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Bridging the gap between forest conservation and poverty alleviation: the Ecuadorian Socio Bosque program

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Bridging the gap between forest conservation and poverty alleviation: the Ecuadorian Socio Bosque program

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ARTICLE INFO

Published on line 19 May 2011

Keywords:

Forest conservation
Conservation agreements
REDD+
Poverty alleviation
Ecuador

ABSTRACT

The Socio Bosque program is a national conservation agreement scheme of the government of Ecuador. Socio Bosque consists of the transfer of a direct monetary incentive per hectare of native forest and other native ecosystems to individual landowners and local and indigenous communities who protect these ecosystems, through voluntary conservation agreements that are monitored on a regular basis for compliance. Two years after its creation, the program now includes more than half a million hectares of natural ecosystems and has over 60,000 beneficiaries. The characteristics of Socio Bosque make it a good example of a national conservation agreement scheme from which important lessons can be drawn: it is part of a clear government policy, combines ecosystem conservation with poverty alleviation, incentivizes and monitors local socio-economic investment, is transparent and straightforward, and has generated nation-wide participation of local and indigenous communities and farmer households. Socio Bosque furthermore sheds light on how benefit sharing mechanisms for national REDD+ strategies could work in practice.

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1. Introduction

Direct payments for the conservation of ecosystems have become increasingly popular (Ferraro and Kiss, 2002). Especially well documented is the concept of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) (Bishop et al., 2009; Engel et al., 2008; Pacey and Costanza, 2005; Kenkes et al., 2010; Wunder, 2005; Zabel and Zee, 2009) and the literature on PES offers important insight in issues related to conservation payments. PES is considered a more direct way to achieve conservation goals than for example Integrated Conservation and Development Projects as it is more targeted and conditional on compliance (Landsell Mills and Porras, 2003; Ferraro and Kiss, 2002). PES has also been proposed as a response to the lack of effective command and control measures, failing market

mechanisms for positive externalities of certain types of land management and are considered an effective way to channel resources to traditionally abandoned rural populations (Corbett et al., 2009). The most common ecosystem services considered in PES schemes are regulation of freshwater flows, carbon storage, provision of habitat for biodiversity, and scenic beauty (Wernsdorfer et al., 2010).

Governments play an important role in regulating ecosystem services because public goods and benefits are involved. However, as the ecosystems that provide the services are often privately owned, policies should aim at supporting landowners to maintain the provision of services over time (Kenkes et al., 2010). Several examples of large scale government PES programs exist. In 1997, Costa Rica launched its program for payments to private landowners through

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doi:10.1016/j.envsci.2011.04.007

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Filename: [articulosociobosquerevista.pdf](#)

Size: 960.72 KB

Summary

The Socio Bosque program is a national conservation agreement scheme of the government of Ecuador. Socio Bosque consists of the transfer of a direct monetary incentive per hectare of native forest and other native ecosystems to individual landowners and local and indigenous communities who protect these ecosystems, through voluntary conservation agreements that are monitored on a regular basis for compliance. Two years after its creation, the program now includes more than half a million hectares of natural ecosystems and has over 60,000 beneficiaries.

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