

Abstract

China's Sloping Land Conversion Program (SLCP) is the largest land retirement/reforestation program in the developing world, having the goal of converting 14.67 million hectares of cropland to forests by 2010 (4.4 million of which is on land with slopes greater than 25°) and an additional "soft" goal of afforesting a roughly equal area of wasteland by 2010. Pending successful completion it could represent a 10–20% increase in China's national forest area and a 10% decrease in current cultivated area. In contrast to China's other forest-sector policies, SLCP uses a public payment scheme that directly engages millions of rural households as core agents of project implementation, and has the stated principals of volunteerism. Thus, insofar as current or future *de facto* program implementation involves decentralized, voluntary grassroots participation, SLCP represents an important departure from "business as usual" in how China manages its forest resources. This work draws upon current available research of the program and uses a 2003 household and village-level survey conducted by the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, CAS, to examine program design, implementation and outcomes to date. Results indicate that significant problems in design and implementation exist, with these including shortfalls in subsidies delivered, lack of respect of the principals of volunteerism, and insufficient technical support and budgeting for local implementation costs. More fundamentally, some program goals appear to be based on common misperceptions regarding the linkages between forests and watershed services. Overall, SLCP contains both innovative elements (volunteerism and the direct engagement of farmers) as well as components that hark back to policies and mindsets of decades past (the program's top-down, simplified contract structure, lack of sufficient consultation with local communities and rural households, and campaign-style mobilization). The paper concludes by providing four main suggestions to improve the program: 1) Increase local community input in design and implementation, and ensure that households have full autonomy in participation choice; 2) improve technical support and budgeting for local administrative costs and capacity building; 3) clarify the environmental services targeted and verify the measures needed to acquire these services; and 4) integrate SLCP into an overall package of complementary policies aimed at the rural sector.

Keywords

Payments for Environmental Services **Toast Titanium** China

