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## Global analysis of forest management shows local communities often lose out

09 November 2020

Maintaining forest cover is an important natural climate solution, but new research shows that too often, communities lose out when local forest management is formalised.

The new study published today in Nature Sustainability, led by Dr Johan Oldepkop at The University of Manchester and Reem Hajjar at Oregon State University, is based on 643 case studies of community forest management (CFM) in 51 different countries, from 267 peer-reviewed studies.

It provides the most comprehensive global analysis of CFM to date and shows that whilst CFM policies often have positive environmental and economic impacts, CFM often results in weakened rights and less access to forests for local populations.

Around the world, 1.6 billion people live within 5km (3 miles) forest, with 71% located in low or middle income countries.

"Improving forests can be a vital way to both tackle climate change and address poverty -- however, our study shows that too often local communities lose out when the management of community forests is formalised by governments," said Dr. Oldekop. "With the clock ticking on catastrophic climate change, the world needs to learn from successes in countries like Nepal, where we saw some cases with simultaneous economic, environmental, and resource rights outcomes."

Previous research by Dr. Oldekop demonstrated that community-forest management in Nepal led to a 37% relative reduction in deforestation and a 4.3% relative reduction in poverty.

Around the globe, forests regulate climate, sequester carbon, are home to a large proportion of the worlds plants and animals and contribute substantially to the livelihoods of people living in or near them.

"Around 14% of forests worldwide and 28% of forests in low-middle-income countries are formally owned or managed by Indigenous people and local communities," said Reem Hajjar. "Case studies that show positive outcomes abound. But gaining a better understanding of the trade-offs -- this outcome got better but at the expense of other outcomes getting worse -- is critical for understanding forest governance systems' potential for addressing multiple sustainability objectives at the same time."

The new study analysed 643 examples of CFM in Latin America, Africa and Asia-Pacific, to gain a better understanding of the social, economic and environmental trade-offs which are occurring and what changes can help ensure goals across the spectrum are successful.

- Of the 524 cases that tracked the environmental condition of a forest following a formalised CFM initiative, 56% cited improvement but for 32% it decreased.
- Of the 316 cases that reported on livelihoods, 68% found an increase in income, 36% showed no change and 6.3% reported a fall.
- Among the 249 cases reporting on resource access rights, 34% indicated an increase compared to 54% that showed a decrease.

However, clear trade-offs were visible in cases which assessed joint outcomes. Of the 122 studies which looked at all three CFM goals, just 18% reported positive outcomes across the three goals.

"Community Forest Management can improve both forests and the lives of the people near them. While it is heartening to see improving incomes in 68% of cases, reduced environmental impacts in 56% and gains in resource rights in 34% of cases, the overall results are significantly less transformative than they could be. Governments need to do more to ensure it's a triple win for people and the environment, rather than a series of trade-offs between them," added Dr Oldekop.

Source: https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/11/201109132446.htm