

Book Review

Kanchan Chopra & S. C. Gulati, Migration, Common Property Resources and Environmental Degradation: Interlinkages in India's Arid and Semi-arid Regions; SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2000. pps 164. Price Rs. (Indian) 350/-.

This book tries to develop linkages between poverty, environmental degradation, and migration. The premise is that poverty leads to environmental degradation, and degradation of natural resources in rural areas, which results in 'degradation' pushed 'migration' to urban areas and this also happens to be the major cause of the degradation. The book uses a complex set of hypotheses, which have been tested with primary data inputs from field-based surveys in Rajasthan, India.

One hypothesis, which was put to test, was that the State of the Commons play an important role in determining the inter-linkages between environmental degradation, poverty and distress-out migration in the arid and semi-arid regions of India. The first chapter "Rural-Urban Migration and Property Rights Structure" provides the introduction to this book and highlights the "degradation-pushed migration" and "distress-migration" with the link to the lack of a well defined property rights structure. The chapter concludes on a note that infact then lays down the only possible solution to tide off both distress-out migration and environmental degradation.

The second chapter "Common Property Resources in India: Magnitude and Distribution" attempts to classify property right arrangements with respect to existing data on land use classifications and sets up a methodology for estimating common property land resources at the state level. Data provided helps the writers to conclude that land on which common property rights exist is of considerable magnitude in India, that being mainly non-profit land ranging from 40-45 million hectares and forest land which permits access of different kinds which can be classified as common.

The third chapter "Population Movements, Environmental Degradation and Property Rights: A District Level Analysis" studies the linkages between population movements, environmental degradation which is normally viewed as deforestation and land degradation and the role of property rights or institutional structures ensuring such rights in arid and semi-arid agricultural zones of India. The authors conclude that the distress-out migration in arid and semi-arid zones over central and western India are because of environmental degradation processes and shrinkages of common property resources. But what is interesting is that employment opportunities

do not, or cannot be attributed to rural out-migration. The conclusion clearly shows that distress-out migration can only be contained by regeneration of forests, and land improving irrigational potential and bringing more land under the common property regime.

The fourth chapter “Micro-level Initiatives in Semi-arid Zones: Emergence, Evolution and Impact” deals with the matter of organisational structure and institutions creation, and the impact and effectiveness of the newly created institutions. The collection of data from the micro-level studies suggest that once property rights are well defined, inputs of labour for environmental protection start coming in, and the distress-out migration process starts to decelerate.

The fifth chapter “Non-governmental Initiatives in Natural Resource Management: A Profile of Study Villages” takes the ‘*panchayat* system’ of the village and studies it with respect to the impact of changing modes of natural resource management. Therefore the village is treated as the focus in analysing the emergence and respect of natural managing institutions to a disaggregated level. This chapter basically sets the foundation for the sixth chapter, which tries to determine whether the creation of rights emerging from the existence of Non-Government Organisations (NGO) intervention can be linked to the differences observed in the migration and environmental related variables. The study reveals that the creation of common property rights in natural resource management significantly stalls rural to urban migration in the long run.

The seventh chapter which incidentally is the last chapter, provides a summary and policy recommendation. But it also sends out a very clear message that in developing nations, “development” has to be seen in a wider framework, suggesting that rural development and environmental up-gradation are not only desirable objectives for their own sake but these would also prevent the continuous degradation of the urban environment.

The book provides valid information, both to students and amateurs. It is well structured with seven close-knit chapters. It is one of the few original books that has primary data for the developing world in the context of the environment. In all it is a very readable book with a good focus on environmental issues emerging in the developing world.