8 **How does adaptive collaborative management leverage changes in power**

Insights from social theory

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Introduction

As community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) initiatives proliferate in low-income country contexts – from forestry through fisheries, marine protected areas, to REDD+ investments and beyond – power imbalances in CBNRM emerge as a major concern (Colfer 2005; Berkes 2006; Ojha, Cameron and Kumar 2009; Adams, Juran and Ajibade 2018). Even in CBNRM cases considered “successful,” power imbalances persist, leading to inequitable decision making and distributional outcomes (Arts and Visseren-Hamakers 2012; Basnyat et al. 2020). Addressing these dynamics has become pressing, even more so in recent times with the COVID-19 pandemic’s exacerbation of structural inequities along the intersecting lines of gender, wealth, ethnicity, migrant status and more (see Kabeer, Razavi, and van der Meulen Rodgers 2021).

While power can be understood as a phenomenon within and across multiple scales, in this chapter, we focus on the local (community and intra-community) scale in CBNRM. Here, power imbalances – especially relating to gender and intersecting socio-economic dimensions of inequality – frequently play out in terms of the marginalization of some people from decision-making processes (Mahanty et al. 2006; Nightingale 2011; Cassidy 2021). In terms of everyday experiences of people from marginalized groups, the effects of this marginalization include less access, amount or quality of natural resources, lower-income opportunities or returns, and potentially higher burdens and risks such as challenges in meeting resource-related fees, distances, or restrictions. Power asymmetries compound climate risks and vulnerabilities of marginalized actors, as well as weaken resource governance due to limited input, buy-in and conflict (Colfer 2005). Consequently, these power dynamics and inequities limit conservation and development outcomes, including women’s empowerment and poverty reduction (Lachapelle, Smith and McCool 2004; Charnley and Poe 2007; Baynes et al. 2016). As such, unaddressed power imbalances limit CBNRM’s potential to contribute to pressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, SDGs 1 (poverty reduction), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work), 10 (inequity) and 13 (climate resilience), as well as 14 (life below water) and 15 (land).

Amidst a variety of initiatives in CBNRM, adaptive collaborative management (ACM) has emerged as one potentially promising approach (Colfer 2005). ACM is “an approach in which shared learning, experimentation, and adaptation are key principles, as are inclusivity and shared decision-making at various levels” (Box 8.1). The approach has emerged in various forms in response to the complexity of socio-ecological systems and the challenges of enhancing collaborative decision making among multiple actors in such systems, which are often under top-down governance or varying stages of devolution (Folke et al. 2005; Colfer 2005; Olsson et al. 2006; see also Plummer, Armitage and de Loë 2013). While on the one hand, ACM has been criticized for not explicitly or effectively acknowledging or engaging with power and related risks (Colfer 2005; Plummer and Armitage 2007; Nadasdy 2007; Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose 2013; Ojha, Hall and Sulaiman 2013), on the other hand, there are some promising examples evidencing ACM’s ability to engage and contribute to shifting power towards greater equity (McDougall et al. 2013b; McDougall and Banjade 2015; Chapters 4 and 5, this volume; Colfer 2005). The latter, however, have been mainly in empirical, descriptive terms (i.e., what interventions contributed to what observed effects). What is lacking is a theoretically nuanced explanation of how ACM engages with and addresses power imbalances in the latter at a deeper level. Without an understanding of underlying phenomena and mechanisms at play, we are left with the fundamental question: “Yes, in some cases ACM shifts power and reduces inequities, *but how?*”

This dearth of theoretical exploration into power leaves ACM and CBNRM at an impasse. This morass is in urgent need of addressing given the policy and development investments in CBNRM and ACM in the past decade. It is this knowledge gap and risk that animates our motivation for this chapter. In line with Lewin’s maxim that “There is nothing as practical as a good theory,”¹ we turn to social theory to ultimately enable more effective engagement with power in practice. We propose that a theory-based inquiry can elucidate the underlying mechanisms of persistence and change in power relations, thus sharpening the edge of ACM and its ability to improve CBNRM policy and practice. This theoretical exploration thus seeks to tackle two main questions:

- 1) Why do power imbalances persist in CBNRM contexts?
- 2) When ACM does constructively shift power imbalances, how can this be explained? In other words, what are the underlying mechanisms at play?

In addressing these questions, we do not seek to explore the depths of any single theoretical perspective on power, nor do we present a comprehensive review of the literature. Rather, following Kemp (2010), we aim to build bridges *across* ontological divides (around the nature and dynamics of power imbalances). Specifically, we integrate formative social theory-related insights (from the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, Archer and Habermas), enriched with feminist theory from various arenas (drawing in particular on Kabeer’s foundational inputs as well as more recent insights of Mackay and Ackerly). The

feminist theory's specific value is through its critique regarding the need for theory to engage without blinders with an imperfect and unequal world, and its contributions regarding what is needed to create a more level playing field given these imperfections. While this wide cross-fertilization may be academically unconventional, we see it as worthwhile to help create a richer and more coherent picture for CBNRM and ACM policymakers and practitioners alike.

The chapter's aim is thus to generate a theoretical explanation of why power imbalances persist in local scale CBNRM and how an ACM approach interacts with power-reproducing dynamics to enable shifts in them. First, we ground the chapter by briefly presenting an example of ACM in Nepal that demonstrates persistent power imbalances and evidence that they shifted with ACM. Next, we unpack concepts: defining power and exploring relevant conceptions of power. Following that, we explore theoretical underpinnings explaining why power imbalances persist, in particular using concepts of *unmarked categories*, *doxa*, *delegation* and the interface between *structure* and *agency*. This is followed by an exploration of how ACM may contribute to transforming these power imbalances (i.e., what mechanisms underlie changes). In particular, here we unpack and explain the potential for shifting power through the concepts of *reflexivity*, *deliberative decision making* and *social learning*. The interplay of these concepts is graphically summarized in Figure 8.1. The chapter wraps up by highlighting insights developed through this exploration, including regarding a relatively unique role ACM may be able to play in relation to one form of power (power over) and speculating on the application of this learning.

Figure 8.1 Indicating perpetual evolution.

Power and ACM: An empirical example from community forestry in Nepal

The case presented here draws on a six-year collaborative research initiative focused on catalysing and assessing ACM and its effects in community forestry

in Nepal (see McDougall et al. 2013a, b; McDougall and Banjade 2015).² In this case, ACM was understood as an approach in which actors “intentionally use social learning as the basis for decision making (see Leeuwis and Pyburn 2002), emphasize inclusion and equity in processes and outcomes, and seek to engender effective connections amongst actors and/or groups of actors” (McDougall and Banjade 2015). This initiative emerged in response to recognition by government, civil society, development agencies and research groups that community forestry – framed as a form of “pro-poor and inclusive CBNRM” – was not delivering on its social and poverty reduction goals. While it had been extensively (and “successfully”) scaled out in Nepal by 1999 (at the time of project start) through the establishment of over 10,000 community forest user groups (CFUGs) (Kanel and Kandel 2004) and had led to some conservation outcomes, it was evident that the CFUGs were replicating the pre-existing gender and social inequalities. Not only were decision making and benefit sharing biased systematically towards more powerful (wealthy, male, higher caste) local actors, but in some cases, marginalized actors were being made worse off (Agarwal 2001; Bhattarai and Ojha 2001; Buchy and Subba 2003).

