



Communal governance, equity and payment for ecosystem services

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ABSTRACT

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) presents a number of complex equity concerns when implemented in the context of communal resource management. This analysis contributes to our understanding of intracommunity equity and the role of communal governance in determining distributional equity outcomes, specifically in collective PES arrangements. The study examines the relationship between local governance and the distribution of collective payments in an Ecuadorian payment for conservation program implemented in communities in the Andean highlands. We use data from approximately 200 households living in six participating communities to examine how communities distribute collective payments across community members, and identify the household and communal attributes that influence (i) the likelihood that a household will receive a benefit, (ii) perceive the distribution of benefits to be fair, and (iii) perceive that the PES program itself is fair. The results highlight the important role of communal governance mechanisms in promoting participatory and transparent decision processes, and the resultant distribution of benefits. Households in more organized communities are more likely to receive a benefit and are more likely to perceive that the distribution is fair. In contrast, those in less organized communities are less likely to have budgetary information or agree with how the collective payment is spent. The results also indicate that communities generally distribute the benefits based on egalitarian principles and point to a potential disjuncture between communal equity principles and the individual costs incurred under the PES program land-use restrictions. Findings suggest that PES practitioners and researchers pay greater attention to, and support, the governance capacities of communities prior to implementing a PES program. The findings also call attention to the potential conflict between PES distributional principles and communal distributional norms.

1. Introduction

Environmental governance, particularly for ecosystem services, is increasingly concerned with how conservation initiatives interact with, and impact, social equity (Friedman et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2014; Pascual et al., 2014; Sikor et al., 2014). Scholars and practitioners argue that social equity is not only a moral imperative, but may also be critical in attaining and sustaining conservation goals (Friedman et al., 2018; Pascual et al., 2014). Nonetheless, we continue to struggle with how to craft conservation tools that adequately address social equity realities on the ground (Martin et al., 2014; Pascual et al., 2014; Sikor et al., 2014).

In the 1990s, payment for ecosystem services (PES) emerged as a conservation tool in resource-poor communities to pay individual landowners for the provision of ecosystem services on their private lands (Kerr et al., 2014; Wunder, 2005). Proponents argue that PES is a more just and effective means to achieve conservation outcomes than

more traditional conservation initiatives (e.g. protected areas) as participants voluntarily enter a payment program and receive compensation for providing the desired environmental services, or land-use proxies (Engel et al., 2008; Ferraro and Kiss, 2002; Wunder, 2005, 2013).

Others, however, caution that the PES model can reinforce global and local power imbalances (Brown and Corbera, 2003; Liverman, 2004; McAfee and Shapiro, 2010), and many question whether PES is in fact, an equitable and effective tool for conservation (de Lima et al., 2017; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Liverman, 2004; McAfee and Shapiro, 2010; Muradian et al., 2010; Naem et al., 2015; Pascual et al., 2014; Vatn, 2010). Previous studies have often focused on the potential for PES to promote ‘win-win’ conservation and poverty alleviation outcomes, and assessed the ability of poor and marginalized households to enroll in and receive benefits from said programs (Engel et al., 2008; Ferraro and Kiss, 2002; García-Amado et al., 2011; Grieg-Gran et al., 2005; Landell-Mills and Porras, 2002; Muradian et al., 2013, 2010;

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Muradian and Rival, 2012; Pagiola et al., 2008; Pascual et al., 2010; Tacconi et al., 2011; Wunder, 2006).

The continued expansion of PES and related incentive-based instruments for conservation raises a number of growing concerns about how conservation programs affect social equity, particularly when implemented in impoverished and traditionally marginalized communities (Brown and Corbera, 2003; McDermott et al., 2013; Pagiola et al., 2005; Pascual et al., 2014; Sikor et al., 2014; Wunder, 2013). Equity and justice scholars emphasize the need to not only assess distributional concerns, but also consider the institutional context and social structures that underlie and reproduce distributional outcomes and societal inequities (Fraser, 2009; Schlosberg, 2009). Similarly, environmental governance scholars call for assessments that look more closely at relative differences within and across households, communities, and regions, and the procedural and contextual factors that may be shaping those disparities (Brown and Corbera, 2003; Larson and Ribot, 2007; McDermott et al., 2013; Pascual et al., 2014; Rodríguez de Francisco et al., 2013). Scholars also urge grounding assessments of equity in local perceptions of fairness and justice, as emergent scholarship on equity in PES suggests that abstract notions of justice may not align with local conceptions of what is fair and, if left unresolved, divergent visions of justice may produce conflict and stifle desired program outcomes (He and Sikor, 2015; Martin et al., 2014; McDermott et al., 2013; Pascual et al., 2014).

