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### Compensation for Environmental Services and Rural Communities: Lessons from the Americas<sup>1</sup>

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#### SUMMARY

Compensation schemes for ecosystems or environmental services focused on poor rural communities can strengthen their livelihoods and improve ecosystem management. Various initiatives in the Americas provide lessons in this regard. Peasant and indigenous communities manage ecosystems to meet subsistence needs, earn income in markets and pursue new alternatives linked to the provision of environmental services. Compensation schemes should support the integration of these various levels and overcoming hurdles in each one. This requires a broad approach to compensation that avoids fixation with direct payments. A landscape perspective becomes important since environmental services are generated through a variety of land uses. Social capital is crucial for effective collective action in heterogeneous landscapes, to foster internal cohesion and positive external linkages. Expanding and defending communities' rights to the resource base is a prerequisite, otherwise compensation schemes can sidestep or disenfranchise communities. Donors and intermediary organisations should respect community's perspectives and priorities. The State should guarantee the defence and expansion of communities' rights, policies that revalue rural spaces, and rules for compensation schemes that favour communities.

**Keywords:** [environmental services](#), [compensation](#), [indigenous communities](#), [PES](#), [CES](#)

<sup>1</sup> This 'Comment' is based on a report published with the same title

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