While this ACM study engaged from sub-local through national scales, here we focus on the local scale, within and up to the level of CFUGs. These groups hold legal use rights over community forests and have significant institutional autonomy to plan and manage forests for the benefit of local households. The research used in-depth multi-year case studies, using mixed methods involving qualitative and quantitative assessment. The transition to ACM took place through participatory action research (PAR), which is a well-established, people-centred, integrated strategy to learning and action for catalysing ACM (see Selener 1997; Chevalier and Buckles 2013). In this study, PAR was oriented to the CFUGs seeking to improve their own, self-identified, site-specific community forestry-related issues (including internal relations and conflict, equity and livelihood outcomes; see more on PAR in Chapter 9). They operationalized this through shared, iterative, learning-based efforts to enhance the internal adaptiveness of their CFUG governance as well as strengthen the CFUGs’ collaboration with other stakeholders. The first phase (1999–2002) involved four CFUG case studies (i.e., long-term sites). While these continued through the second phase, an additional seven sites were added in 2004–2007 ($n = 11$ groups). A final field visit to each site took place in 2008.

Through participatory action research, the groups shifted from “business as usual” to varying degrees of ACM-based decision making. (In fact, the case team came to refer to it as adaptive collaborative *governance*, as opposed to adaptive collaborative management, because of the strong emphasis on applying learning and collaborative strategies primarily to the decision making (governance) itself, not to technical management.) In terms of processes, the groups shifted away from operational and annual plans being based on standard local “blueprints” or interests of more powerful committee members to participatory visioning and self-monitoring-based planning. This involved cycles of shared visioning, collaborative assessment of strengths and weaknesses using the CFUG’s own

indicators, and participatory reflection leading to the adjustment and implementation of processes and management plans. A central part of this was the self-analysis of equity (in governance and of outcomes) by CFUG members. Equity-tracking processes involved strategies such as participatory wealth ranking and gender data as the basis for CFUGs' monitoring of their diverse members' involvement in, and distribution of benefits from, the CFUG, crosschecked against agreed aims and indicators. In terms of institutional arrangements, CFUGs shifted from executive committees as the single decision making bodies to multi-level, multi-node (i.e., nested) arrangements, with *toles* (hamlets) as the base. The approach was catalysed and backstopped by facilitators – first external, then a combination of local and extension actors, backstopped periodically by research team members. The facilitators' role was not only to lead processes but also to take on the role of a supportive “critical questioner,” raising queries to spark reflection and self-awareness, helping the group members to “hold up a mirror” on their own assumptions, practices and resultant outcomes. Facilitators also supported groups in recognizing and addressing conflicts in a transparent way as a part of the ACM approach (McDougall and Banjade 2015).

In terms of effects, although the progress was not linear, the case evidenced recognizable changes in power imbalances and a shift towards greater gender and social equity across all sites. At the outset, women, *Dalit* (a highly marginalized caste group) and poorest members were largely marginalized from CFUG decision making, including being driven away from general assemblies, and accessed relatively few benefits. In some cases, they reported being persecuted and accused as “destroyers” for pursuing what they saw as their only livelihood option (fuelwood selling). In all CFUGs, there was resource-related conflict, most of which had persisted over many years. The primary areas of this persistent conflict were identified as related to equity in: decision making, especially the de facto exclusion of members along the lines of class, caste, ethnicity or gender hierarchies and corruption and transparency issues relating to executive committees; distributional rights and resources, especially forest product distribution and benefit sharing; “illegal” collection and sale of firewood by low caste and poor members (mostly women); and “encroachment” issues.

The assessments during and at the end of the participatory action research found that ACM contributed to shifts in relation to the above power issues. In terms of decision making, not only were there quantitative increases in previously marginalized members attending CFUG assemblies, but researchers noted shifts in “voice,” including that women increasingly challenged power imbalances as individuals and collectively. For example, in one site, a Mothers' Group – led by a *Dalit* woman – successfully removed the CFUG chairperson who had been misappropriating CFUG funds. In terms of leadership, the representation of women and poor members in executive committees almost doubled across sites. The self-monitoring records of all CFUGs indicated that members perceived their engagement to have increased in 27 of the 28 self-assessed indicators (in total, all sites) relating to participation and/or “voice.” As one *tole* representative noted: “In the past our [women's] voice was not considered but nowadays our sayings also are counted and we are asked as well” (McDougall and Banjade 2015).

Finally, in terms of the extent to which the user groups' priorities and actions reflect the marginalized members' interests and needs (as a proxy for distributional equity), the case also found a shift in all sites towards CFUG priorities better reflecting women's and poor and low caste members' priorities than at the outset of ACM. For example, the number of sites with income-generation initiatives targeted to women and/or poor members increased from two to ten (of 11), with the eleventh site planning one for the post-research period. Similarly, the number of sites with pro-poor small loan programmes grew from five to nine of 11 sites, with the remaining two having plans to start in the post-project period. As one poor member explained, "After...*tole*-level reflection and discussion, the real poor have accessed the community forest fund for income-generation activities in an equitable manner and increased [the participation of the] poor" (McDougall et al. 2013a, 9).

Understanding power: Key concepts

Power is a multidimensional concept and is interpreted in diverse ways. At a basic level, power can be understood as relating to the capacity of individuals or groups to exercise their will. As such, is a condition for the potential for (social) action (Rupert 2004). In other words, "power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate" (Barnett and Duvall 2004, 9).

A central feature of power is that it is *relational* – one actor's power cannot be specified except in relation to that of other parties. This is illustrated in Weber's contributions, in which power is understood as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his [sic] own will despite resistance" (Weber 1978, 53). While shedding the masculine language, the relational understanding is a central driver in Kabeer's approach in gender and development:³ the "concept of gender relations sought to shift attention away from looking at women and men as isolated categories to looking at the social relationships through which they were mutually constituted as unequal social categories" (Whitehead 1979; Elson 1991) (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996, 17). As CBNRM represents multiple actors and/or groups negotiating the management of shared resources, power relations of one form or another are manifest in CBNRM. Power relations underpin how and the extent to which different actors control, use and benefit or bear risks related to resources and thus shape equity (Box 8.1; Sikor and Lund 2009).

BOX 8.1 EQUITY AND CBNRM

Equity, a cornerstone concept bridging social justice and development, refers here to the perception of fairness and relates to procedural and distributional domains. Procedural equity in natural resources encompasses not only recognition of rights, but also spans actors' inclusion, and power

and ability to engage without discrimination, to make views clearly understood and appreciated by others and to negotiate and influence (including enabling processes; see Agarwal 2001; Österblom et al. 2020; Bennett et al. 2019; Ribot and Peluso 2003; Ojha 2008; McDougall et al. 2013a). Procedural equity, however, is mediated by a multitude of factors. For example, in many parts of the Global South, cultural and colonial assumptions about CBNRM being a male domain, normative constraints about men – not women – being “leaders,” compounded by associated unequal gender divisions of unpaid labour. These have contributed to patterns of women’s engagement in CBNRM decision making being token (attending versus influencing; Kleiber, Harris and Vincent 2018). In this sense, recognitional justice (see Bennett et al. 2019) can be considered a foundation for procedural equity.

