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Tropical forest governance - conceptual clarity and what is special about tropical?

LUKAS GIESSEN

TU Dresden, International and Tropical Forestry, Germany

Abstract

Forest governance has emerged as an important concept in multiple fields of research and policy, including international forest, land use and development cooperation, national and international forest politics as well as applied and scientific research around the globe. The use of the term in academic works stretches from the mere mention of the term to coarse attempts of defining it, to fully developed frameworks. Often, however, the concept remains underdeveloped, vague or at the level of a favourable buzz word. It is often also unclear if the concept is used in prescriptive, normative ways, e.g. as good governance, or in analytical, explanatory traditions. Due to such remaining ambiguities, the concept's potential for systematically guiding analytical explanatory research, however, has not been fully realised, yet.

In comprehensively conceptualising forest governance as societal steering, this contribution first aims to develop an analytical forest governance framework for inspiring future analytical research. It does so by drawing on the role actors and institutions play in causing forest outcomes. Second, it aims to contextualise the concept into tropical contexts, elaborating on the question: What is special about TROPICAL forest governances, as compared to other contexts. Illegal logging policy is used as an empirical example for demonstrating the concept's utility in research. The contribution closes with (i) elaborating how such a broad framework can bring added analytical value across multiple social science perspectives and disciplines, (ii) how it can build an interdisciplinary bridge between technical and social sciences, and (iii) illustrating – based on the author's research programme - how also focused empirical research perspectives can contribute to our understanding of the broad ways in which forests are governed.

Keywords: Concept, forest policy, good governance, illegal logging, social sciences, tropical specificities