

RAKOTONARIVO, SAROBIDY [S8-P33]

The "true" local welfare costs of forest protection: Investigating the qualitative and quantitative discrepancies between a willingness-to-pay (WTP) and willingness-to-accept (WTA) framing

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If protected areas mostly aim to achieve conservation through the enforcement of forest use restrictions, they will inevitably impose costs on local welfare: predicting these costs is critical to designing compensatory interventions. Using discrete choice experiments (DCE) to predict the local costs of forest protection is challenging in a developing country context where customary land tenure rights are rarely aligned with formal rights. Although natural forests are often state-owned, state control over forest access is frequently weak or non-existent and local people often claim customary rights through the act of original clearance and settlement. In these circumstances, one difficulty is deciding whether to estimate respondents' Willingness to Pay (WTP) for use rights, or their Willingness to Accept (WTA) restrictions on their use rights. Past research shows that the choice is likely to heavily influence average opportunity cost estimates, but may have other implications. This paper aims to better understand how rural people near a new protected area in Madagascar respond to two DCE surveys: willingness-to-pay (WTP) to lift forest protection and willingness-to-accept (WTA) compensations for forest use restrictions. We used a between-subject design and administered the two DCE formats to two split samples (N=203). We investigated the trade-offs local people make between their rights to continue swidden agriculture, cash payments, and improved rice cultivation in the eastern rainforest of Madagascar. The WTA and WTP surveys are identical except for the magnitude of the payment levels. We also conducted qualitative debriefing interviews with a sub-sample of respondents to demystify the meaning of the DCE responses. Mixed logit models show that respondents positively value the compensatory improved rice cultivation in both DCE formats. However, WTA respondents highly favour the permit for one hectare of forest clearance and disfavour strict forest protection. Conversely, WTP households show indifference to any forms of forest use restrictions: demonstrating that the choice of WTP/WTA format does not only affect the average level of opportunity cost estimates, but also the relative attractiveness of different options. We further explored these differences by examining heterogeneity among respondents' choices with latent class analyses and found that only wealthier respondents (more food secure and own more livestock) and recent migrants are willing to pay to lift forest protection yet the poorest groups and longer established households require substantial compensations for foregoing forest clearance. Qualitative debriefings also reveal divergence in beliefs and attitudes towards concepts of legitimacy in forest conservation policy, personal experiences of compensations and external aids, and trust in the payment vehicle between these two groups of respondents. A particular challenge with designing compensatory interventions for forest protection is ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the most affected forest dwellers are heard and acted upon, and our results indicate that even where de jure forest ownership rests with the government (suggesting that WTP should be estimated) researchers should also consider estimating WTA. We conclude that local people's working definition of property rights and legitimacy will remain critically important in conservation issues in least developed countries.