

NATH, MEGHA [S1-P3]

Forests – What do we know and what don't we know on what works?

Co-authors: Dr. Jyotsna Puri, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation; Raag Bhatia, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Forests are integral to sustainable development (WDR 2015; UNEP, 2013). Despite their importance, (forests provide resources and revenue to an estimated 1.3 billion people; The World Bank 2014) high quality evidence in this area remains sparse. An important constituent in decision making about forests and related sectors is understanding the evidence on what works, when, why and under what circumstances for whom. Carefully surveying existing rigorous evidence on the causal links between conservation and livelihoods interventions, such as payments for ecosystem services, community management of forests and protected areas and welfare outcomes of interest, is critical to assess programme focus and trade-offs (Ferraro et al. 2011; Martin et al. 2014).

Impact evaluations using experimental and quasi-experimental methods to identify the effects that can be attributed to a particular intervention or policy while combining these with qualitative methods and a theory of change, are critical in building rigorous evidence. However, we know of no instance where a full mapping of all the evidence in this sector has been done.

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) has developed a new interactive tool – Evidence Gap Maps (EGMs) – to synthesize and review counterfactual analysis. This study will outline the findings of an Evidence Gap Map of forest conservation interventions in low and middle income countries. It will present an overview of what we know and don't about effective forest conservation interventions. It will also identify key gaps where little or no evidence from impact evaluations is available and inform a strategic approach to build the evidence base in the forestry sector.

The presentation will focus on policy relevant findings based on the ecological, environmental and social welfare outcomes corresponding to different interventions targeting forest ecosystems, adaptive capacity, governance, local livelihoods and climate change.

The construction of an Evidence Gap Map on forest conservation and livelihoods fits well with a key goal of the conference: to lay the groundwork to further develop tools, methods, and indicators for future research. Evidence Gap Maps can help reveal what has worked well which methodological approaches and indicators have been used to approach which types of evaluation questions. In this way, Evidence Gap Maps are an important tool for setting a research agenda. Beyond a research agenda, Evidence Gap Maps can have multiple levels of influence in decision-making for practice and policy by engaging different stakeholders, revealing the stumbling points in the implementations of the interventions and considering new approaches for pursuing outcomes of interest in a cost-efficient manner.