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Repairing the mosaic: The political economy of landscape-level agroecological transitions

SONALI SINGH, RUTH MEINZEN-DICK

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), India

Abstract

Agroecology offers a promising pathway to enhance the resilience and fairness of agrifood systems by integrating ecological, social, and economic dimensions, prioritising natural processes, minimal external inputs, and participatory approaches. The social metabolism, or flows of materials and energy between nature and society, transcends boundaries of individual farms. In contrast to approaches that focus on plot or farm-level practices, landscape-level agroecology seeks to integrate across landscape mosaics, including individual farms as well as forests, rangelands, wetlands, water bodies, and other forms of commons. This poses significant coordination challenges of achieving this interconnectedness in governance of land and natural resources, particularly related to land tenure and coordination of actors. This paper addresses how political economy affects the coordination challenges inherent in realising agroecological transitions at the landscape level. We employ the 3I's framework of political economy, focusing on how the ideas, interests, and institutions of various actors shape landscape-level application of agroecology governance of land and natural resources, especially concerning tenure security. Through a case study from Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh, India, we delve into the power dynamics and institutional structures influencing landscape-level agroecology. Employing stakeholder analysis and case study methodologies along with key informant interviews and focus group discussions, we explore critical components of agroecological landscapes, such as actor coordination, commons management, collective action, social equity, and tenure security. Our findings underscore the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneity within and among stakeholder groups, particularly farm households and government agencies. We also identify processes to foster mutual understanding among stakeholders. We conclude by discussing the utility of the political economy framework in informing strategies for agroecological transitions and highlight the potential of the Indian experience to inform global efforts.

Keywords: Actor-coordination, agroecological transition, landscape-level, political economy, social metabolism, tenure security