

Informing biodiversity conservation strategies in Uganda and beyond

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- Conservation organisations used the evaluation findings to inform the review of Uganda's environment policies.
- The evaluation prompted local conservation organisations to form a network that used evaluation findings for a subsequent programme.
- The evaluation was covered widely in the media and featured in documents informing regional and global policy.

Factors that contributed to impact

- Governments and sustainable development finance institutions have long sought rigorous evidence of the effectiveness of payment for ecosystem services.
- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which funded the implementation, brought governmental, non-governmental and research partners together to regularly communicate on the progress and implications of the pilot.
- The researchers translated and communicated findings through various channels, including articles in journals, magazines and newspapers.

Impact evaluation details

Title: [Cash for carbon: a randomised controlled trial of payments for ecosystem serv...](#)

Authors: Seema Jayachandran, Joost de Laat, Eric Lambin and Charlotte Stanton

Status : Completed May 2016



Context

Although forests provide several benefits on a global scale, the cost of conserving them falls disproportionately on local communities. As part of global climate change avoidance and mitigation negotiations, countries have committed to paying the parties who conserve forests and to reducing emissions. However, there is little evidence on which conservation and emissions reduction strategies are the most cost-effective in balancing conservation with socio-economic well-being.

The United Nations and the World Bank count payments for ecosystems services (PES) as an attractive option to promote sustainable development under ‘reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation’, known as REDD+. PES programmes provide forest users and private forest owners incentives to avoid activities that might deforest or degrade forests.

To provide evidence on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of PES, researchers affiliated with Innovations for Poverty Action evaluated a pilot PES programme in western Uganda. UNEP funded the pilot, under which enrolled private forest owners were required to conserve their entire forest and were prohibited from cutting down any medium-sized trees. They were paid extra for planting tree seedlings.

Starting in 2010, the researchers evaluated the pilot PES programme’s impacts on deforestation and livelihood outcomes of smallholder landowners in Hoima and Kibale districts. Uganda’s National Environment Management Authority and a local implementer, Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust, were key collaborators on the pilot and its evaluation.

Evidence

Using high-resolution satellite images, the researchers found that the pilot PES programme led to a sharp reduction in deforestation. Between baseline and endline, tree cover on forest owners' land declined by 2–5 per cent in villages whose enrolled private forest owners received US\$28 per hectare of forest conserved, whereas it declined by 7–10 per cent in villages outside the programme area.

Participants were 14 per cent less likely to have cut any trees a year into the pilot programme. It averted a ton of CO₂ emissions at an estimated cost of US\$0.57.

The evaluation also found no evidence of tree-cutting shifting to areas outside the pilot.

Evidence impacts

Informed Uganda's biodiversity conservation policies

Uganda's National Environment Management Authority, the Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust and other conservation organisations built on the findings of the Hoima and Kibale pilot, amongst other projects, to review the proposed National Environmental Management Policy and contribute to discussions on drafting the new environment law. The National Environment Act of 2019 updates the previous law to include PES for conservation and management of biological diversity.

Prompted greater collaboration amongst conservation groups

The need for coordination during the evaluation prompted the formation of the Northern Albertine Rift Conservation Group, a loose network of conservation partners in the region, including the Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust, ECOTRUST, World Conservation Society and the Jane Goodall Institute. The evaluation and its findings informed the design of the network's 2014 project, funded by the UK-based Darwin Initiative, to provide livelihoods support and incentives to private forest owning communities in the region.

Informed global and regional analyses of PES

The evaluation was featured in [UNEP's global study](#) on trade in environmentally sound technologies. The study cites the evaluation as a resource to understand the effectiveness and limitations of PES as part of green industrial policies. The evaluation's findings and design also informed a [USAID document](#) that compiles lessons for informing the regional PES guidelines for the Lake Victoria Basin Commission.

Suggested citation

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2020. *Informing biodiversity conservation strategies in Uganda and beyond* [online summary], Evidence Impact Summaries. New Delhi: 3ie.

Related

[Terminal evaluation of the project: developing experimental methodology to test PES effectiveness in conservation in Uganda](#)

This 2015 UNEP-commissioned study analyses the pilot project, the evaluation and its impacts (Section 2.11.2).

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