

Impacts of Community-Level Conservation Incentives Across Diverse Institutional Landscapes

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Conservation incentives often target communities with diverse institutions and capacities for cooperation. We implemented an online experiment (N = 1,010) using a modified public-goods game to examine how pre-existing institutions influence the impact of incentives. To reflect resource monitoring costs, we limit individuals' information about peer contributions and thus their ability to raise cooperation through peer punishment. Our 2x2 design staggers two treatments. First, a forum in which costly voluntary participation reveals participants' information about contributions. Second, temporary community payments that reward "additional" contributions above the group's pre-payment baseline. Our findings show that average contributions rise by 18% with a forum and 11% with payments. Access to the forum does not significantly raise the effectiveness of payments. Crucially, when the temporary payments end, contributions never fall below the pre-intervention baseline. For groups with high initial cooperation, contributions remain significantly above the baseline even after incentives are removed — a form of "crowding in".