Equity in CBNRM outcomes – distributional equity – relates to the proportioning of benefits and burdens of all kinds. This includes distribution of benefits such as amount or quality of natural resources, related income or opportunities and also burdens such as resource-related fees, distances walked or restrictions on harvesting. Those whose interests are marginalized by power imbalances, whether they are themselves present or absent in governance (low procedural equity), are less likely to get their resource needs met and may bear a relatively larger portion of the burdens (low distributional equity).

Power relations are also nuanced and complex in multiple ways. First, they do not exist in the abstract; rather, they are *embedded in specific socio-economic, political and ecological contexts*. Moreover, they are negotiated and *change over time*. Second, however, there is a tension between this embeddedness and dynamism: across contexts and over time in CBNRM – and development more broadly – certain markers of identity (socio-economic characteristics), show up as consistently correlated to lower power. These *patterns* of actors with lower power relate (but are not limited) to gender (women), wealth (low income) and low social status groups (such as low caste groups in South Asia and ethnic minorities). Third, power is not uni-dimensionally constituted. Rather, power is nuanced in that it reflects multifaceted identities or *intersectionalities*: one actor is never fully embodied by a single identity (McDougall 2001; Sen 2006; Nightingale 2011). Different markers of identity, in different combinations, such as gender, ethnicity, caste and wealth have varying and context-dependent implications. Thus, while gender is a significant marker of power differences throughout the world, the relative power of different women or groups of women is shaped by many other factors such as wealth, marital status and age. For instance, in contexts such as Nepal and India, Indigenous women may be less subject to the dominant cultural norms that discourage

otherwise more privileged *Brahmin* women from speaking out in public meetings. Overall, the above patterns elucidate that while power is dynamic and can be context-specific, it is rooted in various structural regularities in the society, hence is neither neutrally nor randomly expressed.

Additionally, development and CBNRM literatures have increasingly recognized that power needs to be understood in relation to systemic aspects of society or its formal and informal rules. Specifically, and of relevance to CBNRM and equity, is the fact that *power relations are embedded within institutions*.⁴ Feminist theory in particular adds depth here to institutional theory relating to power, unpacking the “complex ways in which organizational rules, cultural norms and routinized practices from different institutional sites intersect to produce and sustain such inequality across society” (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996, 21). As elucidated by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996, 17):

Gender relations are an aspect of broader social relations and, like all social relations, are constituted through the rules, norms and practices by which resources are allocated, tasks and responsibilities are assigned, value is given and power is mobilized. In other words, gender relations do not operate in a social vacuum but are products of the ways in which institutions are organized and reconstituted over time.

Decades later, Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010) flag the same as they underscore the continuing need for and value-added of a feminist lens to otherwise often power-light or gender-blind institutional theory.⁵

Sources of power have been distinguished in a multitude of ways. Galbraith, for instance, frames power as “condign” (based on force), “compensatory” (based on the use of resources) or “conditioned,” and sources of power as “personality” (individuals), “property” (resources) and “organizational” (Galbraith 1983). In a broader social commentary, Toffler emphasizes the transformative and amplifying role of knowledge vis-a-vis power: “Knowledge itself... turns out to be not only the source of the highest-quality power, but also the most important ingredient of [the other sources of power:] force and wealth” (Toffler 1990, 18). Linking to CBNRM, it is useful to recognize the focus on *capital* brought in by livelihood frameworks (Ellis and Freeman 2004), such as human capital (including knowledge, ability to labour, language skills, persuasive ability and ability to speak in public assemblies), symbolic capital (respect, honour and so forth) and social capital (in terms of positive linkages to others and/or to powerful actors). It is critical to note that “power is most likely to be exercised by those who are able to mobilize these resources over a range of organizational domains” (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996, 21). Connecting to the gendered patterns noted earlier:

It is precisely because men from any given social class are more able in general than women from the same social class to mobilize resources from

a broader range of organizational domains – the intimate and personalized organizations of family and kinship to the increasingly more distant and apparently impersonal organizations, community, market and state – that gender relations are constituted as relations of power.

Institutional theory concurs that there are power differentials between institutional actors and offers further that these arise from access to resources that are tied to “rules and worldviews” that differentially constrain or empower different actors (Olsen 2009, 9). Mackay et al. (2010, 581) underscore that feminist institutional analysis adds value here by highlighting that

access to these resources, and the power they create, has a gender bias... While constructions of masculinity and femininity are both present in political institutions, the masculine ideal underpins institutional structures, practices and norms, shaping “ways of valuing things, ways of behaving and ways of being” (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995, 20), as well as constraining the expression and articulation of marginalized perspectives. With a few exceptions, women are... thereby disadvantaged in the power play over which ideas matter and who accumulates institutional resources.

Finally, power can be unpacked into *forms of power*: i) influence on or control over resources or over other actors (“power over”); ii) actors being socially empowered with capacities and practices that influence their ability to perform or achieve socially meaningful action (“power to”); iii) internal sense of self-worth and confidence (“power within”); and iv) relation or connection with others (“power with”) (see Hillenbrand et al. 2015).⁶ While not necessarily explicitly identified, a review of the relevant literature for this chapter suggests that much CBNRM (as well as empowerment-focused development) work is implicitly oriented towards the latter three. Specifically, there are considerable investments in three kinds of social capital (see McDougall and Banjade 2015), all contributing to “power with”: the bonding (within groups), bridging (connecting between similar groups) and linking (between community groups and NGOs, government or other agencies) social capital. Similarly, there is considerable investment in capacity building aspects of CBNRM, aimed at building “power within” and enhancing the ability to act based on greater information, resources or networks (“power to”).

In line with the feminist critique that this may embody “empowerment lite” (Cornwall 2018), what is notably less clear in the literature is reference to how “power over” (other actors) can be shifted – in particular, the power imbalances between more and less powerful groups. This leaves a gap in knowledge for CBNRM – and in particular for ACM – regarding how policy and practice can effectively address the pervasive and persistent multifaceted social (including gender, caste and class) hierarchies that shape engagement and outcomes of management. This missing thread in the literature is the entry point for our analysis.

Why power imbalances persist

In the previous section, we defined and unpacked the concept of power. Here we use social theory, including feminist thinking, to explore and explain the persistence of power imbalances. We begin by exploring three concepts that help to unpack and explain power imbalances: i) privileged and marginalized social and gender identities (*unmarked categories*); ii) dominant beliefs that are internalized and thus taken for granted and unnoticed, dominant beliefs (*doxa*); and iii) political representation (*delegation*). Together, these cover a broad swath of social theory on structural forms of power. We then consider the persistence of these imbalances through the application of the more encompassing and interconnected concepts of *structure* and *agency*. As noted, here we draw on an array of political and institutional theory including feminist critiques that address earlier gender blindness and wrestle with these issues in an imperfect (power-imbalanced) world. Together, these conceptual lenses offer an explanation of the internalized and structural aspects that contribute to stasis in power imbalances, while also indicating the potential for transformation. We conclude each subsection with a question; we gather and return to these in the next section of the chapter.

