



PRESS RELEASE: New Report shows forests provide more livelihood benefits when local forest users have a right to participate in forest governance

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***** RELEASE *****

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New research shows higher likelihood of improvement in both livelihoods and biodiversity when local forest users have a formal right to participate in forest governance

WASHINGTON, DC (24 March 2011) - New research highlighted this week in *Science* finds that there is a greater likelihood of a forest providing higher subsistence livelihood benefits to local populations, and also having higher levels of biodiversity, when local forest users have a right to participate in forest governance by making rules over the management and use of the forest.

This research, conducted by researchers with the International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) Research Program, currently housed at the School of Natural Resources and Environment at University of Michigan, looks at the relationship between a key pair of social and ecological outcomes from forests in human-dominated landscapes – the extent to which forests contribute to the subsistence livelihoods of local populations, and the conservation of forest biodiversity – to determine if it possible to get livelihood benefits from forests and conserve biodiversity in the same forest simultaneously.

“There has been a lot of rhetoric around achieving ‘win-win’ outcomes across social and ecological dimensions of forests, while some think win-wins are impossible and trade-offs are inevitable,” said Dr. Lauren Persha, a postdoctoral research fellow with IFRI, when asked about why this research had been undertaken. “But, there has been very little work to date which uses systematic and sufficiently robust data to try to move beyond this ‘either/or’ rhetoric in order to better understand relationships between social and ecological outcomes from forests, or to identify important institutional, socio-economic, policy, or related factors that are associated which jointly positive outcomes.”

Partly due to this lack of analysis, policies that have tried to promote improvements across both dimensions are rarely based on evidence of what actually works in this respect. To help rectify this evidence gap, the IFRI study analyzed a large, systematically collected dataset of 84 cases in 6 countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, India, Nepal and Bhutan) to look more closely at how

forest-based subsistence livelihoods and biodiversity conservation outcomes from forests are related, and identify the most important determinants of this relationship.

Size and Governance Matter

The research identified three possible relationships between forest-based subsistence livelihoods and biodiversity conservation: a win-win relationship (about 27% of cases had jointly higher subsistence livelihoods and biodiversity conservation); a win-lose relationship (60% of cases were trade-off situations where livelihoods contributions from the forest were above average but biodiversity was below average, or vis versa); and a lose-lose relationship (13% of cases had jointly below average livelihoods and biodiversity outcomes). Two important factors that emerged in analyzing the likelihood of obtaining each of these three different outcomes are a formally recognized right for local forest users to participate in the governance of forest use and management, and the size of the forest.

“IFRI’s research is key to identifying that win-win scenarios are possible – particularly when local forest users had rulemaking participation rights,” said Andy White, coordinator of the Rights and Resources Initiative, noting that it makes sense it is more difficult to get high subsistence livelihoods benefits and retain high levels of biodiversity from smaller patches of forest, regardless of the level of local participation. “But their results suggest that for small forests in particular, policies which formally recognize and provide for the right of local forest users to participate in forest governance might be an especially important way to more effectively promote positive results across both of these dimensions.”

“Rulemaking participation rights for local forest users was a key factor in getting a win-win situation in our research,” said Dr. Arun Agrawal, IFRI coordinator. “Similarly, we found a greater likelihood of a forest being below average for both subsistence livelihoods and biodiversity when local forest users do not have this right.”

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The views presented here are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by all of the Partners of the Coalition, nor the Department for International Development (UK), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ford Foundation, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, who have generously supported this work.

Notes to Editors:

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About International Forestry Resources and Institutions:

The **International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI)** program examines how governance arrangements shape forest outcomes. Scholars and policy makers affiliated with IFRI are interested in understanding the role of formal and informal institutions in enhancing livelihoods and adaptive capacity of peoples, conserving biodiversity, and promoting greater sustainability in carbon sequestration. IFRI is a Partner of the Rights and Resources Initiative. For more information, please visit <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/ifri/home>.

About the Rights and Resources Initiative:

The **Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)** is a strategic coalition comprised of international, regional, and community organizations engaged in development, research, and conservation to advance forest tenure, policy, and market reforms globally.

The mission of the Rights and Resources Initiative is to support local communities' and Indigenous Peoples' struggles against poverty and marginalization by promoting greater global commitment and action towards policy, market and legal reforms that secure their rights to own, control and benefit from natural resources, especially land and forests. For more information, please visit www.rightsandresources.org.