve them in the whole research cycle. The recognised strength of Wageningen UR in the agricultural sector and land use in the Netherlands and Europe provides an excellent basis for study of interactions and competitive effects of policies on land use in the EU and developing countries.

The partners in the target countries will be selected on their comparative advantage. We will build strongly on the existing networks Wageningen UR has already in the various regions. In the specific cases to be developed into projects under the Competing Claims programme, the partnership will be enlarged with all stakeholders required.

Coherence with national and international development policies

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) were adopted during the WSSD held in Johannesburg in 2002. The Competing Claims initiative directly addresses MDG 3 (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger) and MDG 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability). The Netherlands' Government strongly supports these development goals and developed policies to reach the targets set by the MDG's. The DGIS policy aims at coherence between the various national and international policies and actors within development co-operation.

More specifically for Africa, DGIS recognises that as a result of conflicts, a large part of the population is living in extreme poverty and that the natural resource base is deteriorating. Prevention and avoidance of conflicts is both a necessary precondition and a direct contribution to building improved livelihoods, poverty alleviation and food security.

The activities envisaged with the Competing Claims programme under the Wageningen UR-DGIS partnership strive at a sustainable use of the natural resources for socio-economic development by recognizing the potential conflicts in the use of these resources. The new approach demands integrated and coherent responses that cut across the departmental structures of governmental administration, stakeholders' individual interests, and disciplinary boundaries and organizations of science. The results provide inputs for more coherent policy making.

Working in public-private partnerships is part of Dutch development policy and provides an opportunity for the Competing Claims initiative to generate inputs and support relevant partnerships. The Competing Claims initiative can support the transition programme, with its long term strategies for sustainable development, partnerships and linkages between the Netherlands and developing countries.

Challenges

One of the challenges of the Competing Claims initiative is the complexity of the policy arena and the challenge of identifying key actors and their respective power positions at different levels in hierarchies of governing structures, and to bring them together at relevant levels.

A second challenge in the Competing Claims concept is the acceptance that win-win situations are not always feasible. The overall question is: how do we weigh one particular kind of natural resource use, or the claim on it, against another?

Conflicts around the use of scarce natural resources often result from weak local and national institutions, either being formal or informal. Therefore, conflict management and avoidance of conflicting claims on resource use has to involve also the strengthening of local and national institutions and governance systems.

Globalisation makes that claims on natural resources are often initiated and exercised by actors far away from the actual resource. This implies that the initiators do not directly feel the negative impacts on local populations and ecosystems. Clarifying the link between the resource and resource managers, and the distant consumers of the resource is a particular

challenge that involves the creation of partnerships, involvement of actors at both sides of the chain and working at different hierarchical levels.

Programme outline and possible activities

A meta-analysis of ongoing and past projects and experiences (from within DGIS, Wageningen UR and elsewhere) related to Competing Claims on Natural Resources will be implemented. This analysis will draw on case studies and examples from developing countries, as well as those from the Netherlands and Europe as a whole. It will serve to identify gaps and opportunities that new projects should address to achieve better sets of future options and more harmonised policies. This analysis will also seek the synergy of partnerships with private enterprise and NGO's, as supported by the WSSD. Results of this analysis will feed into theme selection and project formulation which may include:

Claims on land in southern Africa.

A wide variety of driving forces is leading to increased pressure on land. These range from population growth, poverty and associated declines in land quality and soil fertility, to national and private sector demands for land for commercial production of commodities (sugarcane and meat for the European market) and nature conservation. Changes in EU policies have a major influence (e.g. reform of the sugar market, market access restrictions due to foot-mouth disease -livestock and wildlife co-management-) on these sectors and on the income of producers in the southern Africa region. At the same time, strong international environment pressure and national demands for income from tourism results in allocation of land for conservation. Although the countries in southern Africa are confronted with the same international claims on their natural resources, possible solutions and mechanism for land use change will be different, due to contrasting stakeholders, contrasting national governance and economic policies, different systems of land ownership and local diversity in countries like Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Claims leading to accelerated deforestation in Amazonia

In the Amazon, the pressures leading to deforestation are numerous but include commercial logging, improvements in infrastructure (construction of roads leading to improved access) and expansion of commercial pasture driven by the international market for beef. Developments in global food systems, such as the huge demand in the urban centres in China, is leading to new international contracts for massive production of soyabean and other grain crops in Brazil, and results in new demands on forest clearance for agriculture. These interacting drivers represent a huge challenge for the development of inter-sector policy that can balance rainforest protection with demands for economic development and sustainable land use.

Potential users of the research outputs

- Local individuals, communities and supporting agencies in areas where the research is focused.
- Non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations in the South and the North concerned with sustainable rural development.
- Governmental and non-governmental institutes and organisations in the South and the North concerned with policy development.
- Global institutions dealing with economics and environmental policies and programmes.
- Private enterprise in the South and the North concerned with investments in sustainable production or development.

Expected outputs

- Strengthened local capacity for analysis of resource use problems, established multi-stakeholder platforms for social learning and development of innovations, locally acceptable “solutions” combining multifunctional use of natural resources.
- Policy advice for local, national and international policy makers on the effects of policy decisions made.
- Decision-making toolboxes for more-balanced inter-sector policy development taking into account the local diversity.
- Decision-making toolboxes for more-balanced investment policies taking into account sustainability considerations in the South and the North.
- Interdisciplinary approaches for complex system research, scientific publications.
- Policy briefs, papers in the popular media and public debate strengthened.

Criteria for definition of projects under Competing Claims

To be able to make significant progress in our understanding of this complex field, it is essential that projects funded under this heading address a number of issues including:

- The competing or conflicting claims (international, national, and local), their origins and the actors exercising these claims must be clearly elucidated.
- Policies and interventions at all relevant hierarchical levels must be addressed.
- Rights, power and access of stakeholders should be considered.
- Insights from multiple disciplines should be brought to bear.
- Inter-sector policy development should be a goal.
- Approaches need to focus essentially on institutional development.
- There must be realistic options and innovative solutions to the problem of competing claims on the resource.
- Synergy with public-private partnerships and with the other themes in the DGIS-Wageningen UR-DGIS partnership (i.e. Agro Supply Chains and Agrobiodiversity) will be sought.