Unmarked categories

Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 372) describe the phenomenon of unmarked categories as “an ideological process of erasure.” The concept, with its roots in feminism and linguistics, offers a lens into power imbalances by highlighting the phenomenon of more dominant, powerful categories of actors being (unconsciously) understood as constituting the standard for all categories of social actors. As dominant actors are taken to constitute the norm (the “unmarked category”), other identities are implicitly delegated to outlier status (the “marked” categories) – “the Other” (as per de Beauvoir [1953]).⁷ Buchholtz and Hall (2004) describe it thus:

When one category is elevated as an unmarked norm, its power is more pervasive because it is masked. By being construed as both powerful and normative, its special status is naturalized and the effort required to achieve this status is rendered invisible...Because markedness implies hierarchy, differences between groups become socially evaluated as deviations from a norm and, indeed, as failures to measure up to an implied or explicit standard. Hence such differences are used as a justification for social inequality.
(Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 373)

The construct of unmarked categories is illustrated in local CBNRM contexts in terms of dominant, visible and powerful actors – such as wealthier, non-minority men in the Nepal forestry case – embodying the norm or unmarked category. Other actors – women, poor, *Dalit* people and especially those for

whom such markers of identity overlap – constitute the marked categories who are “less than” the norm. Being perceived as outliers, these (non-dominant) “marked” actors have tended to be implicitly overlooked (erased) while more dominant, visible and powerful actors can claim to or are perceived by government, extension, NGO and other actors to be “the community” and legitimate (Chambers 1995; Guijt and Shah 1998; see also Criado Perez 2019 for how this translates to data gaps and gender-blind innovation and policy). We suggest this also plays into the positioning of marginalized actors as “deviants” (such as the *Dalit* members in the case above, being driven away from assemblies and framed as “destroyers”). If this aspect of power imbalances is considered in terms of systemic erasure – or a form of myopia – then the question emerges: What shifts in process or otherwise would contribute to making less powerful groups seen and, moreover, recognized on their own terms?

Doxa

Doxa is another important concept in understanding power imbalances. Here we shift from (non-dominant) *actors* being unnoticed (above) to underlying *beliefs or assumptions* being unnoticed. In the words of social theorist Bourdieu, doxa refers to “a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view” (Bourdieu 1998, 57). As main aspects of the social order are naturalized, they become taken for granted and go unnoticed specifically because they become perceived as part of the “natural” order (doxa). Regardless of the actor's intentions, practices thus tend to reinforce the claims of the powerful (Bourdieu 1977). In this way, doxa reinforces the dominant discourse, values, standards, procedures or beliefs that are taken for granted and ‘go without saying.’ In doing so, doxa simultaneously does two things: it legitimates otherwise potentially illegitimate practices (such as unequal rights, or inequitable access to natural resources) and reduces the perceived need for deliberation and critical thought (Ojha 2006).

The concept of doxa sheds light on how power imbalances are perceived – or more accurately *not* perceived (unnoticed) in CBNRM, as in development more broadly. As noted by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996, 25), “Few institutions profess explicitly to ideologies of inequality; where inequalities are observed, they tend to be explained in terms of natural difference, divine will or culture and tradition.” The widespread internalization of unequal and constraining gender norms in CBNRM (and agriculture) is a potent example (see McDougall et al. 2021). This includes the framing of men as decision makers, leaders and “real” farmers and fishers – in contrast to women as followers, caregivers and “helpers.” Women and men alike are so deeply immersed in these norms that they may be largely unaware of them and how they affect all aspects of decision making and outcomes. This is akin to McLuhan and Fiore’s (1968) metaphor of fish being unaware of the water they swim in – actors in CBNRM (and agriculture) may not recognize the gender norms within which they are immersed and that shape their own thinking and behaviours.

We suggest that the lens of doxa can also be helpful to elucidate the phenomenon in which less powerful actors are present (attend) natural resource governance processes, and yet are in effect excluded. Specifically, it can help to flag that CBNRM governance arrangements and processes themselves tend to accommodate and serve the needs of more dominant actors. For example, in the Nepal case, as in many cases, the use of assemblies or other large meetings was standard and unquestioned as a forum. Yet, in these types of forums, members need to effectively communicate with and in front of large, heterogeneous, mixed-gender groups, sometimes in a language other than their mother tongue and sometimes in relation to written information. These factors inhibited the participation of women, people from minority language groups, those who were not literate and other less powerful actors. And yet, the fact that the arrangements and processes themselves reinforce inequitable opportunities to engage, went without notice and was unquestioned. As such, we flag that decision-making *processes* and arrangements themselves can be doxic. Widely normalized “participatory or community-based” decision-making processes and arrangements are assumed to be inclusive or power neutral (see Agarwal 2001). Because they are assumed to be or experienced that way by dominant actors, the processes and arrangements may go unquestioned and unchallenged.

The above concept of doxa underscores how dominant views, discourse or even processes can go unnoticed because they are so naturalized. If doxa reinforces power imbalances in these ways, then the question emerges: What, if anything, can allow actors to take a cognitive step back and perceive doxa – become aware of “the water we swim in” – and thus become more conscious of its implications and alternatives?

Delegation

Power imbalances are also produced and reproduced through the processes of political expressions and representations – processes that we frame here as “delegation.” This relates to the vital social processes regarding “who makes decisions.” The question of power delegation is particularly critical in CBNRM contexts because, despite the expansion of participatory discourse in natural resource governance, the historical legacy of centralized bureaucratic systems of control over natural resources persists (Li 1999, 2002). Within these systems, the responsibility for informed (policy) decisions has been delegated from “citizens” to “experts,” either in the form of scientists, bureaucrats or politicians (Ojha 2006). This occurs at many scales, for example, the delegation of resource decision making to “politicians” (as experts) in the form of local leaders, including local resource group leaders.

Two considerations arise in relation to our reflection on power. The first is regarding representation. Building broadly on critiques of representation and delegation (Foucault and Deleuze 1977; Radhakrishnan 1990), we note that representative governance grows from an assumption of people being able to be categorized into groups based on shared interests – an assumption that fails

to acknowledge the multifaceted (intersectional) nature of identities. As such, there is an underlying dilemma in terms of a representative being able to represent the interests of a group when each member of the group him or herself embodies multiple categories. In relation to CBNRM, Ribot (2012) and others similarly challenge deficits in representation in the context of decentralization of natural resources on the basis that

the potential of decentralization to be efficient and equitable depends on the representativeness of local institutions. But there are few cases where democratically accountable local institutions are being chosen and given discretionary powers.

(Ribot 2012, xix)

Instead, political space available for the community in its internal governance and external dealings tends to be made accessible to and claimed by members of dominant groups (see above). The needs of marginalized groups (if considered) are *assumed to be represented* by the dominant groups. For example, in CBNRM, poor members' interests are assumed to be represented by wealthier members, women's by men, and nuancing further, less powerful women by more powerful women. In this way, pre-existing power relations – and failures to challenge the “myth of community” (Guijt and Shah 1998) and to engage with multifaceted difference – legitimize the power and authority of dominant actors as representatives (Nightingale and Ojha 2013), resulting in “participatory exclusions” (Agarwal 2001) in CBNRM.

