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Beyond Crisis Narratives: Transforming Knowledge on People-Environment Interactions

Many of today's global narratives on people-environment interactions blame the poor, women, colored people, and ethnic minorities for social and environmental ills. This silent violence is embodied in dominant knowledge and mediated through organizational cultures and the policies and interventions they give rise to. The aim of this book is to offer citizens and social movements new insights and evidence that can help debunk these disempowering myths—exposing their origins, history, inequities, and enduring consequences on people and the land. But the book seeks to go beyond simple myth busting—necessary as it is. It also explores reforms in organizations, research, and professional practice that could help reframe the knowledge-policy nexus in ways more consistent with democratic pluralism, the history of places, and cultural diversity. In sum, the purpose of this book is to contribute to the democratization of knowledge and power. It draws on a series of conversations with key scholars on environmental knowledge—some of whom have been invited to contribute to this book.

The aim of each chapter is twofold. First, explain why dominant policy, practice, and organizational cultures are maintained so concretely even in the face of increasing and apparently contradictory evidence and new knowledge about the behavior of genes, populations, ecosystems, and people-environment interactions at different scales. Critical reflections on the interplay of internal and external factors that constitute knowledge will explore combinations of the following:

- the political economy of the received narrative or knowledge—in who gains materially from what is believed or viewed as scientific fact;
- how disciplinary oriented professionals reproduce errors and myths through the way they work and exercise power; and
- the convergence of ideas and social commitments on the part of various actors and their networks, including local inhabitants, at particular historical moments.

Second, each chapter focuses on ways of constructing more holistic and inclusive knowledge systems that blend quantitative approaches with a science of qualities as well as the knowledge of local resource users (indigenous peoples, peasants, women and youth, etc.). Authors offer their views on how to combine indigenous with scientific knowledge, and use innovative participatory and complementary methodologies. Where possible, the pedagogical and organizational implications of these approaches will also be discussed.

The book—whose tentative title is *Transforming Knowledge for Diversity and Democracy*—is part of a larger action research program with partners in Asia, Europe, West Africa, and Central and South America. This action research seeks to understand the dynamics of institutionalizing people-centered processes and democratic participation in environmental governance and stewardship (from genes to whole landscapes). The book argues that a focus on transforming knowledge is central to claiming diversity and gender inclusive participation in environmental governance and the management of natural resources on which local livelihoods and cultures depend.