

## Book review

### **The World's Savannas: Economic driving forces, ecological constraints and policy options for sustainable land use.**

Eds M.D. YOUNG and O.T. SOLBRIG, The Parthenon Publishing Group Limited. Price £38. ISBN 1-85070-417-1

Wow, this is not a volume for the faint hearted! As the 12th volume in the Man and the Biosphere Series it addresses the issues of managing tropical savannas in ways that are more environmentally sustainable, economically profitable and socially equitable than at present. These issues are drawn out using a mixture of issue papers on such topics as: ecological constraints to savanna land use; effects of international trade arrangements; and case studies from developed and developing countries in Africa, South America and Australia. The volume is aimed primarily at upper level university students, scientists and resource managers, who are not necessarily specialists in ecology. Most of the case studies were prepared jointly by a social scientist and an ecologist.

The subjects raised in this volume are highly topical and should be compulsory reading for those involved with drafting policy which affects land use. It should also be read by biological scientists so that they might consider the importance and relevance of their work against the backdrop of social and government influences upon land use. The chapter by Mike Young entitled "National and international influences that drive savanna land use" provides an excellent summary of this "big picture" view of land use. His summary that "National and international policies are often formulated with little attention to their implications for sav-

anna land use (and) many of them tend to increase rates of land degradation, encourage inefficient forms of development and cause social conflict" should be a signal for more of us in the scientific community to enhance our interactions with social scientists and policy makers to bring about a more holistic view of land use.

An important third element to the fashionable "ecologically and economically sustainable systems" phraseology is that of equity. Whilst this concept is raised primarily in this volume where subsistence and commercial systems co-exist, it has increasing relevance to Australia as we review our predominantly pastoralist use of savanna lands. Other significant "players" with a particular interest in land use include Aborigines and the wider community to meet its conservation, tourism and recreation needs.

There is a great deal of collective wisdom embodied in this volume — much of it hard won at the expense of the poorest in our communities. There can be no excuses for making the same mistakes again! But somehow I suspect that this will be the case. The "iron triangle" governing resource use patterns in India's savannas (discussed by M. Gadgil in his chapter entitled "Restoring the productivity of Indian savannas") of politicians, bureaucrats and industrialists who personally benefit from inappropriate land use policies at the expense of the natural resource and the subsistence sector will, unfortunately, prevail in many countries for some time to come.

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