Second, in broad terms, following critical theorist Habermas (1996), “any use of coercion and power (such as the constitution of a small group or legislature of a state) is legitimate only when it is constituted through reasoned debate among citizens” (Ojha, Timsina and Khanal 2007, 2). In practice, however, this is rarely the case. For example, as part of a larger techno-bureaucratic system and embedded in existing socio-cultural contexts, the Nepal case (above) demonstrated the opposite. The decision-making groups were not being constituted through reasoned debate among citizens; rather, executive committees were created by external actors (who tended to have stronger ties to more powerful community members) or based on appointments through doxic processes (see earlier). In terms of decision-making, as described above, CFUG decisions were not made through “reasoned debate through citizens,” but rather were taken by the committee chair or one or two committee members based on their interests or on “blueprints.” Even in the de facto openings for “debate” (such as assemblies), not noted in the case, less powerful actors' “voice was not counted.”

As well as delegation reducing meaningful engagement in decision making, it also may prioritize one type of (and one social group's) knowledge over another. As flagged by Bäckstrand (2004), delegation enables scientific over traditional and local knowledge. Broadly speaking, in CBNRM contexts, this is played out and exacerbated through the tendency for there to be closer ties between local elite and externally valued technical and bureaucratic forms of

knowledge, while marginalized actors may have a higher reliance on and connection to experiential knowledge.

The above considerations raise two important questions. First, if the delegation of decision making potentially disempowers by misrepresenting or excluding the interests of marginalized people, what is a constructive alternative? Second, can CBNRM decision-making processes (in an imperfect, power-imbalanced world) engender decision making based on local “reasoned debate” rather than settling issues through delegation?

Structure and agency

To better understand the persistence and reproduction of power imbalances over time, we draw on ideas regarding the shaping of social systems from philosopher Bourdieu, sociologist Giddens and social theorist Archer, and link to feminist and new institutional theory through Kabeer and Mackay. While these are divergent – even opposing perspectives – in many ways (Kemp 2010), taken together, they shed light on both the stickiness of and the potential for change in power imbalances. Their differences notwithstanding, these theorists share common ground insofar as they highlight social structure and human agency as forces that jointly reinforce and mutually re-create social systems (Jones 2005). While each theoretical approach has its own view, structure here refers to patterns of social relationships that are enacted in practice consciously or without notice. Agency, as used here, is the human actor’s ability to learn, reflect and choose actions, even in the face of structural constraints. Cutting across the debate on structure and agency is the question of reproduction or change in practice, including the role of agency-led initiatives or the emergence of any crisis in structure.

Within his larger social theory, Bourdieu sees social structure as propelled by people who take action – and yet people are locked within existing patterns of identification and cognition, in compliance with the social order (see Jones 2005). For Bourdieu, a social institution tends to reproduce itself through existing forms of doxa and entrenched relations of power that go “mis-recognised” by both the more and less powerful. As Bourdieu argues:

The practical acts of knowledge and recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated that are triggered by the magic of symbolic power and through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of *bodily emotions* – shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt – or *passions and sentiments* – love, admiration, respect.

(Bourdieu 2001, 39)

This implies that power imbalances are related to beliefs, practices and knowledge that have been produced and reproduced over time (in their particular

contexts as well as through the influence of broader supra-local fields). In this framing, one possibility of change – rather than reproduction – lies in the prospect of “crisis” that can unsettle underlying doxa, mindsets and habituated practices (Ojha, Cameron and Kumar 2009).

Giddens (1984), in his theory of structuration, describes social relations as shaped by what he calls the duality of structure. He suggests that “social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution” (Giddens 1993, 128–129). Agency and structure are seen as connected in

a never ending recursive process...each agent draws upon structure (that is, stocks of knowledge) to reproduce sets of spatially and temporally specific practices which in turn contribute to the total constitution of society at any one point in time in any one spatial location.

(Thrift 1985, 612)

Giddens acknowledges emergent changes in social patterns, but frames these as largely unintended effects, as agents generally act without consciousness (Jones 2005).

Archer’s approach to structure and agency also emphasizes their mutual influence. However, she re-conceptualizes them to be less “instantly and simultaneously” co-generated than Giddens (Jones 2005, 4). She instead proposes them as interrelated, but separate entities. Archer suggests transcending both structure and agency by considering them to be two faces of a single coin. She suggests that transcending this “divide rests upon conceptualising ‘structures’ and ‘agents’ as ontologically inseparable because each enters into the other’s constitution and therefore they should be examined as one mutually constitutive amalgam” (Archer 2007a, 18). Her focus on the interplay between the two (and with cultural systems), creates greater scope for (conscious) causal power to create change (Jones 2005; Vandenberghe 2005).

The potential for change is also underscored in new institutional theory’s contributions. Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010, 578) argue that current work

has shifted the focus to the dynamics of endogenous institutional change, highlighting the ways in which “institutions organically evolve (or are intentionally designed) through changing, introducing or manipulating institutional elements while supplementing existing elements (or responding to their failure to generate desired behaviour).”

(Greif and Laitin, 2004, 640)

Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010) flag that new institutional theory represents a convergence around views of institutional change as incremental and bounded. They signal that more nuanced attention is needed regarding which elements of particular institutional arrangements are renegotiable (or not), and why some forms of change are more forthcoming than others.

Finally, we underscore a dimension of effective analysis of structure and agency that is critical for CBNRM: that structure and agency in institutions are (intersectionally) gendered (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010). Feminist theory in development, in fact, has drawn on and advanced earlier thinking. As well as elucidating the interconnections of structure and agency in relation to women's empowerment (e.g., Eerdewijk et al. 2017), feminist contributions have underscored that a focus on agency alone is limited (and may place development burdens on women). Underlying structural barriers need to be addressed if gender equality is to be achieved (Cornwall 2018; McDougall et al. 2021). As Kabeer (forthcoming, 1), for example, articulates "Unlike neo-classical understandings of agency as the free-floating capacity for rational choice, therefore, feminist approaches conceptualize agency as inextricably bound up with structure." This unpins the shift in development towards gender transformative approaches that seek to engage with underlying structural barriers, including constraining gender norms in CBNRM and beyond (McDougall et al. 2021).

With the recursive – yet potentially evolving – nature of structure and agency in mind, the potential transformation of persistent power imbalances hinges around these questions: What can create a "break" in these reinforcing patterns of (gendered) structure and agency? How can CBNRM enable (constructive) cognitive "crisis" that can unsettle underlying doxa, mindsets and habituated practices? How can actors build coalitions of action and learning to trigger changes in individuals' behaviours, group dynamics and institutional practices?

