

## Deforestation much higher in protected areas than forests run by local communities

BOGOR, Indonesia \_ Tropical forests designated as strictly protected areas have annual deforestation rates much higher than those managed by local communities – reinforcing a challenge to a long-held belief that the best way to conserve forests is to lock them away in protected areas, according to a new study.

“Our findings suggest that a forest put away behind a fence and designated 'protected' doesn't necessarily guarantee that canopy cover will be maintained over the long term compared to forests managed by local communities – in fact they lose much more,” said Manuel Guariguata, Senior Scientist with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and one of the co-authors of the paper, which includes researchers from Mexico and Spain.

Although a few isolated studies from different parts of the tropics have shown that community-based management can be more effective than protected areas in slowing deforestation, [the paper](#), published in the journal *Forest Ecology & Management*, makes a strong case that these previous findings may constitute a broader trend. The paper also underscores earlier findings by other scientists that show that greater rule-making autonomy at the local level are associated with better forest management and livelihood benefits.

The latest research compared peer-reviewed case studies in 16 countries across Latin America, Africa and Asia. It found that protected areas lost, on average, 1.47 percent of forest cover per year compared to just 0.24 percent in community-managed forests. In addition, the range of variation within the values of deforestation rates around each of these two averages was much larger in forest-protected areas than in community-managed forests.

With billions of dollars being channeled into Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) – a climate change mechanism that pays developing countries to protect the world's forests – the paper suggests that community-managed forests could be a more cost-efficient and effective solution to reducing deforestation and ensuring the sustainable use of forests while benefiting local livelihoods.

“When done properly, the benefits of community-based management can be seen over the long term, leading to greater conservation participation, reduced poverty, increased economic productivity and the protection of many forest species,” Guariguata said.

“We are not arguing that parks in tropical forested areas are useless. Instead we argue that community-managed forests are a key part of the overall forest conservation package.”

The findings reinforce a view held by experts that if REDD+ is to succeed, ensuring community participation in the design and implementation of projects will be vital.

Recently released [preliminary findings](#) by a six-year global study carried out by CIFOR found that communities living in or near forests received more than one-fifth of total household income from forest-based resources. This further suggests that communities are much more likely to employ sustainable forest management practices if they rely on the forest for their livelihoods.

"After decades of expanding protected areas, the need to incorporate human rights concerns and

equity into management objectives is now unquestioned. REDD+ schemes could provide an opportunity to recognize the role that local communities play in reducing deforestation," Guariguata said.

Each year, more than 13 million hectares (32 million acres) of forests are lost globally, an area roughly the size of England.

Community-based forest management now comprises 8 percent of the total of the world's managed forests, and up to 20 percent of Latin America's forests.

"This figure could rise now that we have found that community forest management may lead to better environmental and livelihood outcomes than conventional reserves. However, there are specific issues involving tenure rights, government regulations and local and international market forces that influence the likelihood of positive outcomes for people and forests. We need to learn in a rigorous way how these factors interact in order to develop appropriate policy interventions," Guariguata said.

**Read the original paper published in *Forestry Ecology & Management* [here](#).**

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