

Title: Assessing the relevance of relational values to explore human well-being in forest-frontier contexts: lessons from northeast Madagascar

Presenting author: Jorge C. Llopis

Other authors: Clara Diebold, Flurina Schneider, Julie G. Zaehring

Primary affiliation: Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern, Switzerland

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Abstract text (max 300 words)

Largely due to methodological constraints, much of the work done in ecosystem services assessments have focused on the more readily measurable categories, namely provisioning and maintaining services. However, the cultural services provided by ecosystems and agricultural systems, arguably less easy to grasp with current valuation methods, remain understudied to a large extent. We argue that neglecting the role of such cultural (agro)ecosystem services in contributing to human well-being might result in a deficient understanding of the motivations people has to care for and value Nature. Recently, the concept of relational values has been proposed to facilitate expanding the analytical space beyond instrumental or intrinsic motivations to value nature, which might help understanding the culturally-rooted dynamics between natural ecosystems, agrosystems and human well-being in complex mosaic landscapes.

In this paper we present results from the well-being assessment conducted in the periphery of two recently created protected areas in northeast Madagascar. Also, the main export cash crops produced in the area, vanilla and clove, are experiencing a price spike. In this study, we explore how these two recent developments have influenced the well-being of local populations, operationalised in terms of capabilities. We show that capabilities of local populations show a bundled character, meaning that changes in one well-being aspect might trigger changes in a whole set of capabilities. Within these dynamics, the relational value domain plays a central role in how local farmers articulate the benefits they obtain from their different agricultural systems and forest ecosystems. Crucially, our findings also suggest that these dynamics might give rise to trade-offs between capabilities, where an aspect locally consider crucial for having a 'good life' might improve at the expense of others and vice versa.