How ACM may shift power

As noted in the Introduction, some forms of ACM in some contexts have contributed to shifting power imbalances. In the Nepal case presented earlier, we highlighted that – while imperfect and not without its challenges – in practice, ACM's combination of learning and inclusion-oriented processes, structures and facilitation and the focus on equity in decision making itself (versus ACM as a technical management strategy), contributed to shifts towards equity (see McDougall and Banjade 2015; McDougall et al. 2013a, b). In particular, ACM appeared to enable more equitable engagement of women, the poor and low caste members, as well as greater distributional equity and a concomitant increase in social capital. These all reflect renegotiations of power imbalances within the local CBNRM institutions. In other words, it illustrated shifts in "power over," not only increases in power "to," "with," or "within." As noted earlier, however, insights into how ACM contributes to these changes in this case and others remain descriptive. For example, such shifts have been illustrated with practical reference to the following: the self-monitoring processes developed by the community forestry group involved (Dangol 2005); and facilitators identifying and addressing local power imbalances and this leading to overall improvements in decision making and planning (Ojha et

al. 2010). To date, *the underlying mechanisms* with which such shifts in power imbalances occur with ACM remain murky. Here we unpack *how* ACM practices contribute to shifting power relations through the concepts of reflexivity, deliberative decision making and social learning.

Reflexivity as an opening for change

We begin with a broad question about the potential for change within potentially recursive systems of structure and agency. In particular, we highlight *reflexivity* – in terms of the potential for learning as a foundation for change. In this framing, reflexivity offers a means of going beyond established rules or routines that underpin particular relations of power. Reflexivity (in Giddens’ terms “reflexive monitoring of actions”) refers to conscious self-consideration or monitoring of one’s own actions and behaviours in relation to the social context or others’ actions. Reflexivity is critically important in that it enables “agents to design and determine their responses to the structured circumstances in which they find themselves” (Archer 2007a, 20; see also Chapters 6 and 7). Kemp builds on Archer here with the suggestion of reflexivity as “an inherent ability that all social actors possess” (Kemp 2010, 8). One strength in this view is that it encourages (all) actors to map out possibilities regarding what they can do to enable change, rather than waiting for structural forces to cause change.

Reflexivity thus emerges as a principally important concept here. It embodies specific potential to unsettle habituated thinking and practices, including Bourdieu’s notion of *doxa* as culturally embedded views (Ojha 2008, 45). As such, reflexivity enables change by dynamically bridging structure and agency, “*mediating deliberatively* between the objective structural opportunities confronted by different groups and the nature of people’s subjectively defined concerns” (Archer 2007b, 61).

And yet, while reflexivity is recognized for its potential to enable social systems to change rather than conform to history, *even reflexivity itself is a construct of the social system* (Giddens 1984). This is a line of thinking pushed further by Bourdieu in his notion of *doxa*, which is seen as structurally reproduced in diverse fields of social practices. In other words, the structural constraints to reflexivity themselves need to be recognized as a substantial impediment to the process of change. CBNRM actors may be so deeply embedded in the system that although the inequity is experienced, it is difficult for it to be critically perceived, reflected upon and addressed, even by those adversely affected by it. In other words, from within a self-reinforcing system with relations of power fully naturalized at the level of culture, it is difficult for actors to spontaneously or independently step entirely outside of that system and achieve an alternate view (i.e., cognitive distance or outsider perspective, see Syed 2019) that would enable a break in the reinforcing social feedback loops of structure and agency. In view of the entrenched nature of power imbalance in CBNRM contexts, how is reflexivity to be enabled when it involves actors who are

themselves part of the structure and who tacitly accept doxic forms of knowledge that have historically sustained such relations?

Deliberative decision making

Here we turn from the broader notions of agency and reflexivity as openings for change to the question of decision making. One way to understand how ACM may shift power imbalances (when it is effective) is that ACM represents a transition from a delegative towards a *deliberative approach to decision making*. In contrast to delegative decision making, deliberation theoretically emphasizes space for debate and for the bringing together of diverse forms of knowledge (hence it embodies social learning). The concept of deliberation also reflects the notion of democratically legitimate decision making involving the communicative power of citizens being translated into administrative power (Habermas 1996; Ojha, Timsina and Khanal 2007; Dryzek 2010). As a foundation of collaboration, deliberation is an *implicit* element of adaptive collaborative management. This is significant for CBNRM in that CBNRM often de facto relies on delegation and representation-based arrangements and processes (Ojha 2006; Ojha et al 2007; Ojha, Cameron and Kumar 2009).

And yet the notion of deliberative democracy has been widely critiqued (e.g., Young 2003; Cornwall and Goetz 2005), especially by feminist theory, for its foundational assumptions that deliberation takes place in a power neutral context. As highlighted previously, CBNRM does not take place in power neutral contexts or on “level playing fields,” but rather in contexts in which power imbalances are the norm and deeply entrenched. Feminist theory notes of liberal democratic, critical and postmodern theoretical perspectives, that:

because they presume equality where substantive equality is lacking, they fail to provide a satisfactory account of how individual and group rights can be respected in a democratic model, and they fail to consider as political those issues and interests that have been historically considered private... In the real world, coercion impedes argument, social criticism, social decision making, and social change. People with more power are able to prevent social change or to influence the process to their advantage and to the detriment of others. Third World feminist social criticism shows how, despite power inequalities, the views of the less powerful can be heard and can influence social decision making. How can society hear the arguments of those who do not argue because they are coerced in their environment, living metaphorically in crocodile-infested water?

(Ackerly 2000, 30–31)

As this is the case, how is it that in some instances, ACM has been able to contribute to shifting power within a deliberative approach? First, we suggest that when ACM has contributed to power shifts (such as in the Nepal and Uganda cases, Chapters 4 and 5), then it is likely that the approach to

ACM used as a starting point the rejection of assumptions of neutrality of deliberative democracy, and instead took as a starting point a critical view that the playing field is most likely uneven. Taking this one step further, when this is a starting assumption in ACM and ACM has equity as a goal, then it seems likely that the form of deliberation enacted reflects “de-centred notions of authority.” By this, we suggest ACM, when it shifts power, reflects what Carey, Dickinson and Olney (2017, 9) describe from a post-structural feminist perspective, highlighting

the ways in which the diverse groups drawn into the policy process can and should challenge authoritative ways of working on the basis of positionality. Thus, post-structuralist feminist theories and ways of working have de-centred notions of authority, that is, single ways of knowing or doing (Gavey 1989; St. Pierre, 2000)...Recognising that de-centred power can be productive allows for and enables a great diversity of perspectives, as well as assisting to negotiate diverse perspectives.

This de-centred authority is visible in the Nepal case, for example, through ACM catalysing the shift from centralized (committee and chairperson-based) to decentralized (hamlet-based) and nested visioning, planning, monitoring and decision making. This likely helped to address the challenge of less powerful people not being heard because of discrimination or “because they are unable to present their views according to the terms of appropriate content of deliberative fora” (Ackerly 2000, 179). The smaller, more familiar and casual spaces in which experiential knowledge was valued – which ultimately fed into overall decision making – reflect one response to feminist theorists’ call for expanding what are considered “acceptable arguments” and language as a means of more inclusive deliberative democracy (see Carey, Dickinson and Olney 2017; Ackerly 2000).

