

Community-based management of reindeer pastures: does it work?

Worldwide governments are experimenting with community-based management by devolving authority to resource-dependent groups for managing common pool resources (CPR) sustainably. These reforms build on a significant body of empirical literature which has demonstrated that small communities could successfully manage forests, pastures, and fisheries by devising their own rules. The very same literature has also increased our understanding about the conditions which enhance the likelihood that local users work towards shared goals. However, with respect to pastoralism, critics argue that the strong emphasis on clear rules and well defined boundaries as an institutional basis for community-based management is counterproductive due to the flexible institutional arrangements and the mobility needed to access the optimal pastures under variable environmental conditions. I present the relevance of these scholarly debates for reindeer management by using the Finnmark case in Norway as an example. In Finnmark there is a large difference in production and calf weights between different siidas, which indicates that production is dependent on more than governmental politics, economic incentives or individual decisions on household levels. These variations could be explained by the size of pastures, the herd size inequality, and stable siida partnerships which are structural factors known to influence reciprocity, trust and cooperation among local users. The low level of reciprocity and trust on the largest winter pastures could also explain the request for predictable access to pastures through siida tenures rather than more flexibility to move to optimal pastures in winter. The example underscores the significance of rules, well defined boundaries and third parties for community-based management of pastures, and cast doubts on the strong emphasis on flexible institutional arrangement as a panacea for adaptive management.