



Tenure Trends

Who's Best?...at Conserving Forests and Securing Carbon?

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It's a good question, and one that's increasingly important as we careen towards a weak agreement in Copenhagen and prepare for the chaotic forest carbon market that is likely to follow.

For a long time the answer for most people has been easy: the government. Public ownership and management of forests and parks have been assumed to be both necessary and sufficient to ensure protection. Of course, all of us who've spent time in the world's forests know the answer is more complicated. State sanctioned deforestation as well as illegal and unsustainable logging are now well recognized problems. On the other hand, we can cite many examples of effective conservation by Indigenous Peoples and local forest communities and households. But rigorous, large-scale research on this question has been limited to a few, recent, studies. Research in Mexico and Guatemala showed that communities are at least as good as governments and a similar study by IPAM in Brazil showed that Indigenous Peoples won hands down.

Two newly released studies finally give us a more global answer, at least for tropical countries.

Andrew Nelson and Ken Chomitz of the World Bank analyzed remote sensing imagery across the entire tropical biome and compared effectiveness of protected areas against that of multiple use and Indigenous areas, using forest fires as the best proxy available for deforestation. Multiple use areas generally provide greater deforestation reductions than protected areas, and Indigenous areas have an even higher positive impact.

Ashwini Chhatre and Arun Agrawal, of Illinois and Michigan Universities respectively analyzed 80 community managed forest areas in 10 tropical countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America and found the larger the area and the greater the rule-making autonomy at the local level the higher the amount of carbon stored and greater the benefits to local livelihoods. They also examined the effect of ownership and found that when communities owned the forest they tended to defer use, diminishing their own livelihood benefits and increasing carbon storage. On the other hand there was a higher probability of overuse and less carbon storage on state-owned land.

So for now anyway, Indigenous Peoples and local communities owning the forest and practicing multiple use are the best bet to avoid deforestation and secure carbon, that is of course when they, and not the government, actively control and manage their forests. This is a bit of a wake-up call for developing country governments resisting the recognition of community rights and for developed country donors and investors looking for credible carbon offsets. It also suggests that in addition to halting the state-sponsored deforestation and logging that are the primary sources of emissions, credible conservation and emissions reductions requires encouraging this shift in tenure rather than

rewarding deforesters, or the conservation organizations committed to continuing state-sponsored control.

Of course, government ownership of land and management of forests does make sense in some situations and in some countries. Just because local ownership and management is proving more effective in the tropics doesn't necessarily mean that all forest land, everywhere, should be owned and managed by local people. So what are the conditions in which government ownership or management of forests make sense? Lin Ostrom recently won a Nobel Prize for her decades-long effort to understand and champion the possibilities of local collective action. Perhaps it is time for a new generation of research examining the real limits and possibilities of state ownership and management. *In this era when rights need to be respected, forests need to be conserved and emissions need to be curtailed, where in the world should forests remain under the control of governments?*

Reports Reviewed:

Andrew Nelson and Kenneth M. Chomitz. **Protected Area Effectiveness in Reducing Tropical Deforestation: A Global Analysis of the Impact of Protection Status.** October 2009. Independent Evaluation Group Evaluation Brief 7. The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

The article is available at

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTOED/Resources/protected_areas_eb.pdf

Ashwini Chhatre and Arun Agrawal. **Trade-offs and synergies between carbon storage and livelihood benefits from forest commons.** PNAS 2009 106:17667-17670.

The article is available at:

<http://www.icarus.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/ChhatreAgrawalPNAS2009main.pdf>

Tenure Trends alerts the global develop community to important news, events and research findings regarding forest tenure, rights and development in the world's forests. It is published by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), a global coalition of community, development, research and conservation organizations and prepared by the Rights and Resources Group, the secretariat of the coalition. The views presented are those of the secretariat and are not necessarily shared by the agencies that have generously supported RRI, nor all of the Partners of the coalition. If you would like more information please send a message to Lopaka Purdy at LPurdy@rightsandresources.org. For more information on RRI go to www.rightsandresources.org.