An additional mechanism from the ACM Nepal case emerges as a feminist element for inclusive deliberative institutions: social criticism. In the ACM Nepal case, facilitators (external and internal to the communities), used critical questioning to routinely and explicitly spark reflexivity, including about equity. Unpacking this through a theory lens, the facilitator plays the role of the “social critic,” which is framed as essential in Ackerly’s Third World feminist social criticism. Social critics (internal and external)

draw society's attention to those exploitative or potentially exploitative inequalities that are perpetuated through its values, practices, and norms... social critics must follow a methodology intended to be sensitive to the reality of an imperfect world where power inequalities enable coercion and potential exploitation to silence some within a society and to impede social criticism and social change...The social critic must criticize the values, practices, and norms of a society. This may require being a critical voice as a representative of silent voices, facilitating the social criticism

of others (possibly by creating a safe place for those who are excluded or exploited), or contributing to social criticism directly.

(Ackerly 2000, 28)

Contrasting with the neutral assumption of deliberative theory, Ackerly (2000, 18) further underscores the significance of the feminist method of social criticism as the “critical bridge between the ideal and the reality of social change.”⁸

Social learning as a catalyst for reshaping power imbalances

While reflexivity is concerned with agency, and deliberative democracy with institutions, the related concept of social learning takes us closer to mechanisms relating to processes. Specifically to how groups of (diverse) actors engage in the process of challenging beliefs, behaviours and culture that underpin and sustain power imbalance. We propose that, while complex and multifaceted, here social learning as a concept and mechanism are particularly salient. Social learning, in relation to CBNRM, is a multifaceted process in which multiple stakeholders bring together their different knowledge, experiences, perspectives, values and capacities in social spaces where communication, joint deliberation, critical reflection and analysis are facilitated as a means of identifying ways forward in relation to a shared issue (Prabhu, McDougall and Fisher 2007; see also Leeuwis and Pyburn 2002). An emphasis is placed on shared or co-learning and facilitation involves negotiation of power relations, including conflict management (Leeuwis 2000; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Prabhu, McDougall and Fisher 2007). As such, while learning occurs naturally in society, social learning as framed here is a way to harness learning potential more consciously. While ACM-related literature has already engaged with social learning as a key element (Armitage, Berkes and Doubleday 2007; Ojha, Hall and Sulaiman 2013), it has not yet fully recognized it or fleshed it out in relation to the forces underlying power imbalances outlined in the previous sections. Of particular interest here is the productive dialogue that emerges when we consider the above challenges and questions (unmarked categories, doxa, how to enable reflexivity) through social learning and feminist lenses.

First, referring to the challenge of unmarked categories, a key observation relates to the question of *what may make less powerful actors more visible and shift their outlier status*. What can theory tell us about the underlying mechanisms that distinguished ACM from business as usual “participation?” We propose that *the social learning foundation of ACM* was an underlying mechanism. Specifically, social learning relies on the pooling of diverse knowledge and perspectives (Pahl-Wostl, Mostert and Tàbara 2008; Reed et al. 2010). It is helped along by facilitators – in the mode of feminist social critics – enabling forums to expand on what is understood to be “accepted” forms of expression and knowledge (Ackerly 2000).

Yet to be effectively brought together, first the value of diverse knowledge and perspectives needs to be acknowledged. For this to occur, diverse

actors must themselves be recognized and acknowledged. Here, a feminist lens articulates why this is a prerequisite. As posited by Carey, Dickinson and Olney (2017, 9) in relation to policy processes:

Feminist theories can enable deeper analysis of why different actors need to be brought together to solve problems. As noted above, groups have different and partial knowledge of policy problems. Accessing this different knowledge is the gain that offsets the heightened complexity of working across boundaries...Rather than merely acknowledging complexity, post-structural feminist theory pushes us forward to actively challenge orthodoxies and make space for competing views inside...We can be more open to dissenting views...It enables us to shift from vague concepts of plurality to more concrete notions of diversity (deLeon 1999). We argue that there is a need to actively seek out different, and particularly under-represented, voices and make space for them. This is important because alone complexity can seem daunting and impenetrable (deLeon 1999).⁹

Through its recognition of the value of cognitive diversity, ACM being anchored in social learning and a feminist grounding may thus contribute to the shifting of power imbalances by serving as a potential opening counterforce to unmarked categories.

A second observation relates to the question of *what can help actors “step back” (gain cognitive distance) and experience a “break in thinking.”* In practical terms, the Nepal case suggests that change is related to inquiry-based facilitation over time, prompting reflection on people’s own views and assumptions, combined with process and arrangement changes, such as participatory monitoring. What can theory tell us about underlying mechanisms at play here? First, we note the link between social learning and Bourdieu’s notion of “crisis” as an inducement of reflexivity. In particular, we signal cognitive crisis: when there is a lack of synchrony in subjective expectations and objective conditions (or feedback about conditions). The nature of social learning as oriented to problem-solving across diverse views means that it is oriented towards the potential to create such a “cognitive crisis.” When well done, social learning thoughtfully confronts people with information and experiences and knowledge different from their own, but in spaces and processes designed to enable listening and reflection (“safe spaces”), rather than setting up for zero-sum outcomes. We propose that Bourdieu’s “breaks in thinking” may relate to what practitioners refer to as “ah ha moments” of transformative learning. Recognizing that social and institutional change is a slow process, it is likely that these “moments” are most effective if they occur over time, rather than in a one-off event. In the Nepal cases, for example, the self-monitoring processes over time involved marginalized members feeding back their diverse experiences and perceptions of equity in opportunity, combined with data (who actually received the opportunities) compared against equity goals (women, *Dalit* and poor members were to have been prioritized). This “new information” about (lack of equity), in

the context of a facilitated process with equity as an agreed goal (and including conflict management), likely enabled cognitive distance and a “break” in thinking in the previous perception of the committee that the forestry groups were de facto inclusive and pro-poor (McDougall et al. 2007, 2013a, b).

The third and closely related point relates to the question of *making doxa more explicit*. In particular, it relates to Giddens’ suggestion that even reflexivity is a construct of the social system. The question thus arises: how can doxa be made more explicit if the tool to surface doxa – i.e., reflexivity – is itself embroiled in the constructs and biases of the system? We speculate that when this happens it may be through social learning bringing into question not only material inequities in the context but also facilitating the critical questioning of the underlying factors at play: actors’ own individual and collective perceptions, norms and values in relation to social hierarchies and power relations. Gender transformative approaches offer a current example of this in development. These approaches have been increasingly recognized in development for their catalysing shifts in unequal power relations. Similar to ACM cases that make explicit power relations, assumptions and outcomes in CBNRM, gender transformative approaches operate by engaging women and men together in explicitly reflexive, experiential processes about (previously “hidden”) constraining gender norms, surfacing endogenous insights into how these shape the wellbeing of women, men, households and communities (McDougall et al. 2021). In other words, the mechanism at play here is likely the surfacing and bringing into conscious awareness the previously unseen doxa underpinning power imbalances – combined with endogenously identified alternative ways of knowing and being.

