



INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON
OSTROM WORKSHOP

COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Nathan Cook

O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, IUPUI

Monday, December 6: 12:00 – 1:00 pm ET

Virtual via Zoom: [Click here for link to Zoom meeting](#)



How Natural Resource Decentralization Reshapes Inequality

Decentralized, community-based approaches to natural resource management are believed to improve environmental conditions while reducing poverty in the Global South. Despite apparent successes, one of the key challenges facing these approaches is that of inequality. The local distribution of benefits under community-based resource management is often not only highly unequal, but also inequitable because it reflects pre-existing social inequalities by gender, class, ethnicity, and geography. There is, however, a lack of rigorous evidence from large-scale population studies showing how community-based governance approaches affect inequality compared to before such arrangements are implemented. Hypotheses about positive as well as negative effects of community-based approaches have theoretical support. We use data on over 18,000 local natural resource governance committees across Nepal and household-level data from two nationwide censuses to test two competing theories. We find evidence to suggest that the program partially alleviates social inequality—conceptualized as differences in poverty between the ethnic elite and the most marginalized ethnic groups—though the magnitude of the effect is modest.

Dr. Nathan J. Cook is an Assistant Professor in the Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at IUPUI. His research examines the conditions under which environmental policies and interventions lead to changes in environmental conservation, policy responsiveness, participation, and equity. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Colorado, where he also completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Institute of Behavioral Science. His work appears in journals such as *Nature Climate Change*, *Nature Sustainability*, and *World Development*.

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