ACTORS AND ACTANTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AUTHOR INFORMATION

DR. TSETEN UDEN BHUTIA

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
SIKKIM GOVERNMENT COLLEGE, BURTUK,
AFFILIATED WITH SIKKIM UNIVERSITY,
GANGTOK, SIKKIM, INDIA.
E-mail: zigojojo@gmail.com

Abstract:

For a long time, public-sector actors have been the main focal agents in the process of environmental policy-making; with changing times, the approach and strategies towards the matter have changed as well. The state institutions or the public sector are aided and assisted by several other agencies. There is a move from government to governance and multilevel governance; since various institutions and agencies participate in the making of policies geared towards addressing environmental issues. These policies aim to reduce the impact of environmental changes and disasters, whether caused by nature or humans while meeting the current and future needs of the community. Public and private actors today work through strategies of coordination and collaboration; leaving space for local communities to participate as well. This is due to the understanding that the relationship between certain communities and nature goes beyond the conventional understanding of human-nature interactions and this is reflected in their active participation in environmental governance. Environmental governance with Actor-network theory (ANT) encompasses more than just the anthropogenic standpoint of nature-human relations; in this, the capacity of human and nonhuman agents to influence action is also to be acknowledged. Collaboration and network-based approach through ANT stresses actors and actants working as agents or co-agents in environmental governance.

Keywords: *Environmental governance, multi-level governance, actors, actants.*

Introduction:

A notable shift has occurred in public policy-making; whereby power and authority have made a move to become wider in terms of the range of actors. This has made policy-making a broad approach focusing on the participation of numerous actors and also building collaboration among them. This has been apt in the environmental sector- as has been mentioned by Arts (Arts, 2006)*"the*

environmental domain has been a laboratory for new modes of governance par excellence"(Newell, Pattberg, & Schroeder, 2012). With this, the governance ideals have moved on to new governance. This process is preceded by a move from involving government as a linchpin of decision-making to governance, whereby there is no direct transfer of responsibilities but there is a sharing of responsibilities and participation in decision-making which goes beyond state institutions. Hence, giving way to nonstate actors (NSAs), non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations and makinga place for community participation as well. This association of non-state actors in decision processes has come to be important to governance (Newig & Fritsch, 2009). Several factors affecting governance and environmental governance in particular have been viewed from an anthropogenic standpoint; making causes and effects of environmental activities and participation human-oriented. Anthropogenic (human-centric) activities can and have caused uncontrolled influences on the environmental conditions of a place(Chettri, Singh, & Krishna, 2006). This idea of new governance and new environmental governance with emphasis on multi-level governance, along with actors and agencies that are human-centric should also provide space for non-human entities that could manifest changes.

Objectives:

1. To identify the attributes of 'new' and multilevel governance.
2. To outline the importance of governance in environmental policymaking.
3. To classify and explain the notions of 'actor' and 'actant' as agents of action.
4. To relate the significance of 'actor' and 'actants' to environmental governance.

Methodology:

The paper is based on qualitative secondary analysis. Analysis of concepts relevant to the content of the paper has been explored and examined. The secondary data inquired upon have been applied in fulfilling the objectives identified for the study.

Governance and Multilevel governance:

Presenting Stoker's definition of the word 'government' as implying activities which are undertaken principally within the domain of the state bodies, specifically activities which are undertaken in the name of public order and hence include as a part of its agenda the facilitation of collective action and characterizing 'governance' to encompass strategies leading to new developments resulting in the blurring the dividing line between the public, private, national and international. Stoker as such mentions that "the essence of governance is its focus on governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government"(Jordan, Wurzel, & Zito, 2003)**.** Governance comprises many functions and types of governing systems; which embrace actors representing different sectors; and are henceforth presented within the purview of patterns of governance; hence, it is not a homogenous activity(Kanie, et al., 2019). Along with

actors, environmental policymaking has to be considerate of several factors that may not directly correspond to human entities or activities. State actors and non-state actors have come to form various levels of governance; a reason presumed as being the inability of the public sector to produce all the needed environmental improvements and hence must be aided by private sector markets and civil society communities, there also exists a hybridization of interventions where there is a mixture of these three sets of actors (Delmas & Young, 2011). The emphasis is more on the plurality of actors; working through multi-level procedures, and not adhering to the standard mode of top-to-down operation. These actors hence rely on a plurality of actors whose functioning may lead to an overlap of authority(2012). Governance also has been explained to not only incorporate but also transcend the fixation on government or the state; this is done through the government's acceptance and integration of the private sector/civil society into the process of making and implementing policies. And, it is imperative to understand here that all three actors bear numerous agencies, components, and also individuals(Minnery, 2007). Stoker's Five (5) propositions regarding governance are worth mentioning;

1. Governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government.

2. Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues.

3. Governance identifies the power dependence involved in collective action.

4. Governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors.

5. Governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide(Stoker, 1998).

New forms of governance are also acknowledged, wherein arrangements form an interlinking of public and private actors which are depicted through networks, business organizations working independently, public-private and civic-private partnerships, etc. This process is referred to by some as a 'shift from government to governance' or as 'governance without government'(2006).

