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## Assessing the Social Impacts of the Natural Forest Protection Program in Local Forest-Dependent Communities in Mountainous Regions in Western China: Case Studies in Gansu Province and Chongqing Provincial Municipality

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### Abstract

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been employed as a development support instrument in various sectors. The objective is to analyze, monitor and manage the social consequences of planned policy implementations, especially in relation to consequences for local population. In forestry SIA has great potential to go a step ahead in sustainable forest management (SFM), taking into account the rural development objectives and local needs. The SIA can be applied before and after the project and programme implementation.

After recent policy change in China, the Natural Forest Protection Program (NFPP) is being implemented in a top down process by central government from 1998 until 2010. Large parts of the Chinese forests are put under conservation with severe restriction for their economic use. The social consequences for local forest-dependent communities are so far unknown.

Objectives of the research are **(1)** to understand how the NFPP affects the local communities and households in two case study areas; **(2)** to analyse their current strategies to cope with these impacts; and **(3)** to identify optimal strategies for a harmonisation between forest management options as NFPP and rural development and local livelihood improvement. The research intends to be valuable to apply SIA practices in SFM in different regional contexts; is seen as relevant for future development in China.

The theoretical fundaments for indicator selection are “Functionalism” and “Human Ecosystem” approaches. Existing case studies from sectors of mining, fishery, and dam construction served to identify the relevant indicators suited to conceptualise social impacts in the local context.

The derived operational framework contains four categories of social impacts and twelve measurable quantitative and qualitative indicators. The empirical field survey serves in a first step to validate the indicators fit to the real world problems in local communities. Social science methods as Questionnaire Survey, Semi-structured interview, Key informant interview, Target Group Discussion and field observation are employed for data collection; SPSS statistic software is used for data processing and analysis.

In 4 villages a total 80 households are being surveyed and interviewed during field survey. In the contribution a first data analysis is presented.

**Keywords:** Forestry policy, human ecosystem approach, natural forestry protection program, social impact assessment, sustainable forest management