MILLER, DANIEL [S8-P32]

Using predictive proxy indicators to assess the long-term impacts of forest programs on poverty
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The international development community is increasingly demanding better evidence on the effect of different forest policies and programs on poverty alleviation. However, efforts to strengthen the evidence base confront the challenge that forest-related interventions often take a long time to show results. Results of investments in sustainable forest management, for example, may take years, even decades to materialize. At the same time, forest investments are limited in duration, usually lasting no more than five years, and post-intervention monitoring remains extremely rare. Here we develop a novel approach to address this challenge: the use of predictive proxy indicators (PPIs). PPIs are measures taken during implementation of a project, program, or policy that are designed to provide credible information on longer-term impacts. To identify PPIs for poverty-related impacts we conducted an in-depth review of the forestry portfolio of the World Bank, the largest donor in the sector. Our sample included 80 projects that closed between 1990 and 2013 to allow variation in the lag times since project completion. We developed criteria to score the indicators extracted from project documents according to their predictive potential. We then used a theory-based approach to validate the PPIs based on input from more than 100 experts from different development agencies, governments, and academic institutions. We found that standalone PPIs are difficult to identify, but that multiple indicators, considered together, can have strong predictive potential. We developed several clusters of indicators for sustainable forest-related livelihoods outcomes, which together highlight the importance of indicators on secure land tenure, sustainable financing, and effective monitoring and evaluation. Our results suggest that PPIs can be a useful, cost-effective tool for assessing socio-economic impacts in the forest and other complex development sectors. The results and approach presented in this paper lay the foundation for future analytical work to empirically test and refine PPIs for the poverty impacts of forestry interventions. This study should have particular resonance as the international community seeks to develop targets and indicators to track progress toward an ambitious set of Sustainable Development Goals over the next 15 years.