



Milestones

Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom

“The best solutions to global problems like deforestation and depleted fisheries often lie with local people”, asserts Professor Elinor Ostrom, the American political scientist who was awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel for 2009. Notably, she is the first woman to have won the award in its forty-year history.

Ostrom won the award for “her analysis of economic governance, especially the commons”. In an interview, after the announcement of the Nobel Prize, Ostrom pointed out that common ownership is much more effective for the management of natural resources than is usually appreciated.

Through empirical research, based on field studies of user-managed common pool resources such as fish

stocks, pastures, forests and ground water basins, Ostrom has shown that under certain conditions, when communities are given the right to self-organize, they can and do work together to manage their resources.

Ostrom’s work has consistently challenged conventional wisdom that maintains that common pool resources, if they are to be saved from overexploitation—the ‘tragedy of the commons’—must either be privatized or brought under government regulation and management.

The award to Ostrom will come as a shot in the arm to indigenous and local communities who have consistently pointed out that they are the best managers of their resources, provided their rights to use and manage resources are upheld. **■**