

Payment for environmental services (PES) remains high-risk strategy for climate change mitigation until rigorous impact evaluations can determine its effects



Payment for environmental services (PES) programmes provide financial incentives for resource managers to adopt positive behaviours.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effects of Payment for Environmental Services (PES) programmes on environmental and socio-economic outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. The review summarises findings from 44 quantitative and 60 qualitative studies from 12 countries.

Programmes that provide economic incentives to reduce the negative environmental impact of land use are a popular means to reduce deforestation and degradation and mitigate climate change. In some cases they also aim to improve socio-economic outcomes. The effects of Payment for environmental services (PES) programmes on these outcomes, however, remain unclear due to the low quality of available evidence.

What is this review about?

Greenhouse gas is released by unsustainable practices in the land use sector. PES programmes seek to create positive environmental outcomes by providing an economic incentive to the owners and managers of environmental services in low- and middle-income countries to change their behaviour.

This review uses existing evidence to assess whether PES programmes have positive effects on environmental and socio-economic outcomes. It also assesses how these effects vary across different contexts and implementation strategies.

What studies are included?

Studies were included that evaluated a PES programme in low- and middle-income countries and targeted populations living in or near forests, agricultural land, wetlands, grasslands and mangroves.

Forty-four impact evaluations and 60 qualitative studies were included. They covered 18 programmes from 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Ten of the 18 programmes had as their objectives the improvement of both environmental and socio-economic outcomes.



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies in August and September 2017.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary is based on the Campbell systematic review 'Incentives for climate mitigation in the land use sector – the effects of payment for environmental services (PES) on environmental and socio-economic outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: a mixed-methods systematic review' by Birte Snilsveit, Jennifer Stevenson, Laurenz Langer, Joshua Polanin, Ian Shemilt, John Eyers and Paul J. Ferraro.

The Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) provided the funding for this review.

Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.

What are the main findings of this review?

PES may produce reduced deforestation, improved forest cover and increased household income. These findings are, however, based on low and very low quality evidence from a small number of countries, and should be treated with caution.

Qualitative data indicates that the effects will vary, depending on where and to whom projects are targeted, the quality of implementation, presence of governance structures, contextual factors, and attitudes towards environmental protection and towards PES itself.

What do the findings of the review mean?

Until higher quality research is conducted, the large-scale implementation of PES programmes should be considered a high-risk strategy for mitigating climate change.

Based on the current evidence, strong conclusions about the impact of PES cannot be made, however effective targeting and including strong governance structures may improve project results.

To address the evidence gap, funders and implementing agencies should collaborate to develop rigorous methods for impact evaluation. They should also invest in the collection and analysis of qualitative data that examines diverse research participants and follows change over longer periods.

