Community Controlled Forests, Carbon Sequestration and REDD+: Some Evidence from Ethiopia

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Abstract

Mitigating and hopefully reversing climate change is one of the key challenges facing humanity today. REDD+, which supports a variety of forest carbon-enhancing approaches in the developing world, is one of the tools under development to try to meet this challenge. A key issue within REDD+ is to appropriately bring in the almost 25% of developing country forests that are effectively controlled by communities. Many authors have discussed or analyzed the social aspects of appropriateness, but there is limited analysis of the actual carbon sequestration potential of better-managed community controlled forests (CCFs). Drawing on an analytical framework that relies heavily on the common property and social capital literatures, our paper attempts to contribute to closing this research gap and therefore shed light on whether community forest management structures are institutions that should be given serious consideration as REDD+ partners in the battle to mitigate climate change..

Using household and community level data from four regional states in Ethiopia, we examine whether CCFs with design features known to be associated with better management appear to sequester more carbon than community systems with lower levels of these characteristics. Though because of the nature of our data results should be considered indicative, the empirical analysis suggests that the quality of local level institutions may be important determinants of carbon sequestration. Developing country CCFs may therefore play a positive role within the context of REDD+ and other carbon sequestration initiatives. Better and smarter data combined with innovative techniques are needed to conclusively evaluate linkages between CCFs, carbon sequestration and REDD+.