

solution of the socio-economic problems the country has been facing after the introduction of democracy, like gender issues, minority problems, grievances of disadvantaged groups, poverty, unemployment, corruption, etc. Thus, it has become more a conservative force than an agent of change. One example is the adoption of the principles of privatisation and market economy, which Hacchethu sees as a result of international pressure dictated by donors' priorities.

On the first view, the CPN-UML with its self-identity as protector of the poor, minority groups, and backward communities may appear more people-oriented and progressive than the NC. But Hacchethu hints at the CPN-UML's ideological ambiguity and policy inconsistency, because of which the party suffers from "a lack of clear vision and perspective for the development of the people and the country."

Hacchethu's book provides a comparative overview of the parties' evolution, but its highest value lies in the evaluation of the period after 1990. The study contains an impressively detailed analysis of historical events, organizational structures, and ideological statements, as well as leadership behaviour and power struggle. Even the most critical readers will find few, if any, factual errors, which are in any case of no importance for the substance of the book. It must be emphasized that the book provides a neutral analytical picture of Nepal's leading political parties that is free of any personal attitudes. Finally, the numerous tables with their detailed comparative information are another highlight of the book. Hacchethu's book is a must for all who want to get an insight into the working and structure of Nepal's party political system.

***Policy in High Places: Environment and development in the Himalayan region* edited by P.M. Blaikie & S. Z. Sadeque. Kathmandu, Nepal: ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), 2000. ISBN 92911523-3-1, 209 pp.**

Reviewed by Ulrike Müller-Böker

'Policy in High Places' is first of all a report of an ICIMOD project – without any doubts, a very ambitious one – intended as policy recommendation. If a reader of this publication expects a theory-guided contribution of the well-known author Piers M. Blaikie he/she may become disappointed.

The main goal of this ICIMOD project was 'the evaluation of the impact of land policy on land management by resource users and its subsequent effects on environmental outcomes and livelihoods' (p. 11). P.M. Blaikie and S. Z. Sadeque summarise the findings of seven studies carried out by ICIMOD teams in six countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan). Out of the wide range of areas dealing with land policy, the study addresses forest policy, national parks and wildlife, agriculture, property rights and national environmental policy. These sectoral aspects of land policies are summarised in chapters 4 to 7, referring to the investigated countries and case studies. Chapter 3 gives an overview of international and national frameworks for land policy.

Strategic and theoretical aspects of environmental policy are to be found in chapters written by the two editors - 1, 2 and 8. These chapters contain a great deal of information. The present debates on land policy-related issues are introduced in a condensed form and the mainstream approaches dismantled. (Scientists will note the absence of citations and the explicit use of analytical concepts, but perhaps this is not common for policy-makers, the target group of this report.) If one reads between the lines, one sees that it is Blaikie's Political Ecology approach that lies behind the statements. The Sustainable Livelihood and the Environmental Entitlements Approach have also influenced the way the study is written and the country studies were analysed.

More questions than answers are raised regarding on the interface between policies and land use. At the beginning stands the question: How – if at all – can land policy effects be proven? With a few evidence-based exceptions the authors realise the methodological difficulties of providing unambiguous, empirical proof of the effects on environmental outcomes, last but not least because it is impossible to disentangle from such policy effects the wider socio-economic change that operates in the same area.

Another statement, namely that policy is often a 'shadowy process', provokes the authors to a discussion of the so-called 'Rational Model of Policy-Making'. They sketch under this label what policy-makers claim to do: implement scientific expert knowledge, "usually wielded by a policy elite of scientists, a handful senior professionals from the departments of agriculture, forestry or wildlife, and international consultants" (p. 19). But policy – and here everybody who witnessed this contested field will agree with the authors - simply does not happen like this. The study therefore develops a new approach formed around three related ideas.

The first is to understand policy as an often messy and diffuse process one with frequent unintended outcomes, shaped by bureaucratic regimes and other political and commercial interests, but also by powerful environmental 'narratives'. (Here the authors identify a link to the post-modern criticism on the environmental crisis and land degradation scenarios.) Consequently the second idea is to introduce a stakeholder

analysis in order to identify who makes policy and how the political power of the stakeholders is distributed. Thirdly, a clear normative statement is made: the idea of access to resources is treated as a material necessity and as a right of the (140 million) resource users.

The idea that entitlements are a fundamental right is brought up again in the chapter 'strategic outputs'. "The principle of environmental entitlements to natural capital as an essential part of livelihood should be recognised officially" (p. 202); and more concretely – a "social audit" (and not only an environmental impact statement) that forces policy-makers to confront the implications for livelihoods should be introduced. I hope that the authors are aware that this congenial message is first of all an expert recommendation. How this could be translated into a policy process remains open, and it would be naive to believe that the 140 million resource users mentioned would be able to join forces, to become a powerful stakeholder group in the policy process.

Not only are the so-called resource users a very heterogeneous group, but so are the countries studied with their different political landscapes and land planning approaches, and diverse sub-national administrations, with a huge number of projects and programmes shaping land policy. The only common feature is that they are located in the Hindukush-Himalayan range.

This complexity becomes obvious while reading the results of the sectoral studies. The information collected about the different countries remains very general and the selection of examples seems to be quite arbitrary, the method for reducing complexity is often a sheer listing of facts. But time and again some interesting critical reflections come across. For example the chapter on national parks, biodiversity and wildlife starts off like a typical report on this topic (high landscape quality, high biodiversity, many species etc.), but in the second paragraph the biodiversity paradigm is critically discussed.

To appraise the whole book it is not an easy task. Certainly it is an untypical report and a courageous experiment to translate and transmit ongoing important scientific debates to policy-makers. At the same time it seems that it was necessary to reduce the complexity of very different contexts, especially with respect to strategic conclusions.

The authors have attempted to communicate the substance of academic debates to policy-makers, which is certainly a great challenge. Have they succeeded? Only policy makers can answer that question!