

NEWTON, PETER [S4-P13]

Who are (not) forest dependent people?

Co-authors: Arun Agrawal, University of Michigan; Mugabi Augustine Ateenyi Byenkya, University of Michigan; Johan Oldekop, University of Michigan

Interactions between forests and people are of interest to researchers who study them, and to government agencies and NGOs, who fund and implement conservation and development projects to improve environmental and socio-economic outcomes in and around forests. The term 'forest dependent people' is widely used to describe human populations that derive benefits from forests in some way. In particular, the term is often used to refer to rural people living in poverty, including indigenous and traditional people, in forested developing countries. For example, the term is frequently used to define the population of interest to a research study, the targeted beneficiaries of policies and programs, and as an indicator for measuring the success of donor support. Interpretation of the term 'forest dependent people' is therefore extremely important in determining how research, funding, and program activities are targeted. Despite widespread use of the term, there is very little agreement about who the term refers to, or how many forest dependent people there are. This paper reviews 140 publications on 'forest dependent people' and identifies the range of existing uses and definitions of the term 'forest dependent people', and summarizes them in a new systematic taxonomy. It also identifies the range of existing estimates of the number of forest dependent people globally and nationally. Our taxonomy exposes the many dimensions that characterize the relationships between people and forests, and leads us to three conclusions. First, users of the term 'forest dependent people' should define their population of interest comprehensively, for the context and purpose. The framework and language that our taxonomy provides may aid such efforts. Second, global estimates of the number of forest dependent people are scarce and coarse. We provide a global estimate of the candidate pool of people who may be forest dependent, which may provide a starting point for more refined estimates at the national or sub-national level, depending on purpose and data availability. Third, conservation and development program funders, designers, and implementers could consider more closely the extent to which forest dependence is an appropriate trait for policy objectives. Our conclusions contribute to contemporary attempts by researchers, donors, and program implementers to better understand the impacts of forest sector investments on the livelihoods of people living in and around forests.