

Department of Environmental Science and Policy Seminar Series

Simulating Environmental Policy Effectiveness: Will cash payments induce higher levels of resource conservation?

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Zoom: <https://miami.zoom.us/j/91344769359>



Abstract: In the fight against climate change, declining biodiversity, and social unrest one of the challenges for policy makers is to come up with policies that can effectively change billions of micro-decisions. We need policies that can steer our decision making so that we make better individual choices in our daily lives. The problem is that human behavior is complex and very context-dependent, and therefore how we as individuals respond to public policies is very unpredictable, which is a big problem for public policy analysts. In this paper, we use behavioral field experiments to simulate the likely effect of a set of policy tools, known as conservation incentive payments. These payments are gaining in popularity but have not been implemented for long enough that would allow for a policy impact analysis.

Many argue that even if payments increase conservation while payments last, they may adversely affect other motivations for pro-environmental behavior in the longer term. We test whether conditional payments also encourage resource users to conserve shared resources after payments end. Using a framed field experiment with 1,200 tropical resource users in five countries, we show that (1) during the intervention, conditional payments increased conservation behavior; (2) after payments stopped, users continued to conserve more on average than they did before the intervention, especially when they were able to communicate with each other; and (3) trust amplified the lasting conservation effects of the interventions. Payment effectiveness may increase when interventions facilitate interpersonal communication and when implemented in contexts where resource users enjoy high levels of trust.

Bio: Krister Andersson is a Professor of Political Science, and director of the Center for the Governance of Natural Resources at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His research focuses on the politics of environmental governance in developing countries, paying particular attention to the role of local institutional arrangements in explaining variation in policy outcomes. His research has been published in four books, and some 80 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. In 2007, he received the Giorgio Ruffolo Research Fellowship by Harvard University. His research has received financial support from the National Science Foundation, the United States International Development Agency (USAID), the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others.