Conceptualization	Meaning
'Old' governance	'state-steering' (top-down, command & control)
'New' governance	'new modes of governance' (from public-private networks to private self-regulation)
'All' governance*	'co-ordination mechanisms to provide for public goods' (either public, or private or mixed)
'Normative' governance	'programs to renew public or private management'

| (good governance, NPM, corporate governance) |

Four conceptualizations of governance(Arts, 2006)

A transition from government to governance is not the only notable consequence of changing times; some have also identified *meta-governance* as one of the new developments. Meta-governance is considered to be a specific mix of actors and is headed towards a network that is composed of actors from numerous arenas; engaged in the acts of governing through a multi-level forum and as meta-governors their role may become blurred; this blurring could result in them not pursuing a common goal(Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2020).

In the environmental sphere, actors could range from the government and its institutions, civil society, international organizations, and regional environmental governance arrangements; hybrid actors with public-private partnerships, train governmental and transnational networks and partnerships; and private agents. Governance in the new sense has resulted in an "increasingly pertinent feature of the global public order in and beyond environmental protection and sustainability is the dynamic mixing of the public and the private, with state-based public power being exercised by state institutions alongside and along with the exercise of private power by market and civil society institutions and other actors committed to the public interest and public weal"(2012). The move to governance from government is notable due to failure on the part of the government- as aptly quoted "[j]ust as markets are rarely, if ever, perfect resource allocators, so too governments are rarely if ever perfect planners"(Hepburn, 2010). Few causes for government failure have been identified; *first,* governments do not have complete information; the *second* reason highlights the human component of an individual, who is susceptible to the acts of lobbying, manipulation, and other forms of motivation that encourage one to shape policy for one's benefit (2010).

Environmental governance addresses matters concerning accessibility, utilization, conservation; and overall management of natural resources which are termed common-pool resources. Aside from the reliance on private ownership and state regulation; Ostrom proposed a third mechanism for documenting the self-organization of communities that are reliant on common-pool resources; and this third mechanism is to do the same with or without market regulations (Chaffin, et al., 2016)**.** Participation of different actors in environmental governance especially of the nonstate actors has been based on collective action. The term '*trans environmental'* builds within it an idea of collective action; this transcends the limited definition of the environmental issue that is at stake. It expresses that nature has other implications besides the environment; it also has a social function (Kousis & Eder, 2001). Environmental movements do translate to social movements; hence the participation of community groups as nonstate actors becomes imperative in addressing grievances arising out of environmental changes. What is the social? According to ANT theorist Law, *"the social is nothing other than patterned networks of heterogenous materials"*(Law,

1992)*"or an effect produced by such a network"*(Bueger & Stockbruegger, 2017). This concept provides that having agency could be exuded by any type of entity human or anything that falls within the category of nonhumans, and each of these entities hence executes an action in a similar fashion (2017)**.**Local participation through community participation has been the main idea in terms of resource management theory.Conservation policies reflect the inclusion and exclusion of community; communities are defined in terms of place and space dimensions in resource management and conservation(Stone & Nyaupane, 2014).NEPIs or 'New' Environmental Policy Instruments cover a wide array of instruments or actors in environmental legislation; some identified are *market-based instruments (MBIs), voluntary agreements, eco-labels, etc.*(Jordan, Wurzel, & Zito, 2003)

In the sphere of natural resource management policy, community development solutions play a major role and policymakers have been keen on relying on this; as such community capacity building also has become an instrument of government policies to facilitate resource management practices(Gray, Williams, & Phillips, 2005)**.** This reliance on the community is also evident from the emergence of the 'new' dimension in public policy having characteristics like partnerships, cohesion, trust and reciprocity; aided by community building and inclusiveness. Besides this, the sense of community holds a certain set of values such as equitable distribution of benefits and burdens; they hold accountability towards community and are considered to be better planner, manager and providers than the government or the market(Adams & Hess, 2001). Contrary to the role of formal state institutions; the role of NGOs which fall under the category of nonstate agents are seen to be more effective when it comes to negotiating for the environment; the belief is that the greater involvement through accessibility to negotiations provided to these agents would lead to successful negotiations and better solutions. They are hence designated as the true champions of the environment (2019). The 'social glue' in natural resource management that holds groups based upon diverse identities and affinities might be kinship but there could be many more sources, and this shifting of relationships could be analyzed in terms of actor-network concepts(Mehta, Leach, & Scoones, 2001). This highlights the importance of actors who are beyond the government or state institutions. While deliberating on the role of various actors in environmental governance; a direction towards distinction between 'actors' and 'actants' also becomes necessary.

