



COMMUNITY MONITORING OF ILLEGAL LOGGING IN PREY LANG, CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT

Illegal logging of tropical forests is a threat to increasingly degraded forest ecosystems at a global scale. Logging curtails biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and threatens livelihoods of forest dependent communities. Recently, training and use of ICT, has shown that local communities are in a unique position to document and, with empowerment, possibly police the illegal logging in their local forests. The aim of this study was to explore the general effectiveness of community based monitoring of illegal logging, both in terms of quality of information and its use for guiding management decisions.

We developed a smart phone application aimed at supporting systematic collection of information on biodiversity, natural resources, and illegal activities, and trained 35 community monitors from a group of forest activists in Prey Lang, Cambodia. The activists have been working to stem widespread illegal logging in Prey Lang for the past ten years, and they incorporated the new technology into their existing patrolling activities. Everything from the design of the application to the training sessions and other supporting activities were carried out guided by community preferences. The community monitors have been collecting data since February 2015, and are completely self-managing in terms of when, where, and what to monitor.

We have experienced challenges implementing ICT in an area with very poor access to electricity and cell phone coverage, and working with communities with a non-existent background for using technology. However, even with limited training villagers were able to use the application to effectively monitor a number of variables. Preliminary results show that their work provides good information on illegal activities and activists' interventions, as well as useful plant resources, but less records on biodiversity. Our study supports previous studies that locally driven monitoring schemes are likely to shorten time between observations and interventions and increase number of interventions.