Decentralized forest management programs can reduce deforestation rates but there is limited evidence to assess poverty outcomes.
How up-to-date is this review?
The review authors searched for qualitative and quantitative studies up to August 2013, and conducted a second search for relevant qualitative studies up to November 2013. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in December 2014.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?
The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary
This summary was prepared by Ruth Pitt based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2014:10 ‘Effects of Decentralized Forest Management (DFM) on Deforestation and Poverty in Low and Middle Income Countries: A Systematic Review’ by Cyrus Samii, Matthew Lisiecki, Parashar Kulkarni, Laura Paler and Larry Chavis (DOI: 10.4073/csr.2014.10). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) redesigned and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.

Kenya and Nepal; the studies reporting the effects on human welfare were conducted in Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda.

What are the effects of decentralised forest management on deforestation and poverty?
Decentralized forest management programs reduce deforestation rates on average, but the effects are modest.

Decentralized forest management programs increase average household income in the affected community, but little evidence is available on the effects of such programs on the incomes of poor households. One study from Uganda suggests that decentralised forest management programs may reduce the income of poorer households.

How do institutional and social conditions affect the outcomes of decentralised forest management programs?
No quantitative evidence was found to assess how institutional and social conditions affect decentralized forest management programs. Qualitative studies show that some programs do not have the institutional capacity to be effective. Democratically accountable programs may have larger effects, but only if the community supports conservation goals.

How has this intervention worked?
Decentralized forest management programs are based on the assumption that local authorities have better knowledge of local conditions, leading to more efficient forest policies that are more responsive to community interests. Local authorities may also have better incentives for sustainable forest management.

What do the findings of this review mean?
Proponents of decentralized forest management programs suggest that such programs can contribute to both environmental and poverty reduction outcomes. This review showed that little research has been conducted on the poverty reduction benefits of such programs, and no studies have jointly evaluated both conservation and poverty outcomes. Research is also lacking in the countries where decentralised forest management has the most potential, such as Indonesia and Brazil.