



Rethinking forest reliance

Lessons from applying the Forests-Poverty Toolkit



Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy

IUCN's Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy (LLS) moves from seeing nature as needing to be protected from threats, to promoting negotiated plans and actions for productive landscapes.

To achieve this, LLS goes beyond forest management and includes positive links with other sectors such as agriculture, water, energy, health and business. LLS is currently active in 23 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Forests-Poverty Toolkit

The Forests-Poverty Toolkit uses forest-focused 'participatory rural assessment' techniques to undertake wealth-ranking exercises based on locally identified indicators, making it possible to identify forest dependence among men and women, and richer and poorer people.

Other tools gather data on forest trends over the past 30 years or so and help villagers to identify the key forest problems in their area, and their potential solutions.

Using the toolkit, LLS has extracted exciting new information on poverty among forest-dependent peoples.

Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy (LLS)

Global forest reliance

LLS findings indicate that forest reliance world-wide varies between about 25% and 40% of total annual income. However, cash income from forests is quite minor compared to the direct consumption (non-cash) income it provides. Typically, cash income from forests is about *one-fifth*, and non-cash income about *four-fifths*, of the total income value of forests to local households.

Non-cash forest income

The most important non-cash products include fuelwood; small timber for house construction; forest protein (bushmeat); forest vegetables and fruit; and forest medicines for humans and animals. In Sahelian Africa, and in the hill-terraced farming systems found in much of South and South-east Asia, fodder and browse for cattle is also a highly valued non-cash forest product. Other non-cash values include services such as water, and the regeneration of soil fertility in forest fallows. No attempt has been made to factor these forest services into the household income calculations made here, however.



Forests and poverty – new insights from 15 countries

It can often be shown that per capita income from forests is a good deal higher than the local government allocation per head per annum.

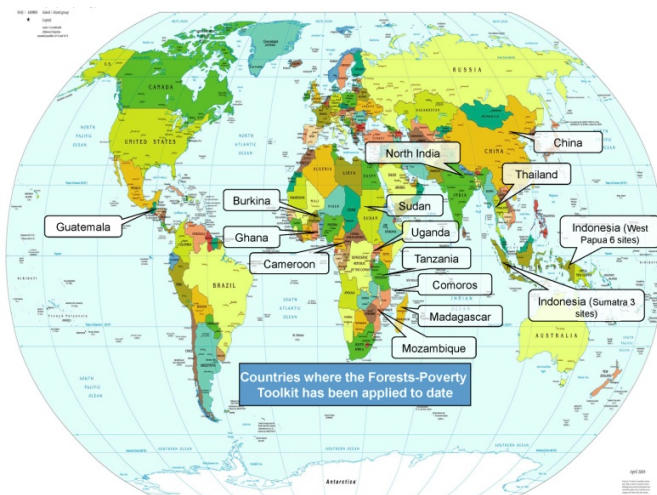
Gender aspects of forest reliance

In general, women rely on forests more than men do, and poorer people rely more than wealthier people. But all categories use forest for both cash and non-cash purposes, and all are forest-reliant at all times. The old argument about forest being only a safety-net or fall-back in droughts and emergencies is not true.

Low-value forest products (fuelwood, forest leaves, snails, etc.) are often sold by women. Where they exist, highly site-specific high-value products—e.g. cola nuts in Ghana, malva nuts in Laos, and gaharu wood and nutmeg in Indonesia—are usually sold by men.



Photo : « Betel nut seller », by Hannah Loizos



The Forests-Poverty Toolkit has been applied in sites across 15 countries

Drivers of deforestation and change

The toolkit has provided very useful data on drivers of deforestation over the last 20-30 years in all sites. The high rates of change over this kind of time period—but also the specific events which trigger sudden additional shocks—show how much change we can expect in the next decade or two, and how flexible arrangements will have to be for REDD—and other payments for environmental services—to work.

Spatial aspects of poverty in forests

A key variable in analyzing forest dependence is that people who live further from markets and roads are more reliant on forests than people who live nearer to them. In LLS this assumption has been demonstrated very clearly by taking pairs of villages at landscape sites and comparing villager reliance on forests, agriculture and off-farm employment.

Those who live in a village nearer to markets, roads and towns sell more of their agricultural crops, and more easily find employment. Those who live more remotely are less likely to have paid employment, can hardly market crops, and must live on the food they grow and the products they gather from forests.

Linking local income data to official data

Finally, where it is possible to link toolkit data to regional or district level per-capita income data, we can say how much forests are worth to local households, and how high a proportion of their total income is foregone if forest is lost, or withdrawn, under a protected area or 'no-use' scheme.

Forest income may not look very high to us—US\$ 100-200 a year per head is typical—but in many places this income is a good deal higher than the local government allocation per head per annum.

Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy (LLS)

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ArborVitae, IUCN's Forest Conservation newsletter: www.iucn.org/forest/av