

The causes of land-use and land-cover change: moving beyond the myths

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Abstract

Common understanding of the causes of land-use and land-cover change is dominated by simplifications which, in turn, underlie many environment-development policies. This article tracks some of the major myths on driving forces of land-cover change and proposes alternative pathways of change that are better supported by case study evidence. Cases reviewed support the conclusion that neither population nor poverty alone constitute the sole and major underlying causes of land-cover change worldwide. Rather, peoples' responses to economic opportunities,

as mediated by institutional factors, drive land-cover changes. Opportunities and constraints for new land uses are created by local as well as national markets and policies. Global forces become the main determinants of land-use change, as they amplify or attenuate local factors.

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