Governing Environment: 'Actor', 'Actant'

Actor-network theory (ANT) defines actors as the human or nonhuman members of a network of association (Watson, 2007). In simple terms, an 'actor' is a human intentional actor(Latour, 1996); but ANT states that this actor also comprises a semiotic connotation 'an actant'; this denotes the ability to act is not a feature related to nature. It is a term that depends on the idea of relativity and hence, "an actant is anything that makes a difference in a situation"(2017). 'Actant' as

a term generally refers to material objects significant identified for their association with humans as actors and their activities. ANT takes it further adding that 'actants' could imply any actor emitting human or non-human traits, and are seen to be engaged in the networked system of interactions. The influence of such actants would emerge organically and situationally (Lewis & Westlund, 2015).In linguistic theory, the term *actant* which is often also referred to as argument or term, etc. denotes "the major syntactic roles of nominals that directly depend on the main verb syntactically; subject, direct object, and indirect object"(Mel'čuk, 2004)**.** Latour uses 'actor', 'agent', or 'actant' to point to autonomous figures, which could be anything "from an individual ('Peter')or collective ('the crowd') or figurative (anthropomorphic or zoomorphic), or non-figurative ('fate')"(Ødemark, Resløkken, Lillehagen, & Engebretsen, 2024).An activity or an action according to Callon and Latour's Actor-network theory takes place through actants which could be identified as elements in a network having tendency to evolve through power relations and are able to shape observed outcomes(Cury, Kennelly, & Howes, 2024).

An important component of ANT is the emphasis on Network; this however is not network in the conventional sense of interconnectedness. Actor-Network has been derived from the French term *'acteur reseau'*, two words that are said to be *intentionally oxymoronic*. The term 'actor' implies centred and 'network' implies a decentred idea(Law, 1999).In environmental governance, the prescribed two ways in which policy actors get involved are "*firstly,* through involvement in formal networks for accomplishing specific tasks and they are stipulated in the form of formal documents. Secondly*,* these actors are also embedded in informal networks based on interpersonal relationships which could be social, economic and political" (Huang, Yi, Chen, Xu, & Chen, 2022).ANT also emphasizes on the social construction of knowledges and views of natural resource issues; it shows interests in the interaction of individuals as creative and knowledges agents with non-human 'actors' like natural resources, technological objects and others; and through this interaction they build networks which help to put in place viable perspectives leading to definite consequences(2001)."An actor or actant is not an agent in the normal sociological sense; instead, actor and actant are used as semiotic terms"(Nhamo, 2006)*;* they also tend to be characterized by specific attributes in terms of their potential and insights. Andthis potential includes within its purview all elements that could result in an outcome. The characteristics could be projected in terms of "thephysical strength, intelligence, or human and social capital; physical resources such as money; technology; and privileged access to information" (2006).Defining intentions as *intrinsic* which is actions directly intended to achieve goals; *as criptive* intentions should also be acknowledged and this refers to actions of robots, swarms of insects, organizations, technology, and others, allowing one to view things as agents. 'Things' here imply inanimate objects and materials as agents or actors, if not it could at least be taken as co-agents complementing an intentional action performed by a human

(Johnston, 2001).

Observation and conclusion:

Community participation in the conservation and protection of nature has expressed a special bond between nature and humans wherein the physical as well as biological components of the environment and humans are linked in varied relationships; portraying a holistic view of the human-nature bond (Gadgil & Berkes, 1991)**.** Strategies that give encouragement to community as an important stakeholder in the governance of the environment could prove to be fruitful; for instance *"Permanent participants"* that has been granted to the representatives of Indigenous People Organizations (IPOs) in the Arcticst and as an example of the role that the local community could play in environmental governance(Duyck, 2012)**.** Multilevel environmental governance should produce transparency, and accountability, and also be open to public participation in the decision-making process; making space for the involvement of indigenous people. Local experiences and expertise of the community could provide knowledge on which suggestions and recommendations to enhance environmental governance could be acquired(Yi, Huang, Chen, Xu, & Liu, 2019).

Identifying actors in environmental governance haveled to the identification of nonhuman agencies and it proves to be important component in the emergence and the sustenance of environmental activism. In environmental policy-making, there are many stakeholders involved, but the natural environment itself is not taken as a stakeholder, it is seen as an entity with no mind and needs like humans; so, Nashin 1990 through the book The Rights of Nature: a History of Environmental Ethics considers natural environment to have innate rights that need to be protected; the impact of the natural environment on organizations is to be given considerable attention besides the attention paid to the impact of organizations on the natural environment (Haigh & Griffiths, 2009).The action may not necessarily arise through a human-centric actor, but an actant having non-human attributes could very much exude the quality of having an agency. ANT in environmental policy making extends consideration to the role of various actors- state, and non-state actors like NGOs and community organizations, and any relationship that can arise out of the interaction between these actors. Thereby, actors or actants may not directly influence an action for instance environmental movements. But there are underlying forces that can be termed as actants that do contribute to the action taking place. Hence, actors and actants comprising the governance paradigm are engaged in activities which is not homogenous (Kanie, et al., 2019) in nature. There are myriad actors leading to multilevel governance; these actors are engaged in an act of facilitating hybridization (Delmas & Young, 2011) of interventions; the public, private and civil society actors within itself comprise of numerous agencies, components and individuals (Minnery, 2007); they present self-governing networks of actors (Stoker, 1998). As such, in environmental governance the public institutions/actors; the market; the private actors like civil society/community-based

organizations could well have an impact upon an activity individually or through a network-oriented approach; with due attention paid to 'actors' and 'actant' both.

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