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Between Rights and Laws: Environment, Livelihood, and Belonging

The research project explores linkages between people's livelihoods, their environments, and discourses and social practices connected to rights and laws. Against the backdrop of shifts in the legal relationship of environment to people's livelihoods, the research explores various discursive and social practices that both constitute and maintain an imagined sense of "belonging." The research will construe environmental social relations as essentially dynamic, cultivating attention to changes in the physical environment, to people's strategies for securing a livelihood, and to their rights claims and assertions. The research will consider belonging through the study of forms of social and political participation as well as representational practices. In particular, different legal case studies will shed light on how rights and laws construct belonging, exploring the practice of law as it is enacted and rights as they are experienced or asserted by communities and political groups. In this respect, the research will ask what kinds of rights can be articulated through existing laws, including environmental laws, and whether such laws carve out new categories of belonging from which individuals and groups or communities may be excluded? If the rights associated with human rights are those that allow people to access the law (the legal system and legal services), do these rights work in practice to empower and to involve or else to deprive groups of capacities with regard to environmental and livelihood claims? Does law help subjects to attest their rights to specific resources and to a certain quality of their natural environment, or does the law affirm their ties to their communities or groups?