Here, we take an empirical approach to assess intra-communal equity concerns in collective PES arrangements in resource-dependent communities (Sikor et al., 2014; Walker, 2012). With the increase in PES schemes for forest, biodiversity and watershed management, PES programs have shifted away from working exclusively with individual landowners and a growing number of programs use collective contracts with communities for the management of their communal resource systems (Dougill et al., 2012; Kerr et al., 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010a). In contrast to the traditional PES model, in which each household voluntarily agrees to provide a specified ecosystem service, or conservation activity, in exchange for direct compensation to the household (Wunder, 2005), in collective contracts the community decides to join PES and provide the desired ecosystem service or conservation activities on their communally managed lands (de facto or de jure) in return for a collective payment (Kerr et al., 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010a).

Field-based equity assessments are particularly critical for collective PES arrangements as said agreements present social equity concerns that are distinct from those in the traditional PES model (Dougill et al., 2012; Kerr et al., 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010a). Specifically, the mediatory role of the community in the decision to participate and the resultant distribution of cost and benefits raises questions about how communities address intra-community differences across households. Scholars and practitioners point to the potential for PES to support or produce inequities within communities, facilitate elite capture of resources, incite conflict, and/or reinforce existent power dynamics (Almeida-Lenero et al., 2017; Corbera et al., 2007; García-Amado et al., 2011; Hendrickson and Corbera, 2015; Kosoy et al., 2008; Neitzel et al., 2014; Pascual et al., 2010; Rodríguez de Francisco et al., 2013; Sommerville et al., 2010a, b).

To date, we have limited understanding of how collective PES programs operate within communities (Kerr et al., 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010b). Previous studies provide mixed results regarding the degree to which all community members are involved in the decision to participate and the benefits from participation (Bremer et al., 2014a; García-Amado et al., 2011; Gross-Camp et al., 2012; Hendrickson and Corbera, 2015; Kosoy et al., 2008; Krause et al., 2013; Krause and Nielsen, 2014; Murtinho and Hayes, 2017; Neitzel et al., 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010a).

In their analyses, scholars and practitioners frequently point to how ‘organized’ communities may be instrumental in attaining equitable and effective environmental outcomes (Bremer et al., 2014a; García-

Amado et al., 2011; Gross-Camp et al., 2012; Kosoy et al., 2008; Ostrom, 1990; Sommerville et al., 2010a). Nonetheless, we lack specific details on how or why organization matters for social equity and the specific micro-level governance institutions that contribute to a more organized community (Ostrom, 1990, 2005; Persha and Andersson, 2014; Sommerville et al., 2010a).

In this study, we aim to contribute to our theoretical and empirical understanding of equity in collective PES arrangements, and community-based resource management more broadly, by looking at the role of community governance in mediating intra-community equity outcomes in communities participating in collective conservation agreements under the Ecuadorian program, Socio Bosque (hereafter referred to as PSB). In 2008, the Ecuadorian government created the payment for conservation program PSB with the explicit goals of preventing the destruction and degradation of native ecosystems, and increasing income and human capital in the poorest communities of Ecuador (De Koning et al., 2011). Participation in PSB is voluntary and the program works with both individual landholders and communities. In this study, we focus exclusively on collective community contracts with PSB for the management of communal lands.

We chose to study PSB because the program has been recognized as a potential model for ‘win-win’ conservation and development goals, and for its equity approach to PES¹ (Bremer et al., 2014b; De Koning et al., 2011; Pascual et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it is unclear how equitable the program is in practice (Krause and Loft, 2013; Krause and Nielsen, 2014). Previous research found that the selection criteria for participation largely supports the participation of poorer and more marginalized communities (Bremer et al., 2014a; De Koning et al., 2011), however, the payment scheme favors individual landholders over collective contracts with larger communities (Krause and Loft, 2013). In addition, while participation in PSB is voluntary, some have questioned the degree to which all community members are included in the collective decision to participate (Krause et al., 2013; Krause and Nielsen, 2014; Murtinho and Hayes, 2017).

Several scholars and practitioners have also raised concerns about how communities are distributing the benefits and whether the collective payments facilitate elite capture or cause conflicts within communities (Accion-Ecológica, 2012; Krause and Loft, 2013; Reed, 2011). While previous work indicates that households and communities receive a wide array of livelihood benefits from participation (Bremer et al., 2014b), we lack empirical data on the allocation of the collective payments across households and the degree to which community members are satisfied with the distribution processes and associated outcomes.

In this paper, we use quantitative and qualitative data from approximately 200 households living in six PSB communities to systematically assess the distribution of benefits across households. The analysis builds upon our previous work on PSB that examined household agreement with the collective decision to participate in PSB (Murtinho and Hayes, 2017), and the role of communal and household characteristics in implementing the conservation contracts and gaining compliance with the associated land-use restrictions (Hayes et al., 2015; Murtinho and Hayes, 2017).

Here, we consider if and how community organization influences internal equity outcomes, and the alignment of local conceptualizations of equity with program equity tenets through three inter-related research questions. First, we examine how communities distribute benefits across all households and identify who is most likely to receive a benefit. Our analysis provides a quantitative assessment of how intra-community differences such as wealth, land-use dependency and political voice influence benefit distribution and in turn, provides a more

¹ It is important to note that the Ecuadorian government does not recognize Programa Socio Bosque as a PES program, however, the conditions coincide what is generally considered PES.

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