

*Forest and soil restoration exclosures in southern Ethiopia - impacts on livelihoods and distributional inequities*

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Deforestation and soil degradation constitute major environmental problem in many parts of the world and different strategies have been developed to tackle this issue. Closing degraded communal land from human and animal interference to promote soil and forest regeneration, commonly termed as 'exclosures', has been pursued as one of the major environmental restoration strategies in Ethiopia. Exclosures are expected to generate community benefits in terms of biomass production, improved soil fertility, water availability (by enhancing infiltration), and flood prevention. The enclosed areas are either left to regenerate naturally or, more often, enriched through planting exotics tree species such as Eucalyptus or native tree species. Exclosures are usually managed by elected village committees who decide on the rules and distribution of benefits in consultation with the government's agricultural office.

Here we report on a study which investigated the impacts of exclosures on local people's livelihoods in three communities in the Halaba area in southern Ethiopia. To do so, we conducted focus group discussions, participatory mapping and photo voice exercises on issues of livelihoods, poverty and wealth distribution and how these interact with the exclosure areas. The work showed that the benefits and dis-benefits produced from exclosures and their impacts on local livelihoods are distributed unequally within and between communities. Location plays a role with regard to differences amongst communities similar to what has been reported previously, with restoration efforts by upstream communities producing 'free' benefits to downstream communities. In addition, differences among communities are also linked to different age and composition of exclosure areas as well as differences in the rules regulating access to wood and non-wood products. These differences can be said to reflect trade-offs between environmental benefits (larger in older exclosure areas with native species and more restrictive rules) and livelihood benefits in the form of forest products (larger in younger exclosure areas with exotic species and more collection opportunities).

Within communities there are also spatial differences, with households nearest to exclosure areas experiencing most dis-benefits such as crop raids from wild animals who are attracted to the restored areas. In addition, there are also inequalities linked to households' wealth status, with richer households in a better position to circumvent rules and hence appropriate benefits such as timber as well as being in a better situation to mitigate negative impacts.

While it is widely acknowledged that reforestation projects aiming to provide global benefits in the form of biodiversity conservation or carbon sequestration often have negative impacts on local people's livelihoods, there has been much less focus on the down-sides of restoration projects which have the explicit aim to create benefits for local people. However, acknowledging trade-offs in these kinds of projects and identifying the factors that influence the distribution of benefits and dis-benefits at the local level is crucial in order to ensure that forests created with the aim to benefit local people truly do so.