Trust, legitimacy and rule compliance in forest commons

Graham Epstein∗1,2

1Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis – 513 North Park Ave Bloomington, IN, 47408, USA, United States
2School of Public and Environmental Affairs – United States

Abstract

This submission is a part of a submitted session entitled "Problem-oriented approaches to the study of social-ecological systems"
The pursuit of sustainability in social-ecological systems depends upon a wide range of social and ecological factors, and their interactions. A particularly salient, though often overlooked, aspect of successful environmental governance is rule compliance. Whereas early studies viewed compliance in terms of the distribution of instrumental benefits and costs and advanced third-party enforcement as the only solution to a compliance problem; most recent research suggests a wider range of motives that factor into the compliance decision. Social norms such as trust and reciprocity, and the perceived legitimacy of rules and rule-making processes, for instance are often observed to be as influential, if not more so than deterrence. Although the literature has clearly advanced in recent years, considerable gaps remain pertaining to how these factors interact to jointly affect compliance decisions. This presentation takes up this issue in the context of forest commons by drawing upon data collected as part of the International Forest Resources and Institutions (IFRI) program.
The results of this analysis shows that while legitimacy and trust are distinct analytical concepts, that community compliance is better explained by models that account for interactions among the two factors. Moreover, trust alone, and external monitoring do not have a significant independent effect on community compliance. The main implications of these finding are threefold. First attempts to improve compliance by altering collective choice rules are more likely to effective when accompanied by a baseline of trust within a community. Second trust does not itself effect compliance unless rules and rule-making processes are perceived to be legitimate. Third a shift to community-based systems of governance or co-management appears warranted given that external monitoring has little effect on compliance

Keywords: rule compliance, collective action, social, ecological systems, decision, making, trust, forest commons

∗Speaker