

Social Impact Assessment of the Natural Forest Protection Program to local forest-dependent Communities and Households in Mountainous Regions in Western China

INTRODUCTION: Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is useful to improve forestry related project planning and to reach a sustainable forest management. Within the context of recent forest policy change in China, the Natural Forest Protection Program (NFPP) is being implemented in a top-down process by the central government since 1998 until 2010. Large parts of the Chinese forests, both state-owned and collective, are put under conservation with severe restrictions for their commercial use. The social consequences, namely the effects to the local forest-dependent communities and households are the matter of debate; a systematic conceptual approach for SIA of NFPP is called for.

OBJECTIVES: (1) To understand how and to what extent the NFPP implementation affects the local forest-dependent communities and households in study areas; (2) To examine what are the factors influencing the different impacts of NFPP, and local strategies to cope with these impacts in state-owned and collective forest areas; (3) To identify optimal strategies for a harmonization between NFPP, rural development and local livelihood improvement; and (4) To demonstrate the application of SIA as a management tool in sustainable forest management in different regional contexts.

Study site 1: Dongcha village in Gansu Xiaolongshan forest area

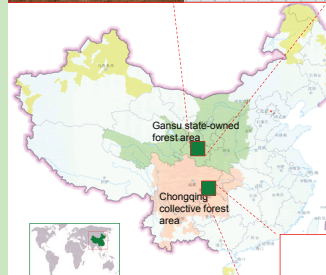


Fig 2: NFPP project areas in the map of China

Source: from NFPP Information Center on line, www. Tianbao. org. cn, 2007

CASE STUDY SITES:

Two case study sites were selected in Gansu and Chongqing which represent the different forest ownership types (state-owned and collective), the different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds as well as the historical forest development conditions.

Study site 2: Nanmu village in Chongqing forest area

METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION: Review of literature, documents, reports and archival records; 80 questionnaire surveys and household interviews, 12 key informant interviews, 4 target group discussions.

METHODS FOR DATA ANALYSIS: Excel and SPSS

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: is based on "Functionalism" (Groots 1992), approaches of "Human ecology" (Marten 2001) "Human ecosystem" (Machlis 1997) and SIA in general (Burdge 1999). Existing case studies from sectors of mining, fishery and dam construction served to identify the relevant indicators for conceptualization of social impacts in local forest-dependent communities.

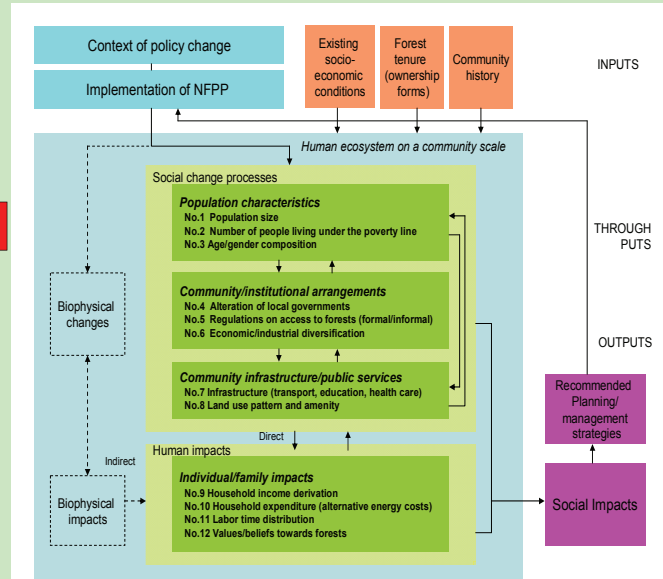


Fig 1. Conceptual framework for this empirical research

Source: field research, 2007

SOME PRIMARY RESULTS:

Community level impacts

Population impacts

From 1998 to 2007, the number of people per village has decreased from 980 to 630 in **Gansu**, and from 2,500 to 2,060 in **Chongqing**.

The number of people living under the poverty line have decreased in both areas.

Community/institutional arrangement

The number of staff working for the local government has reduced from 34 to 32 in **Gansu**, and local government structure remained the same; In **Chongqing** the local government staff number has enlarged from 34 to 50, due to the new establishment of a local NFPP Committee.

Community infrastructure/public services

In **Gansu** the roads, hospitals, schools, and enrollment rates in the local communities have been negatively impacted, due to the less investment from the state; In **Chongqing** the roads, schools and enrollment rates have been positively improved because of the state compensation, even though, hospital facilities have been negatively impacted.

Household level impacts

Individual/family impacts

The annual labor time spent in forestry has been decreased from 162 to 57 days in **Gansu** and from 135 to 45 days in **Chongqing**.

As more and more farmers migrate to cities for jobs and alternative income sources, the annual income per household has increased from 3,052 to 9,293RMB in **Gansu** and from 4,745 to 17,218RMB in **Chongqing** from 1998 to 2007.

INTERPRETATION AND PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS:

- ❖ The NFPP influences the local community development, challenges the household economy, alters the lifestyle of local households who were formerly dependent on the local forest resources. Therefore, the NFPP impacts to the local forest communities and households are profound and complex: partly negative and partly positive.
- ❖ The different forest ownership types, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds as well as the historical forest development conditions differentiate the social impacts of the NFPP in Gansu and Chongqing forest areas, hence, it incurs the different local strategies to cope with these different impacts for their better surviving and livelihood improvements.
- ❖ A better SIA of the NFPP to the local people need to consider the unique characteristics and elements of the local forest communities and households as a whole; the local forest communities might be considered as a small scale "human ecosystem". The conceptualization of social impacts on the local forest communities and households is an important element of the SIA.

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