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Linking conservation and welfare: A theoretical model with application to Nepal

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Abstract

In the literature on the link between conservation and welfare, theoretical results usually exhibit a negative relationship while recent empirical studies show a positive relationship between land protection and welfare. Several authors attribute this last result to ecotourism development inside protected areas. We argue that the gap between theoretical and empirical results can be explained in part by the fact that in theoretical models, protected land remains excluded from any productive activity. Therefore, we develop a theoretical model in which conservation allows an alternative sector to develop. We argue that the relationship between conservation and welfare exhibit a U-shaped curve with the development of an alternative sector. We test our results on Nepalese data and find that conservation combined with ecotourism is positively related to local welfare. The empirical findings are consistent with our theoretical results.

Keywords: Welfare, conservation, ecotourism, protected areas, Nepal

JEL classification : I31; Q26; Q56

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