

Changing policy mixes in practice: what does it take?

Lucy Emerton

Environment Management Group, Sri Lanka

In many countries, efforts to conserve nature still depend largely on command and control approaches. While clear legal and regulatory frameworks, appropriate controls and realistic penalties are undoubtedly key elements of the conditions that are required for effective, equitable and sustainable conservation, by themselves they are rarely sufficient. Problems of enforcement, coupled with difficulties in securing the funds and other resources that are required to enable implementation, often undermine the efficacy of “pure” command and control systems. At the same time, unless conservation is also perceived as making economic sense to the groups that manage and use biodiversity and ecosystems, they are unlikely to be either willing or able to comply with the rules and restrictions that have been set in place.

It is largely in response to these implementation challenges, as well as a growing recognition of the need to better factor equity and distributional concerns into on-the-ground conservation efforts, that something of a paradigm shift has occurred over recent years. A range of new measures and instruments have been thrown into the conservation policy mix, with rights-based approaches and market-based mechanisms having become particularly prominent. Yet there often remains something of a dissonance between these different approaches, with newer incentive-oriented instruments sitting rather uneasily alongside more traditional command and control measures - and, at the worst, actually conflicting with them.

A policymix approach offers an intuitively appealing framework with which to carry out the analysis and generate the information that is required to address and overcome some of these problems, so as to better harmonise and synchronise conservation measures. By focusing on the interactions and synergies that arise when policies are combined, it allows decision-makers to identify “packages” of complementary or mutually reinforcing instruments that can work together to address particular conservation and development challenges. In situations where enforcement poses problems, time, money and expertise are scarce, or there is a particular urgency to act, this kind of thinking can play a key role in designing cost-effective, equitable and sustainable solutions to conservation problems.

Is the promise of policymix approaches borne out in reality, and how can the findings of such analyses be applied to make a useful contribution towards the design of more practical, relevant and effective packages of conservation instruments? We review experiences and lessons learned from integrating this kind of thinking into biodiversity and ecosystem planning, with a particular focus on supplementing and combining conventional command and control approaches with more novel market-based mechanisms. Insights and lessons learned are drawn from the real-world case of sustainable forest management in Mongolia.

The main conclusion concerns the need to integrate political economy concerns into policymix analysis. We argue that it is not just the interactions between different measures that need to be understood in order to identify and design successful packages of instruments, but also the institutional and decision-making contexts which offer barriers and entry points for their actual uptake and implementation on the ground. Another key lesson learned is that often the reorientation or better application of existing policies and measures that are currently serving to hinder or undermine conservation is as - or more - important as the introduction of new elements into the policy mix. Last but not least is the importance of an evidence-based approach which makes efforts to justify and demonstrate the gains from combining policy instruments to the decision-makers and other stakeholders who will be ultimately responsible for implementing them.