Extending this to the notion above that decision-making processes (and associated outcomes) themselves may be doxic flags an important structural barrier to change. The Nepal case’s success here elucidates an important entry point: the mechanism at play was not only illuminating doxa in relation to individuals’ or groups’ norms or attitudes – it was about collective reflexivity about doxa within the group’s formal structures (the processes and arrangements of decision making). Thus, ACM – applied to *governance* – can facilitate critical questioning of the decision-making processes and practices themselves, such as who decides and how decisions are made about what constitutes equitable access to natural resources in a given context. This suggests that a key means by which ACM may contribute to power shifts is through using social learning as a mechanism to purposively surface and make explicit the (previously implicit) doxa embedded in decision-making processes and arrangements. In doing so, ACM has likely created opportunities for embedded doxa and inequities to both be noticed and questioned (e.g., *Dalit* members previously being driven out of assemblies). This is in line with the proposition that facilitated social learning can enable shared critical reflection on and deconstruction of “the existing structures and value systems that hinder the transformation of society” (Banjade et al. 2006, 24). While institutional change also entails deliberation and contestation, as well as consensus-building (Mackay,

Kenny and Chappell 2010), this surfacing of doxic arrangements and processes is a start. It, along with the above other mechanisms, creates openings and momentum for change. Linking back to theory, Wacquant (2004, 97) argued that “knowledge of the social determinants of thought is indispensable to liberating thought.” We suggest that liberating thought within CBNRM – at the level of individuals, groups and in relation to institutional processes and arrangements – in turn, may be indispensable to enabling purposeful, constructive evolution in structure and agency towards more equitable power relations in CBNRM.

Conclusions

At a time when CBNRM has become a key strategy for environmental sustainability, climate resilience and human wellbeing across the developing world, a growing body of research warns that the persistence of power imbalances has hampered CBNRM’s potential to deliver expected outcomes. In this context, questions around why imbalances persist and what can enable transformative change are paramount. These questions have remained, even as innovations such as ACM grow, with claims of varying levels of success. This chapter was animated by our concern that the ability of ACM and CBNRM to respond meaningfully to these questions – especially as they go to scale in multiple sectors – will remain limited or be at risk unless there is a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play. In response, in this chapter, we have aimed to help address this gap by drawing on a range of insights from social and feminist theory.

Using the concepts of unmarked categories, doxa, delegation and structure and agency, we demonstrated the tension and opportunities between stasis and change. Our exploration surfaced several insights into the questions: How can new configurations emerge? And, in particular, how can ACM’s potential influence in shifting power imbalances be understood? A convergence of emphasis in social and feminist theory suggests that purposeful, critically reflexive thinking and strategies may contribute to transformative change in power imbalances. At the crux of this theoretical exploration is the link between the concepts of reflexivity, deliberation and social learning, which are ideally, central elements of ACM. These embody purposeful efforts to introduce a “break” in recursive patterns of unrecognized power imbalances (as explained through concepts of doxa, unmarked categories and delegation). In other words, these sticky, recursive aspects of power imbalances may be unsettled and tackled through reflexivity – and in particular, through feminist-informed deliberation and social learning. The nature of social learning as engendering reflexivity, including with regard to unquestioned assumptions and beliefs, stands out as particularly compelling as long as practitioners are aware of and oriented to social and gender equity. In connection to this, the learning focus on equity and improvements in decision-making processes and arrangements (governance itself) appears centrally important. If equity and power shifts are the aim,

CBNRM actors may even want to consider re-framing ACM as “adaptive collaborative *governance*” to keep this in focus.

These theory-based insights have implications for more effective ACM in forested landscapes (as per this case and volume), as well as for other sectors such as fisheries and wetlands management and climate resilience. The insights can also be applied in gender and development more broadly, as they help to explain why women’s empowerment in mainstream development may have led to limited or unsustainable efforts to date and how gender transformative approaches (that engage with underlying normative constraints) seem to have a greater effect (McDougall et al. 2021). Moreover, this exploration sparks us to speculate that it is worth CBNRM and development design returning to Toffler’s proposition that knowledge is the most important source of power: specifically, it suggests the potency of actors in CBNRM and development more broadly mobilizing the “counter power” of questioning of our implicit perspectives and understanding – as a potent source of transformation.

Finally, our theoretical exploration suggests a clear conceptual basis for linking ACM with theories of power, and in particular feminist theory, in order to better understand the potential transformation of power imbalances in community-based natural resource contexts. Looking ahead, we hope that this theoretical exploration may enrich future ACM and CBNRM design and scaling so that these may move more effectively and consistently in their contributions towards a more inclusive, equitable and just future.

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, Lewin (1943, 1945) or McCain’s (2015) analysis.
- 2 We select this case not only as one of the few published ACM studies that evidence changes in power and equity (see also Colfer 2005; and Chapters 4 and 5, this volume), but also because we (the authors) were involved in the case and thus have a high level of trust in the evidence and first-hand knowledge of the involved factors. In line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) on rigour in qualitative research, this engagement is useful – even necessary – to support meaningful in-depth interpretation of change mechanisms.
- 3 Gender refers not to biological differences (sex), but rather is “understood as a constitutive element of social relations based upon perceived (socially constructed and culturally

variable) differences between women and men, and as a primary way of signifying (and naturalizing) relationships of power and hierarchy (Hawkesworth 2005; Scott 1986). Gender, therefore, not only operates at the level of the subjective/interpersonal (through which humans identify themselves and organize their relations with others); but is also a feature of institutions and social structures, and a part of the symbolic realm of meaning-making, within which individual actors are ‘nested’” (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010, 580).

- 4 Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) define institutions thus: “A simple definition of institutions is as a framework of rules for achieving certain social or economic goals; organizations refer to the specific structural forms that institutions take (North 1990). For analytical purposes, it is useful to think of four key institutional sites – the state, the market, the community and the domain of family/kinship” (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996, 17).

- 5 Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010, 584):

“Although operating across the variants of NI [new institutionalism], feminist approaches to institutionalism have many central concerns in common: they are pluralistic in approach; pay attention to both formal and informal institutional environments; see institutional change (and stability) as driven by gendered processes from within and without and consider actors as having agency, albeit bounded by various constraints. These core features are, we argue, enough to suggest that there exists an emergent feminist institutionalism. While it is obviously still a work in progress, the synthesis of institutionally focused feminist scholarship and NI into a feminist institutionalism has considerable potential to enhance our understanding and analyses of institutional dynamics, gender power and the patterning of gendered inequalities in political life.”

- 6 Galìè and Farnworth (2019) have flagged a fifth form – power through – in relation to gender and development.

- 7 De Beauvoir observes:

“man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity... A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: ...there is an absolute human type, the masculine...She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (de Beauvoir 1953, xviii–xix.).

- 8 Ackerly notes:

“Where inequalities are pervasive, the less powerful may not express their wishes even though existing values, practices, and norms inhibit their ability to live the life they desire. Where there are people who live according to values, practices, and norms they are unable to affect, social decision making is not informed, collective, and uncoerced. Where social decision making is not informed, collective, and uncoerced, social criticism plays important roles in promoting social decision making that is. In contexts of coercion and disagreement, social criticism is in part responsible for enabling those who live in the crocodile-infested water to participate in social decision making and to influence social change through the feminist method, critics encourage the silent to speak for themselves and represent the silent when they don’t” (Ackerly 2000, 28).

- 9 See also Syed’s (2019) relevant argument for the value of cognitive diversity in decision making for complex problems in the workplace and beyond. Moreover, while beyond

the scope of this chapter, we acknowledge the important cross-scale – or endogenous-exogenous interdependencies – influences in path dependency and change trajectories (see also Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010).

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