

Environmental Politics at the Local: Natural Resource Governance in India

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS AT THE LOCAL

Natural Resource Governance in India



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The practice of decentralisation and devolution of power to the 'local' have become central to public policy discourse. Existing scholarship argues that decentralisation will not only allow local communities to better articulate their needs, but also ensure a move towards sustainable, accountable and equitable governance, since local bodies are closer to the people they represent.

While agreeing with this broad consensus, *Environmental Politics at the Local* takes a critical look at the politics of the local that is central to the wider political economy of decentralisation. Despite its promise to democratise control over natural resources, decentralisation faces socio-political and institutional challenges in situations of unequal property and power relations. This is especially true given the entrenched hierarchies of caste, class, gender and community. These social divisions, and the contestations they lead to, problematise the spatial extent of decentralisation as well as the idea of the local.

The case studies included in the book cut across rural and urban settings. They combine macro critiques of decentralisation with micro explorations of local politics and institutions. The contexts discussed range from issues of land rights in Meghalaya, to the concerns of Koli fishers in Mumbai, and the repercussions of joint forest management in the Sunderbans. Through their nuanced perspectives, the writers ask: To what extent have governments really enabled decision-making at the local level? What kind of gaps emerge between policy vision and implementation? Who represents the 'local' when different groups have competing interests?

This book is an essential read for anyone interested in public policy, development studies and environmental and socio-economic justice.