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"Balancing Conservation and Livelihoods: A Study of Forest-dependent Communities in the Philippines"

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Chechina, Mariya, Yannick Neveux, John R. Parkins, and Andreas Hamann. "Balancing Conservation and Livelihoods: A Study of Forest-dependent Communities in the Philippines."*Conservation & Society* 16, no. 4 (2018): 420-30. doi: 10.4103/cs.cs_16_182.

Forest-dependent communities in the tropics typically rank lower in socioeconomic status than agricultural and urban communities, and improving livelihood choices while protecting forest resources can be a difficult task. Conflicts can arise where biodiversity conservation objectives restrict resource access to forest communities. In this study, we investigate how land cover, land use, and protected area management affects communities around a forest reserve in the Philippines. We conduct a socioeconomic analysis at two scales: a municipal-level analysis relating land use to socioeconomic status, and a community-level analysis contrasting villages that are close to and distant from a protected forest area. While forest-dependent communities generally had fewer amenities and infrastructure than agricultural and urban communities, community-level analysis showed that socioeconomic status was higher in areas close to protected areas. The study provides a counter-example to other findings by showing that access to resources improves socioeconomic status for local communities while maintaining environmental protections. We conclude that incorporating local livelihoods into forest conservation strategies, such as collection of non-timber forest product, results in a measure of sustainability, which in turn has a significant positive impact on the socioeconomic well-being of communities near the protected area. (Text from authors' abstract)

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