Scaling-out the effects of interventions in community level natural resource management

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Project summary (30 words)
This project aims to understand how Community Level Organisations’ natural resource management interventions in the Global South scale-out their impact beyond target communities into wider social-ecological systems.

Project background
Donors and NGOs active in the Global South are increasingly directing attention towards supporting community level organisations (CLOs) in their efforts to improve rural livelihoods and sustainably manage natural resources. CLOs are purposefully selected, or created, by donors or NGOs as they are seen to hold legitimacy in the local area and have detailed knowledge of the local social-ecological systems. This is expected to increase the likelihood of positive impacts on both livelihoods and natural resources of the communities in which they work.

Whilst we are gaining a greater understanding of the approaches, activities, and impacts of these CLOs within the geographical boundaries of their target communities and ecosystems, we have very little understanding of the wider effects of these interventions on wider social-ecological systems. We do not know whether they create isolated ‘islands of success’ in a fragmented social-ecological landscape or whether and how their presence in their target communities has wider transformational effects on the broader social-ecological landscape through out-scaling. In order for CLOs to contribute to the achievement of several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 13 (climate action) they will need to have positive effects beyond the initial target communities and ecosystems. This project contributes to our understanding of how such CLOs may scale-out the effects of interventions to support achievement of the SDGs. In doing so, it helps policymakers, donors, NGOs and CLO members reflect on how interventions are designed and implemented.

In order to analyse these processes and effects, this project will focus on the Forest and Farm Producer Organisations supported by the Forest and Farm Facility (https://www.iied.org/forest-farm-facility) and will be able to draw on local expertise in the cases selected.

Key research questions
1. What are the processes through which CLOs aim to scale-out the impact of their interventions in community level natural resource management to wider social-ecological systems?
2. What are the motivations and triggers for CLOs to attempt to scale-out their impact beyond initial target communities?
3. To what extent and in what ways do the scaling-out processes identified in answering research question 1 affect wider social-ecological systems?
4. How does a CLO intervention in community level natural resource management affect wider social-ecological systems through informal social practices between and within communities?
5. Under what social-ecological, institutional or political conditions are the scaling-out processes of CLO interventions in community level natural resource management more likely to have positive effects in neighbouring social-ecological systems?
Methodology

The PhD student will use a mix of qualitative and quantitative social and natural science approaches and methods such as household surveys, interviews, observations, social network analysis, remote sensing combined with ground truthing, GIS and biodiversity assessments. The student will therefore broaden their range of research methodologies and learn how to combine methods to answer the research questions.

The first year will be spent on developing a literature review on scaling-out processes and potential effects and undertaking methodology and language courses as required. During this year the student will arrange an exploratory fieldtrip to craft and refine the research questions together with key resource persons, to gain an orientation of the field site and to select cases. The fieldwork will be conducted during the second year as well as data analysis and determining preliminary results, and the third year will involve writing up the dissertation, presenting at conferences and writing non-academic reports for relevant practitioner outlets.

Training

A comprehensive training programme will be provided comprising both specialist scientific training and generic transferable and professional skills. The PhD student will be able to undertake courses on natural or social science methods as relevant depending on their background, including using Remote Sensing data products and combining data and methods in an interdisciplinary project. The team is comprised of both social and natural scientists therefore a full package of support tailored to the student can be offered. We will also support the student in developing their scientific research, writing and presentation skills. The team has extensive experience conducting research in the Global South and will be able to discuss issues of research ethics, skills and logistics when working in unfamiliar and remote rural locations.

Requirements

The student may have a social science or natural science background with a keen interest in interdisciplinary working. Flexibility, proven ability to work independently and creatively in unfamiliar conditions, willingness to learn languages and strong communication skills, are important attributes. Some experience working in a rural setting in the Global South would be desirable.

Further reading

