

Negotiating tradeoffs: making informed choices about ecosystem services for poverty alleviation

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Introduction

Project aim

To develop an evidence-based understanding of the political economy of negotiation, decision-making and choices about tradeoffs in the use of ecosystem services. The project addresses one of the overarching issues, central to the ESPA programme, which relates to the role of political economy and governance in driving decision making about the use and management of ecosystem services at different levels.

Project location and duration

The project sites are located in the Belgaum district in Karnataka in the Western Ghats and Palampur district in Himachal Pradesh in the Western Himalayas in India. Project duration: September 2010 - November 2012.

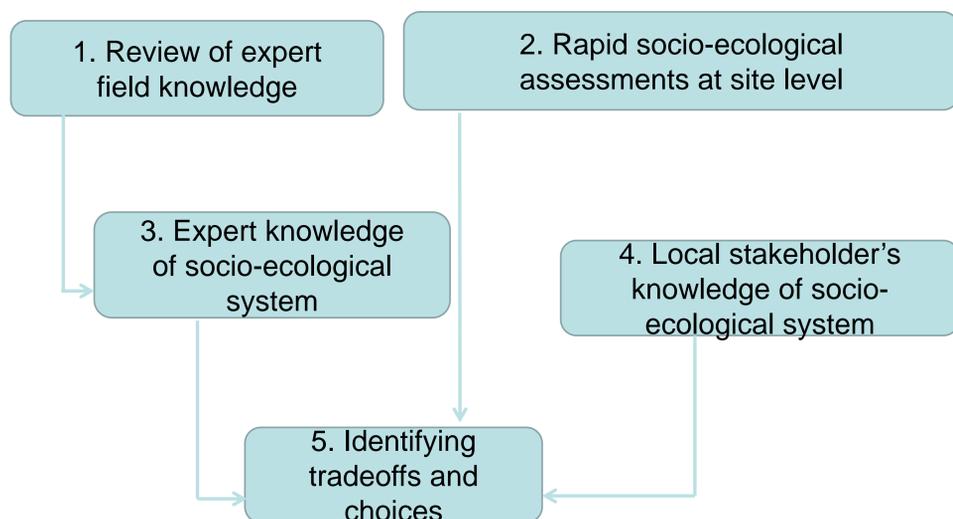


Research team

1. Dr Bhaskar Vira, Dr Bill Adams, Dr Chetan Kumar (University of Cambridge, UK)
2. Dr Rob Hope (University of Oxford, UK)
3. Dr Shrinivas Badiger, Dr Jagdish Krishnaswamy (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, India) and
4. Mr Chetan Agarwal (Winrock International India, India).

Research Design and Methods

Research design



Methods used

For a comprehensive analysis of the case study sites, the project used mixed methods i.e. both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and analysis.

References

Vira, B., Adams, B., Agarwal, C., Badiger, S., Hope, R. A., Krishnaswamy, J., and Kumar, C. (2012) Negotiating trade-offs: choices about ecosystem services for poverty alleviation, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVII (9), 67-75



Results

What ecosystem services are valued?

Local stakeholders	Experts
Local users value provisioning ecosystem services most e.g. water, food, fodder, fuel wood from land and forests.	Expert views tend to privilege regulating services, e.g. carbon sequestration, hydrological services (water quality and quantity), soil protection.

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) in the Western Himalaya: political economy implications

Power struggles resulting from PES

Implementation of PES has resulted in new conflicts and power struggles along the lines of gender, age and local influence (e.g. conflict between forest guard and members of local village organisation).

Winners and losers from PES

Restrictions on extraction of forest products has created winners and losers in terms of access to forest products (e.g. loss of access for nomadic herders).

Drivers of ecosystem change in the Western Ghats: contrasting views

Expert knowledge

- Shorter and severe monsoon
- Increased urbanisation
- Increased material consumption

Local stakeholder's knowledge

- Rainfall variability
- Mining
- Decline in soil quality and soil erosion

Key Findings

Western Ghats site

The findings reveal differing worldviews of experts and local stakeholders in the way they perceive ecosystem services, tradeoffs and synergies. The differences show that the practitioners, policy makers and researchers should be more explicit in their uses of the ecosystem services concept in order to be correctly understood and to foster improved communication.



Western Himalaya site:

The findings from this site highlight that design and implementation of PES schemes will benefit greatly from using political economy approach. A better understanding of the local politics, identification and strengthening of community mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution can be important for the success of PES schemes.